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Original Article

Public-Private Partnership and Early Childhood Education in Kasese District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The article's main purpose was to investigate the relationship between public-private partnership (PPP) and early childhood education in Kasese District, Uganda. The main objectives of the study were to establish the role played by public-private partnerships in making certain that children develop numerical skills and expressive communication abilities. The study was conducted through an Ex Post Facto design study design. The target population of the study was stakeholders for early childhood education in Kasese District, Western Uganda. To ensure fair representation, research subjects were selected from each stratum of stakeholders. The scholar thus used stratified and, later on, random sampling techniques. The sample selected had 312 respondents from an estimated total number of 1.417 ECD stakeholders in Kasese District. Primary data was collected by administering a questionnaire that was designed on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Face-to-face interviews and an observation checklist were also used in the collection of data. Data collected was presented and analysed with frequency distribution and percentages while the corresponding hypothesis was tested with Chi-square statistic at 0.05 alpha levels. It was found the PPP in ECDs helped in the improvement of numeracy among children. For instance, stakeholders' work helped in improving children's counting of fingers on one hand or even copying and drawing shapes amongst young ones. Similarly, respondents indicated that Policy Guideline Formulation due to PPP led children to sort objects by colour and shape. Also, results showed that PPP in ECD enhanced communication ability whereby children were able to put up two words together as per caregiver guidance. It also led a child to pay attention to a simple story being narrated and thereafter answer questions from the account. Similarly, it was also found that Institutional Factors for PPP supported expressive ability in children in that they were in a position to follow a simple command. Besides, the availability of suitable Home Environment Factors was also found to promote communication ability in children. Thus, the study concluded that public-private partnership plays a part in ensuring that children develop numerical concepts. It was also concluded that public-private partnership plays a role in making certain that children develop expressive communication abilities.

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INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO (2011), the first-ever world conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD), whose main purpose was soliciting an international accord aimed at advocating for education as a basic human right for children, was held on 27th -29th September 2010 in Moscow, Russia. The three-day conference was sponsored by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and supported by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). It was attended by delegations from 130 countries and people from international organisations as well as those from non-governmental organisations.

The members reviewed the challenges and progress made towards Education for All (EFA) goal 1 of expanding early childhood care and education in the particular context of Early Childhood Education as a social, human, and economic development initiative (UNESCO, 2011). They also adopted a broad and holistic concept of ECE as a provision of care, education, health, nutrition, and protection of children from zero to eight years.

Preceding the Moscow conference, another world conference had also been held in 1990 at Jomtien in Thailand. Its main theme was Education for All (EFA). This was followed by another one in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. The Jomitien Conference adopted regional frameworks such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children 1990, as well as the Maputo protocol. Goal 1 for the Dakar conferences was "*expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children*." (Alderson, 2000). Thus, responses to early childhood education in many countries, such as Uganda, are set in context from international and regional agencies cited above.

According to Karger (2015) and Lembrer (2020), at birth, children have an empty brain (slate). It is through interacting with the environment in which they grow that this brain gets written. Karger (2015) and Lembrer (2020) further observe that between infancy and childhood is a critical periods for language development, and this is based on milestones positioned at each age of growth, beginning from 0-6 years. In addition to that, after acquiring language ability in the environment, a child's learning moves progressively as he grows up to schooling time.

Similarly, several lines of research indicate that the environment in which a child grows is crucial in acquiring a language. They also concur that since children begin with spoken language before embarking upon reading and writing, they should be helped to enter schools with as many words as possible. When this is done, it helps them read, interpret texts, and write them properly in a classroom setting.

Karger (2015) and Lembrer (2020), in their independent studies, further highlighted that parents and siblings played a great role in helping children acquire a language during the preschool period. In this case, they suggested that those relatives need to help the children practice a language by modifying or repeating a particular

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phrase uttered by such a child. They also both concurred that there were substantial differences among parents in how they communicated with their children and how those differences impacted the development of both non-cognitive and cognitive communication skills in children aged 2-6 years.

Thus, parents who talked more with their children tended to use more of the rich vocabulary, complex ideas, and back-and-forth conversation, and this helped children to grow both receptive and expressive language. This is in line with Skinner's reinforcement theory, as cited by Spencer (2018). Skinner observed that although children were born with the ability to learn a language, they usually imitate what a person around them says. In this case, this person becomes very crucial in helping a child to master the language. When such a person provides feedback to the child, this improves his /her cognitive ability in a language.

Equally, children take delight in-jokes, riddles, proverbs, puns, rap, poems, and stories that play on multiple meanings of words or similar-sounding phrases. These foster abstract reasoning skills among them. They also help them to be creative as well as identify parallels between dissimilar events (Karger, 2015; Lembrer, 2020).

Likewise, Nobuki (2019) and Clements & Sarama (2014) observed that the development of Mathematical skills and knowledge among children was influenced by socioeconomic factors. In this case, parents who gave their children early mathematical acquaintances at home in the form of counting from 1 up to 10 or those who led them in counting songs such as; "Five Green Bottles" had children who joined kindergarten with the requisite numeracy skills. Besides that, Nobuki (2019) further observed that play was an important factor among children. Because of its blissful nature, children develop cognitive, socio, and emotional skills. It helped children to acquire numeracy skills as well as receptive and expressive communication ability. By using flashcards, happy mirrors, and happy shapes in playing, children grasp Geometry. Therefore, parents, caregivers, and teachers should participate in play to give confidence and support to children. That kind of hands-on learning helps children solve meaningful problems.

It should be noted that the consensus of findings from the above scholars was that early childhood education was holistic and, therefore, collaboration between the different ECD stakeholders endangered the progress of learning among children. Also in line with that, World conferences held in Moscow and Jomitien, as well as those organised at regional/continental level in Maputo and Dakar on early childhood education, shared the view that early childhood education and care was comprehensive.

In this case, countries such as Uganda have to tailor their ECD programs to the context of international and regional agencies cited above. However, contrary to the ideal, in Uganda, Ojakol (2012) observed that the situation of nursery schools underscored the value attached to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the country and called for immediate action from all concerned parties. Many ECDs had no clear guidelines concerning quality assurance, program development or capacity building. Each school recruited any quality of human resource it wanted, at any time and in any way. For instance, the human resource gap had been bridged by primary and O-level dropouts who had failed to continue with further education. Further to that, in terms of remuneration, a respective ECD centre paid what it wanted when and how it wanted it paid. On average, such caregivers were paid a monthly pay of one hundred thousand shillings (100,000 shs) (about ¼ of a US Dollar). This was likely to impact upon early childhood education.

Also to note was that The Ministry of Education and Sports Act (MOES) (2008) had provision for PPP in the running of ECDs. In this case, private agencies played a management role, whereas parents/guardians played a funding role. Furthermore, the government's part in this edict was to organise the curriculum as well as set up guidelines on minimum standards for the

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management of such centres. This seemed to be on paper as Ojakol (2012) observed that many ECDs in Uganda had failed to implement the ECD principles among children. They placed so much emphasis on numeracy as well as literacy, and the materials used in teaching contained very little information about children's development. There was also poor hygiene and poor infrastructure, such as a lack of playing kits, and many ECDs were neither registered nor licensed as per the MOES policy (2007).

From the foregoing observation, it is worthy to note that although Uganda has made significant achievements in ECD provision, there are still unmet challenges in matters such as declining stakeholder participation rates, a gap existing between the implementation of the MOES policy (2007), whereby what is advocated for in the ECD vision plan 2007 is not the reality on the ground. Therefore, there is a need to re-affirm the government's position advocating for partnership between the private and public sectors as far as Early Childhood education is concerned.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

According to Burr and Montgomery (2003), philosophical and scientific interest in early childhood education (ECE) has a very long history and relevant contribution spanning the full range of academic disciplines, including Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, and Economics. It also spans major areas of applied research, notably education, socio-politics, health, research, law, and development studies. The field can appear fragmented, comprising theoretical frameworks linked to profound differences in scientific and epistemological perspectives and in some cases, these are closely aligned with policy objectives and narratives (Woodhead 2006).

In line with that, Andrea & Bridie (2015) observe that there are five main groups of theories that benchmark early childhood education. The theories are developmental, critical, socio-cultural, socio behaviourist and post-culturalist.

Socio-culturalist theorists such as Vygotsky, Bruner and Rugolf state that learning occurs in the context of children's communities. Socio-behaviourists like Skinner, Pavlov and Bandura hypothesise that accumulated experience plays an outstanding role in shaping learning among children. On the other hand, the point of view of critical theorists such as Habermas and Freire is that the curriculum had hidden aspects that framed certain points of view and ignored others. Besides, Foucalt, Bourdieu, and Canella were proponents of the post-structurist theory that posits that there are many forms of knowledge with no absolute truth.

An overview of all those theories reveals that none is perfect. Also, the thinking, building, and development of each of them depended on work from previous theorists, and hence, much overlap existed between them.

Hence, for the purposes of this study, the researcher will apply developmental theory and, more specifically, Piaget's theory of development. According to Piaget, there were changes or milestones at distinct stages of child development, which are marked by quantitative and qualitative differences in behaviour (Andrea & Bridie, 2015).

Kabiru and Njenga (2011) also indicate that the four stages were sensory-motor (0-2 years). In this stage, children learn through their senses. The sensory-motor stage is followed by the pre-operational stage (2-7 years), in which children make judgements about the quality of things depending on their appearance. Since the scope of this study is limited to children aged 2-6 years, the researcher will put much emphasis on the two above-mentioned stages. The third and fourth stages are concrete operational and formal operational, whose milestones were 7-12 years and 12-18 years.

Working from this perspective of a 2-6 years stage of development, an educator needs to make judgements relating to an individual child development sequence. This is often measured against milestone norms (Andrea & Bridie, 2015). Teaching material, lesson objectives and evaluation must thus be planned to meet the

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child's development needs (Andrea & Bridie, 2015; Kabiru & Njenga, 2011). This planning is also often compartmentalised into physical, social, cognitive, emotional and language programmes (Andrea & Bridie, 2015; Kabiru & Njenga, 2011).

The researchers are in total support of this. Children aged 2-6 years should be given an opportunity to explore and experiment using their senses of touching, smelling, sighting, hearing and tasting. A child will learn that fire burns after touching a lit candle. Similarly, a child gains expressive language ability through labelling an object, for example, a goat, when he/she points to it with a stick. Thus, stakeholders in early childhood education, such as caregivers, parents, education administrators, curriculum developers, and school inspectors who form the PPP viewpoint, need to be aware of this when working with children.

Rationale

This study will help Kasese District officials identify ECDs that may be lacking quality education indicators that could otherwise affect children's academic performance in the region, and thereafter, such institutions are helped to improve their learning environment. It could help policymakers such as members of Parliament as well as educationists in designing an appropriate teaching syllabus for early childhood education in the areas of content, methods, and instructional materials, which in turn will improve curriculum delivery in pre-primary schools.

It could assist nursery teacher trainers in changing their training methodology for caregivers so that there is some linkage in what exactly children have to study. This will consequently improve children's acquisition and retention. The study will support nursery teachers in preparing lessons as far as the nature of subject matter, methods, and instructional materials are concerned. The study could also benefit future researchers by contributing to the literature on public-private partnerships in the management of early childhood education.

METHODS

The researcher used the Ex Post Facto design for this study (Descombe, 2003). This was because private-public partnership (PPP) and the structuring of teaching in early childhood education cannot be manipulated. After all, it is based on determinants that the researcher has no control over. In using the Ex Post Facto design, the researcher used intact groups of policymakers at local and national levels to provide information on PPP in ECD in Kasese District.

PPP and the structuring of teaching in the learning curriculum were the two independent variables while learning in ECD schools was the dependent variable that was tested. Since ECD is holistic, the government works through the following ministries: local government, health, and education, the leading agency of which is the Ministry of Gender and Socio Development.

Contextual Determinants Variable (CDV) These are area groups of variables that are available in the context of private-public partnership and Early Childhood education. They formed the items that were used in the questionnaire. They include:

Availability of Human Resources (AHR) refers to the presence of qualified staff in different departments to represent ECD interests and foster partnerships between the public and private sectors. Availability of Financial Resources (AFR) refers to the availability of funds provided by the government through the line ministry as well as those from the private sector that can be invested in implementing Early Childhood Education programs in a private-public partnership manner.

Policy Guideline Formulation (PGF): Role played by the government in making the necessary policy that can promote PPP, such as the ECD policy (2007), The MOES Act (2008) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Policy (2016-2021)

Regulation and assessment (RAA): This refers to addressing the quality of education through the Education Standards Agency (ESA), school inspection by education inspectors at least twice a

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year and assessment by caregivers, which provides feedback

Knowledge of Benefits of PPP in ECD (KBI) refers to how knowledgeable the persons responsible for making decisions in the promotion of partnership in ECDS were.

Institutional Factors for PPP (IFPPP) refers to those factors within different institutions or departments in the education sector that play significant roles in fostering the partnership between the government and the private sector. These factors may range from influence peddling by leaders, personal conflicts among staff, or differences in prioritisation of needs by institutions.

Home Environment Related Factors for PPP (HERFPPP) refers to those factors within the respective homes for the individual child in which he or she stays, which play a significant role in fostering the partnership between the child and schooling. These factors may range from the social socioeconomic status of children, assistance given to children with homework, playing environment at home, and presence of extended family and relatives.

Total Contextual Determinant Score (TCDS) refers to the total scores from all the above contextual determinants. This total contextual determinant score was used to establish relations between overall contextual determinants and national or private-public partnerships and the structuring of teaching in ECDs.

This study was conducted in Kasese District in Western Uganda. According to the district profile available at https/www/kasese.go.ug/about-us/district-profile, the district has a population of 702,629 people found in two counties of Bukonzo and Busongora. From the district, a list of sub-counties with their respective population was compiled from the Annual National School Census (2014). From this list, the sub-counties that had the highest population were separated from those that had low enrolment. Ten sub-counties were selected. This brought the total of sub-counties selected from each county to 20.

The target population of this study comprised the District Education Officer, ECD focal people, ECD committees at the sub-county, parish and village levels in the selected districts, as well as parents, caregivers, and ECD school heads.

A total of 312 respondents were sampled for this study from an estimated total number of 1.417 ECD stakeholders in the Kasese District. This number of samples was considered representative of the population and was derived from the table of determining the sample size from a population by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

As a sampling technique, a total of 28 sub-counties from both counties (Busongora and Bukonzo) were sampled using stratified and later random sampling techniques. The sub-counties were listed according to the population based on the National School Census (2014). Refer to *Table 1*.

Table 1: Sampled Sub-Counties in Bukonzo and Busongora Counties

County	Sub-county	Group A	Name of sub-county	Group B
Bukonzo	Kisinga	40,515	Bwera	17,509
	Kyarumba	42,074	Karambi	25,792
	Mpondwe-lhubiriba tc	51,351	Kyondo	25,965
	Munkunyu	33,641	Muhango	19,875
	Nyakiyumba	30,513	Kitholhu	16,871
Busongora	Bugoye	6,713	Buhuhira	3,331
	Kitswamba	6,078	Bwesumbu	3,773
	L. Katwe	5,237	Kilembe	2,508
	Maliba	8,757	Kyabarungira	2,972
	Muhokya	4,184	Rukoki	2,596

Group A = High Population; Group B = High Population

Source: Kasese District Profile

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The sources of data were both primary and secondary. Primary data was collected from questionnaire administration, face-to-face interviews and an observation checklist, while secondary data was obtained from journals, textbooks, the internet, and Education Sector Ministerial Policy statements. The questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection. Three questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale were employed in this study. They were for ECD policymakers in the different ministries, such as District Education Officers (DEOs) and another for ECD committees at sub-county, parish, and village levels in the selected districts, as well as parents, caregivers (teachers), and ECD school heads. Section one of the questionnaires was for biographical data, while section 2 raised seven items based on the Contextual Determinants Variable (CDV that reflected the two objectives of the study. Three hundred and twelve (312) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 295 were retrieved, giving a 94.6% response rate. The researcher also conducted some face-to-face interviews with various categories of respondents. Also, an observation checklist was used to observe materials in schools.

The data collected from the field were presented and analysed with descriptive statistics to provide answers to the research questions, while the corresponding hypothesis was tested with Pearson Chi-square at 0.05 alpha level with the aid of a computer through the application of statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS 13.00 version).

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were made in this study. A letter allowing the researcher to conduct research was obtained from Kabale University School of Doctorate Studies. The use of informed consent before involving the respondents in the study and requesting respondents to kindly participate in the study was also done. Only those who gave consent to participate in the study were involved in the study. Lastly, since the research has been finalised, the findings will be made available to the respondents and other interested stakeholders through publishing as a way of giving them feedback.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public-private partnerships play a role in making certain that children develop numerical concepts.

Table 2: Response on whether PPP enhances numerical skills

Questionnaire item	Strongly agree/agree		Strongly disagree/disagree		Undecided	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
The availability of parental support due to PPP engenders children counting fingers on one hand	242	79.3	48	15.7	15	4.9
The availability of Financial Resources due to PPP brings about copying and drawing shapes among children	233	79.0	42	14.2	20	6.8
Policy Guideline Formulation due to PPP led children to sort objects by colour and shapes	252	85.1	31	10.5	13	4.4

Source: Data from the field 2023

From *Table 2* above, 79.3% of the respondents indicate that the availability of parental support due to PPP engenders children counting fingers on one hand, while 15.7% of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 4.9% were undecided. Also, 79.0% of the respondents indicate that the availability of Financial Resources due to PPP brings about copying and drawing shapes amongst children, while 14.2 % of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 6.8% were undecided. Similarly, 85.1 % of the respondents indicate that Policy Guideline Formulation due to PPP led children to sort objects by colour and shape. In contrast, a handful of 10.5 % of the subjects were opposed to this view, and 4.4 % were undecided.

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Table 3: Chi-square test computed from the frequency cross-tabulation

-	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	31.122 (a)	8	.000
Likelihood ratio	33.364	8	.000
Linear-by linear association	1.738	1	.187
N of valid cases	295		

Source: SPSS WIN 15.00 version output

Table 3 demonstrates the output of the computed Chi-square values from cross-tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of strongly agree to strongly disagree based on the results from the stakeholders of early childhood Education in the 20 sub-counties that are located in Bukonzo and Busongora Counties in Kasese District.

The Pearson Chi-square computed statistic value is greater than the Chi-square tabulated value with 8 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 alpha level. Since the Chi-square computed statistic value is greater than the Chi-square tabulated value, the null hypothesis that public-private partnership does not play any part in making certain that children develop numerical concepts was rejected. This implies that public-private partnership plays a part in making certain that children develop numerical concepts.

The discussion of the results is in line with the objectives the study sets to accomplish. The analysis of results question one in Table 2 showed that the availability of parental support due to PPP engenders children counting fingers on one hand. It also showed that the availability of Financial Resources due to PPP brings about copying and drawing shapes among children. Lastly, it indicated that Policy Guideline Formulation due to PPP led children to sort objects by colour and shape. This shows that stakeholders in Kasese District supported the view that PPP helped the progress of early childhood education. The null hypothesis was rejected because PPP had a significant positive effect on early childhood education.

The finding of the study gives credence to the theoretical foundation by Burr and Montgomery (2003), who observed that the field of early childhood education can appear fragmented, comprising theoretical frameworks linked to profound differences in scientific and epistemological perspectives, and in some cases, these are closely aligned with policy objectives and narratives (Burr, and Montgomery, (2003).

Results from Interview

The researcher also conducted some face-to-face interviews with 32 different categories of respondents. They include 1 district education officer, 3 ECD focal persons, 4 policymakers, 10 parents, 4 religious/opinion leaders and 10 caregivers. The researcher was informed by almost all the above respondents that there was a need to strengthen the necessary partnership between the government and other ECD stakeholders such as caregivers, parents, religious/community-based groups, proprietors and so on. This was due to the fact that amidst the hard economic conditions, other interest groups had done their part in ensuring that such schools were in a position to operate, yet the government's performance was still below the required standard.

They also observed that parents and community-based groups had donated land for building nursery schools. Besides, they were trying as much as possible to pay school fees, buy furniture and scholastic materials, and offer managerial services on ECD committees. What's more, they also provided native ECD curricula such as riddles, stories and children's games and in so doing, this enriched the curriculum. Likewise, religious and community-based organisations, as partners for ECD, had been constituted into the foundation body committees. In addition to that, they were offering scholarships and bursaries to support needy children's education. On top of that, they usually allowed their premises to be used as classrooms for nursery children.

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That said, the government had not done enough to fulfil its obligation as advocated for in the ECD policy 2007. On that note, government seminars aimed at capacity building were still inadequate, inspection and monitoring were also wanting, and the government had not made efforts to partner with ECD agencies in the district. Moreover, monitoring of ECD policy dissemination and development of ECD guides was still insufficient.

Focal Person 3 had this to say,

> *"The ECD policy mandates the Minister to licence and register ECD training institutions... He also has to ensure that ECDs are regularly monitored and inspected. But this is insufficiently done, thus affecting the quality of education for pre-primary schools."*

Parents noted with concern the deprived environment in the area, which was affecting ECD's progress. This was evident in the following attributes: poverty, whereby most homesteads had no consistent income-generating activity other than subsistence agriculture. Alcoholism and drug use cause instability in homes through domestic violence and child abuse. Others include food insecurity, whereby some homesteads had a food deficit due to weather vagaries. And child-headed families resulting from the AIDS pandemic and Ebola. In such circumstances, it was difficult for caregivers to offer adequate physical and emotional support that could engender nursery schooling.

On a positive note, the researcher was happy to note that some stakeholders had tried their best level to ensure that children enjoyed their rights, which could, in turn, lead them to realise their full potential. For instance, a collection of households living together, as well as the extended family system of close relatives, ably participated in children's education through socialisation. Mothers taught the children lullabies, songs, and riddles while caregivers narrated light conversations, stories, and legends to the young ones. The children themselves were left to play freely with their peers in the neighbourhood, thus sharpening their intellectual and social skills.

Religious leader 1 had this to say,

> *"Children are a source of joy and pride in our community... Parents, relatives and the entire community accord status to any family that produces a baby. A childless marriage is looked upon as a total failure in society. That is why we undertake collective responsibility in educating children. It is part of our value as a community."*

School proprietors/ heads also showed that amidst the problems, they had improvised by finding ways of bringing on board other stakeholders. For instance, there was an annual graduation occasion for children completing Top Class in the ECD echelon, which all interest groups attended.

Proprietor 3 had this to say,

> *"On every graduation day, I make sure that I invite as a guest of honour an important person such as an area member of Parliament. This serves many purposes. First, we use the opportunity to voice our concerns to the government. Secondly, it brings together parents, politicians and education administrators for a common cause. Thirdly, it is a motivator to the parents when they see their children dressed in graduation attire."*

Results from Observation

Out of 20 ECD centres observed, only 3 (hereinafter referred to as the 'Model Schools') had the average recommended facilities for pre-primary schools. They had permanent buildings in a habitable state. Others had wooden blocks. The Model schools cited above, at least, had play and experimentation material for young children. These include material for aiding numeracy in children, such as sorting or grouping objects, matching, counting, seriation and measurement. They also had objects to support communication and expressive ability in young ones, such as indoor free-play puzzles and reading construction. Toilet facilities in most ECDs were not user-friendly. They were pit latrines, which were filthy.

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Model schools had waterborne flash toilets with good sanitation facilities.

Children were observed using all their senses to manipulate learning materials through modelling, colouring, drawing, pattern making and painting. Such activities (as recommended by Piaget) met children's learning needs. Also, in such schools, there were outdoor games such as swimming and dancing, which were joyous and culture-based.

In most of the schools observed, the dominant outdoor games facilities were swings, beam balance, merry-go-rounds, sand, and old car tyres halfway buried in the ground. Children usually carry out games using those facilities under teachers' guidance. In most schools, there was a room with laid mattresses to serve as a resting point for young ones. However, some of the mattresses had torn clothing and needed replacement. In many schools, charts were available, though some were defaced and contained content meant for primary children. In all institutions, children normally carry snacks for breakfast and tea. The common foodstuff was bread, pancakes and fried cassava.

Other than the 3 model schools which had a thematic curriculum (TC) recommended by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), others used individually made syllabi. Institutions which didn't use the TC gave an excuse for lack of training in its execution. As noted by various scholars, ECD involves early care, education, development and socialisation of children aimed at their holistic development. Parents, caregivers, teachers, health workers, school administrators and welfare officers have to ensure that they play an important role in ensuring children's early education and total well-being.

Thus, children aged 3-6 years need to be provided with a challenging environment, as advocated for by Piaget in his development theory benchmarking this study. The teaching-learning process for 3-6 year children should be one in which they are practically involved. The caregivers need to allow constructive expression of child-centred methods and the development of appropriate practices in which children are involved in observation, exploration, discovery, experimentation, and play. The content and method should be appropriate for children's age, development level, and cultural experiences. As a result, caregivers are also encouraged to use visual aids, storytelling and songs because these help such learners develop language concepts. In this case, activity should be the most important aspect of this child's learning process. This is because children at this stage learn more through practising or doing.

Also to note is that children need the environment around them to achieve their full potential. This necessitates various stakeholders such as parent elders, playmates, and education officials. These help them to manipulate their surroundings and experiment with objects in the environment to develop clear concepts. Public-private partnerships play a role in making certain that children develop expressive communication abilities.

From *Table 4* above, 81.5 % of the respondents indicated that PPP in ECD brings about children putting up two words together as per caregiver guidance, while 14.3 % of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 4.2% were undecided. Also, 84.1 % of the respondents indicated that PPP in ECD fostered paying attention by a child to a simple story and thereafter answering questions from it, while 12.9 % of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 3.1 % were undecided. Similarly, 87% of the respondents indicated that Institutional Factors for PPP bring about the following of simple commands among children. In contrast, a handful, 8% of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 5% were undecided.

Lastly, 12.5 % of the respondents indicated that the availability of suitable Home Environment Factors does not promote communication ability in children; however, 82.4 % of the subjects are opposed to this view, and 15.1% were undecided

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Table 4: Response on whether PPP enhances expressive communication ability

	Strongly agree/agree		Strongly disagree/disagree		Undecided	
	f	%	F	%	f	%
PPP in ECD brings about children putting up two words together as per caregiver guidance	233	81.5	41	14.3	12	4.2
PPP in ECD fosters paying attention by a child to a simple story and thereafter answers questions from it	248	84.1	38	12.9	9	3.1
Institutional Factors for PPP bring about following of simple commands among children.	256	86.8	25	8.5	14	4.7
The availability of suitable Home Environment Factors do not promote communication ability in children	37	12.5	243	82.4	15	5.1

Source: Data from the field 2023

Table 2: Chi-square test computed from the frequency cross-tabulation

-	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	26.877 (a)	8	.001
Likelihood ratio	30.400	8	.000
Linear-by linear association	3.311	1	.069
N of valid cases	295		

Source: SPSS WIN 15.00 version output

Table 5 demonstrates the output of the computed Chi-square values from cross-tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of strongly agree to strongly disagree based on the results from the stakeholders of Early Childhood Education in the 20 sub-counties that are located in Bukonzo and Busongora Counties in Kasese District.

The Pearson Chi-square computed statistic value is greater than the Chi-square tabulated value with 8 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 alpha level. Since the Chi-square computed statistic value is greater than the Chi-square tabulated value with 8 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis that the public-private partnership does not play any part in making certain that children develop communication skills was rejected; thus, in simple terms, the public-private partnership plays a role in making certain that children develop expressive communication abilities.

The analysis of results in Table 4 showed that PPP in ECD causes children to put up two words together as per caregiver guidance. It also showed that PPP in ECD fostered paying attention by a child to a simple story and thereafter answering questions from it. Further, it was indicated that institutional factors for PPP bring about the following simple commands among children. Lastly, results showed that the availability of suitable Home Environment Factors does not promote communication ability in children.

The discussion of the results is in line with the objectives, and the finding of the present study concurs with Karger (2015) and Lembrer (2020), who, in their independent studies, highlighted that parents and siblings played a great role in helping children acquire a language during the preschool period. In this case, they suggested that those relatives need to help the children practice a language by modifying or repeating a particular phrase uttered by such a child. They also both concurred that there were substantial differences among parents in how they communicated with their children and how those differences impacted the development of both non-cognitive and cognitive communication skills in children aged 2-6 years.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, the study concluded that

- That public-private partnership plays a part in making certain that children develop numerical concepts.
- It was also concluded that public-private partnership plays a role in making certain that children develop expressive communication abilities.

The study recommends that the problem addressed in this research and the suggestions presented provide a basis for improving the content, learning activities, materials, and resources, as well as the quality assurance measures in the implementation of programs for early childhood education.

The study also recommends that parents ought to give their children cognitive numerical or communication skills in the form of counting songs, measurement, estimation, representation, storytelling, talking to them, and so on.

The Ministry of Education inspectorate should ensure that the level of curriculum delivery among children aged 3-6 years in schools matches with the world and regional education parameters that were put forward at Jomitien, Moscow, and Dakar. In this case, that will encourage the improvement of the teaching process.

Novelty

It is crucial to remember that this study is limited to the role played by (PPP) in making certain that children acquire numeracy skills as well as receptive and expressive communication ability in the context of education under the Ministry of Education and Sports in general and Kasese District in particular. The ECD policy (2007), however, emphasises that Early Childhood Education is multi-sector in provision. Therefore**,** other sectors like health or protection are not part of this study, yet they help to provide some of the basic needs for children aged 2-6 years.

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