

Challenges Facing Early Childhood Education in Ghana. What do Stakeholders Say?

Ahmed Abdulai

Department of Early Childhood Education

University of Education, Winneba

ahmedjinapor@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study provides an overview of challenges confronting early childhood education in the Winneba municipality of the central region of Ghana. It looks at factors that might have contributed to such challenges and what measures could be put in place to address them. Using a descriptive survey research design, 17 participants consisting of early childhood educators, heads of early childhood centers, parents, and the National Coordinator of Early Childhood programmes in Ghana participated in the study. Findings revealed that challenges associated with early childhood education in the Winneba municipality include: public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood educational programs to the child's education and development, lack of parental involvement and commitment to early childhood education, lack of teaching staff and infrastructure, and institutional barriers. Reasons identified for such challenges included lack of education on the part of the public about the place and relevance of early childhood education in the total educational setup. To address the identified challenges, study participants recommend increasing public sensitization and education, partnership and commitment.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Challenges, Winneba Municipality, Stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education and Sports issued an Education Strategic Plan (ESP, 2003 -2015) to serve as a framework for the attainment of its educational commitment as stated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Key focal areas contained in this plan (ESP) are access, quality, and management of education as main policy drivers to meet Ghana's developmental aspirations. Critical to achieve these aspirations is early childhood education, which according to UNESCO, is foundational to each country's development.

The importance and relevance of early childhood education in national development is definitely not in doubt when it comes to the Ghanaian people (Morris, 2009). For example, the 1992 constitution of Ghana makes provisions for early childhood care and development (Article, 38); the children's Act of 1998 addresses the protection of the rights of the child, while the inclusion of early childhood education into main stream formal educational system are all indicative of Ghana's commitment to the advancement and promotion of early childhood education in Ghana. These commitments in addition to the above are reflected in Ghana's adoption of an early childhood educational policy (Ghana Early Childhood Policy, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Ghana, early childhood education is a program that aims at improving the skills and competencies of the child. Indeed, the benefits of early childhood education in national development are well documented (see, Barnett, 2006; Connell & Prinz, 2002; Haskins, 1998;

McCartney, 1984; Reynolds et al, 2001). Barnett (1995) for example talks about the benefits of early childhood education in the cognitive development of the child in the long-term, whiles Campbell & Craig (2002) provide evidence of the positive benefits gained by adults with background in early childhood education vis-à-vis their counterparts who never had early childhood education. Craig, Campbell, Burchinal, Skinner, Gardner, & Ramey (2000), talk of positive cognitive effects of children participating in an Abecedarian project after an early intervention program. In fact, a number of studies have articulated the economic benefits of early childhood education not just to the individual but also to the society as a whole (see, Burchinal, 2000; Diamond, et al, 2007; Dillard, 2009; Yoshikawa, 1995).

Given the unquestionable benefits associated with early childhood education, it follows therefore that attention should be paid to some of the challenges that might affect its successful implementation. Hence, this study proceeds to unveil some perspectives of stakeholders involved in early childhood education and development on what they believe to be the challenges confronting that sector of the educational system. The study uses the Winneba municipality of the central region of Ghana as a case study. It categorizes the findings under four broad thematic areas; public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood education, lack of commitment and involvement of parents in early childhood education, lack of teaching staff and infrastructure; and institutional barriers. These themes were identified as major areas of concern for stakeholders who participated in this study. With the above challenges identified, recommendations and suggestions were sought on improving the system.

Research Questions

To carry out this study, the following research questions were examined:

- What challenges exist in early childhood education in Winneba municipality?
- What factors contribute to the challenges of early childhood education in Winneba municipality?
- What recommendations could be adopted to address the challenges that exist in early childhood education in the Winneba municipality?

METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative project, which used the phenomenological approach to elicit views and perspectives of stakeholders involved in early childhood education. Data was collected using semi-structured and open-ended interviews as well as focused group discussions. The research questions served as the basis of data analysis.

The study uses a purposive sampling approach in the selection of participants. 17 participants; consisting of the National Coordinator of Early Childhood Education in Ghana, heads/proprietress in early childhood education, teachers/early childhood educators, and parents participated in the study. All participants were selected from the Winneba municipality except the National Coordinator who as a matter of responsibility has oversight responsibility of early childhood educational administration in the Winneba municipality. Data was collected over a period of six weeks.

FINDINGS

Research question one looked at what challenges confronts early childhood education in the Winneba municipality. Stakeholders identified challenges in relation to the following:

Public prejudice about the relevance of Early Childhood Education

Findings of this study reveal that most teachers identified public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood education to the total educational development of the child as a challenge. Such prejudices according to early childhood educators involved in this study manifest in persistent societal stereotype about the essence, relevance, status and levels of intelligence of teachers involved in early childhood education. In fact all teachers or educators who participated in this study share this view; that there still exist public prejudice about early childhood education. For example, this is how some of the early childhood educators interviewed put it:

Early Childhood Educator One:

Once, somebody questioned me personally, this person is an important person at the education office here in Winneba. And the person said, upon all your degree you still teach at the KG (kindergarten)? What are you doing there, you should be at the JHS (Junior High School) or something because as for those children, what are you teaching them with all your qualification?

Early Childhood Educator Three:

They don't see why people should be trained with degrees to handle children in kindergartens. They believe we go there to sing songs and recite rhymes. For most people, early childhood educators can only sing and clap. People wonder why we should be wasting our time at that level when in actual fact we could be making productive use of our time at the higher basic levels.

Early Childhood Educator Four:

You know I did early childhood education with my husband, and upon graduation he was sent to the JHS because according to management at the district level, pupils at the JHS will be writing BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination) exams and they need teachers to teach at that level. In fact, my colleague teachers at the higher primary level always think they are more intelligent than me because for them, all I do is to sing and clap.

Early Childhood Educator Six:

The problem is, people bring their wards to the school and the perception they have about the children they have brought to you is the problem. So they make the issues very difficult for us teachers to handle; my colleague teachers do not understand why you are paying much attention to a particular child, and the parents do not understand why you should say they should visit the school frequently to ask questions about the child. The educationist at the office also does not understand why you have an early childhood degree and you still sitting at the KG and that why don't you go to the JHS? So the problem is not coming from one angle, our education should be done right from the scratch. In fact, we should not see those at the office as people who know what goes on in early childhood education, instead, they should be educated themselves.

Pursuance to authenticating these assertions as expressed by early childhood educators involved in this study, heads of early childhood institutions were asked of their opinions on public prejudice about early childhood education. The following is a response by a head teacher:

Head Teacher Two:

You see my brother; you have to understand where we have come from when it comes

to early childhood education. If you remember, KG was known to be a place where working mothers use to drop off their children before leaving for work. And at these places we had only old women and most times pregnant women who never had any form of teacher training. So that mindset about people teaching at the early childhood level still persists. Unfortunately people do not know that practice of untrained teachers at the KG has changed. Currently we have four teachers who are all trained with three of them having Cert "A" and one having Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. The one who went for the early childhood programme is doing very well and I know it is because of the training she had in the early childhood education and because of that I have asked two of the other teachers in the section (early Childhood) to do the early childhood programme. So you see when people are trained they bring out their best. I think with time this perception will change.

Responses by other heads of early childhood institutions who participated in the study were not very different from those of Head Teacher Two. The underlying theme in their responses with reference to why such perceptions exist was the lack of education on the part of the public on the place of early childhood education in the total education and development of the child. And this according to them is informed by the historical practices of early childhood education in Ghana. This position was upheld by the National Coordinator of Early Childhood Education Programs of Ghana. The following is a response by the coordinator on the subject.

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

I think even though the country (Ghana) has a policy on early childhood care and development and that is from 0-8 years and this policy came into being in the year 2004 and has been in existence for about eight years now, but now it looks as if still people have not really understood the concept of early childhood education and that is why in the year 2011 we started to put a comprehensive programme in place setting up quality kindergarten education and the plan was completed last year (2012) December and the implementation was to start this year (2013).

Responses by parents on public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood education to the child's education and development were mixed. While all parents agree to the important role that early childhood education plays in the child's education and development, some concur to assertions by teachers of being stigmatized by the public. For example, this is how a parent puts it:

Parent Three:

One day, my son's madam was saying she wants to leave the KG to upper primary because her colleagues laugh at her because she teaches at the KG. And this she said is a problem for her because to teach at the KG you need to be tolerant, patient, and also have to know how to handle children. So you see, when people are teaching at the nursery it does not mean they do not know anything or cannot speak English fluently as most people think. It is because the teachers there have to speak the local language for the children to understand what they are teaching them. So I think the Ghana Education Service will have to advise the public about the work of the nursery teacher.

Lack of Parental Involvement and Commitment to Early Childhood Education

Apart from public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood education in the education and development of the young child, lack of parental involvement and commitment to early childhood education was also identified as a challenge. This challenge was mostly identified by

early childhood educators and heads of early childhood institutions. The following are some responses by early childhood educators on this subject:

Early Childhood Educator Two:

I will say that, if your question is about Ghana in general, then most people in our society do not attach more importance to the education of their children. Most parents think their children do not know anything and for them, they just send their children to school for somebody to occupy the child for the period of time that the child will be in the school. And this problem is very serious at the beaches; I mean the schools by the beaches in Winneba. Most of the parents of these children engage in fishing and because of that they are being taken care of by their grandparents who themselves are not educated.

Early Childhood Educator Five:

The situation is not different from my school. Most of the parents come and write the names of their children, and in no time you will not find the children again. And if you inquire from their mates, you will be told that, the child has been taken away to another place to be taken care of by another guardian. You will be there for two to three months and the child will pop up intending to come back to school.

Early Childhood Educator Three:

Sometimes the parents try to compare children in the private schools with government schools (public schools). And they argue that, those in the government schools are not doing well. How do you expect a child who comes to school bare footed, half belly filled to learn even how to hold a chalk? The child before coming to school is emotionally troubled and sitting beside a colleague who is wearing a shoe and socks and you think they do not have conscience? They know and remember that right from day one that they entered this school they never wore a slipper and you think such a child will understand anything, definitely no. So I think if the parents want us to perform magic for their children, they have to do their part by being responsible in their children's upbringing.

Early Childhood Educator Four:

Personally, I think the problem is even more serious with fathers. I hardly see fathers coming to the school. I cannot talk of 10 fathers for the past five years that I have been in my school coming to inquire about their children. Even when you send for them it is mothers who show up, and in most instances you will find the grandmother not the parents. So you find the child coming to school with nothing and not expecting much from you the teacher.

For heads of early childhood institutions reasons or factors that have contributed to the above challenge has been parental mobility in search of greener pastures, hence the shedding of responsibilities to grandparents. This is how a head teacher puts it:

Head Teacher Four:

I think one of the challenges that we face is that, most of the children are left in the care of their grandmothers and because they are not able to provide all the items the children are to bring to school, we are always confronted with a lot of problems. I am told most of the parents travel to Yeji (a fishing community in Ghana) to engage in fishing. And as you are aware because of government's policy on free education, no parent wants to pay any form of fees. Meanwhile, the capitation grant (government

subvention for basic education) takes forever when it comes to payment. So I think if parents contribute just a bit and work with us, early childhood education in Ghana will be the best in the world.

The above notwithstanding, all five parents who participated in the study did not see this as a problem or challenge. In fact all parents attested to attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings regularly, and have always engaged their respective early childhood educators involved in their children's education. The National Early Childhood Coordinator even though acknowledged such a challenge, however she saw it as a remnant of the perception and practice of early childhood education in the past, and thought it was a challenge that was being addressed.

Lack of Teaching Staff and Infrastructure

Lack of teaching staff as well as limited or no infrastructure was also identified as a major challenge associated with early childhood educational practices in the Winneba municipality. There was unanimity on the part of all participants on the issue of teacher quality in terms of training and teacher pupil ratio. In addition, large class sizes as well as lack of teaching and learning materials were also identified as major challenges. The following are responses by participants of this study to the question of class size and teacher student ratio:

Early Childhood Educator One:

I think one of the biggest challenges we have when it comes to early childhood education in Winneba is the problem of class sizes. A school in town has a population of 80 pupils at KG one and they are being handled by three teachers with no attendants. The school is called A.M.E Zion D preparatory school and it is closer to the hospital. I can say it may have the largest class size in town. The reason been that, our folks at the beaches have been told that if they do not send their children to school they will be questioned and because of that perception, the head teachers cannot tell them the place is choked and they have to admit them especially when education is free. And you cannot levy them to buy tables and chairs. Will you be surprised to know that there are some schools in this town where children are taught in churches? It is really a challenge.

Parent Two:

I think on the issue of class size it is a problem. Looking at where my baby is, when I go there I don't feel comfortable because the school has one big classroom with three different levels of pupils in the same classroom. When you enter the class there is total confusion because whiles one section is reciting a poem, another group is singing or counting numbers. I once asked the teacher in the school that do the children get or understand what she is teaching, and she said yes. Even though I did not want to argue with her I knew the children could not pay attention because of the noise.

Head Teacher Three:

As for classrooms, it has always been a problem and as you can see there are ongoing projects, but the challenge is when they will be completed. I am sorry to say that because of lack of space we are mostly compelled to put a number of pupils together even though they are not supposed to be in the same class. And this is because the policy says you are to admit every child of school going age, you cannot turn them away.

The National Early Childhood Coordinator even admitted to challenges associated to classroom facilities. She was however quick, to admit that such challenges are addressed in a policy framework that is being implemented to improve the quality of early childhood education in Ghana. The following is how the coordinator responded to the above challenge:

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

...the second phase also targets infrastructural development. As you will realize when you move into these kindergarten centers, you could see that most of the facilities they use are of very poor quality. Sometimes some of these children are put into dilapidated structures, some sit under trees, while others eat on bare floor and this does not augur well for these children...

As part of infrastructural challenges, lack of qualified early childhood educators was also identified. This challenge as stated by the National Early Childhood Coordinator is captured in a compact that aims at improving early childhood programs in the country. The following is the response of the National Early Coordinator on the subject of teacher background and training.

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

...the first phase is targeting professional teacher development. With this you realize that at the kindergarten level we have a lot of teachers who are not professionally trained. What I mean is that a lot of teachers who are at this level do not have enough training in the methodology on how to handle children at the kindergarten level. Also attached to professional training, includes teaching learning materials, involvement of the community, and family members.....

The question of teacher quality and training was also identified by parents as being a challenge, especially at private schools. The following are some responses by parents:

Parent One:

When you go to the private schools, it will be very difficult to get more trained teachers than in the public schools, and I think this is a problem. An example is where my daughter attends school; when I visit the school sometimes I just tell myself that these teachers are not professionals and they do not know how to handle children.

Parent four:

I think most of the teachers especially at the private centers are S.S.S. (Senior High School) graduates. Some time ago a lady whose son attends the same school with my son was complaining to me that her child nowadays when he comes home and when she is doing something the child picks up broom sticks and attempt to cane her. So I think the teachers in the school have been using cane at the children, and I don't understand which professional teacher will cane a four year old boy.

For most heads of early childhood centers and teachers, even though they acknowledged the lack of professional early childhood training on the part of some early childhood educators, their position has been that the challenge is more prevalent with private schools than that of public schools. A response by head teacher three of this study on the question of public prejudice about early childhood education in Ghana is in itself an acknowledgement of this challenge; lack of professional training on the part of some early childhood educators.

Institutional Barriers

A fourth challenge that was identified in the course of this study is what is described as institutional barriers regarding how early childhood education is practiced: personal or management of early childhood programs in the Winneba municipality: policies and programs put out by government with regards to early childhood education: and societal orientation about the whole concept of early childhood education. Responses by participants illustrate this point. On the question of how early childhood educational practices serve as a challenge to overall successful early childhood educational development, this is what some parents had to say:

Parent Five:

Once a colleague friend whose daughter is in the same place with my child saw me and was asking me if my child could write, and I said yes she could scribble something but it is not that clear. She said with her daughter she is not able to write at all and she is the same age as my child. What this friend of mine did at first was to go to the teachers and tell them her experiences so far as what she thinks is the problem. She said the teachers have been giving her child home work assignments, and when the child brings these assignments home, she realizes that they are too high for the child to do and was complaining to the teachers that the work was too high for her child but the teachers seemed not to care.

Parent Six:

I think most of the teachers do not understand what they are doing because it is true that they teach most of the children things that are higher than them. For example, my elder sister took her daughter to a school and at KG one, she could recite the times table (multiplication table). So one day I went to her house and she told me that the school her child attends is very good because her daughter could recite the times table. But I told her to be very careful of that school because at that level, the child should not be reciting times table. Now the girl is in class two and she finds mathematics very difficult and cannot work simple mathematics. Now it looks like she does not like mathematics. Meanwhile, from the beginning she could recite the times table well and her mother was happy.

Quite apart from the foregoing, some teachers identified the background of some management personnel at the municipality as a challenge to early childhood education development. For example, this is how a teacher describes the problem:

Early Childhood Educator Six:

You would be surprised to know that a municipality of this nature is having an early childhood coordinator who herself is not early childhood inclined, and so what is she going to imbibe into teachers in those centers if she herself does not understand what early childhood education is all about? I think this problem is not peculiar to just the Winneba municipality; there are other places that I know their coordinators are not early childhood trained. They are appointed there because there are vacancies, and if these problems are not addressed we will continue to have the problems that we are facing.

For most heads of early childhood centers, government policy on free education even though laudable, has not been helpful due to delays in the release of funds. For example, this is how a head of an early childhood center puts it:

Head Teacher One:

Generally, infrastructure and furniture is a major problem and these are also very important to help these children to learn very well in school. Besides, funds from the government to cater for these children are also a problem. Another problem has to do with parents; because the government says free education, parents do not want to supply their children with anything and this is a major challenge. These monies (government subvention) do not come at the time they are mostly needed for the up keep of these children, and this becomes a major problem for every headmaster or mistress (heads of schools).

Effective supervision of schools especially private institutions was identified as a major challenge. In fact, some private schools are seen as been engaged in the business of money making and that for most stakeholders is a problem. The following was the response by the National Early Childhood Coordinator on this subject:

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

You know some of these private people (heads of private schools) come in because of the money and sometimes when they are establishing the schools they do not even involve us. We as an office cannot go to the entire nation but rather it will be proper to turn to the right quarters and find out what is to go into let's say facilities, staff, and structures. You cannot just involve or get anybody to handle these children for you just because you want to make money. Currently, we have been collaborating with the private sector. They have an association and we have been talking with them and sometimes when we organize workshops and seminars we involve their executives. We want them to spread the message to their members about best practices of early childhood education. You know in Ghana, we are always confronted with financial problems, so organizing these programs have always been a challenge. UNICEF (United Nations Children Fund) has always been of help in these sensitization programs and we are very grateful to them.

As part of the objectives of the study participants were asked about research question two; what factors have contributed to challenges associated with early childhood education in the study area? Findings revealed that, most challenges as presented are in themselves factors that might have contributed to some of the described challenges. However, participants went further to specifically present reasons or factors that in their view have led to the current state of affairs when it comes to early childhood education and development in the Winneba municipality. On the question of lack of trained teachers and educators at early childhood centers, as well as public prejudice about the relevance of early childhood education, the following are some of the reasons assigned by participants.

Early Childhood Educator Three:

It is not because those with the requisite skills are not there to teach, it is because those who are suppose to post them to early childhood centers do not see the need to post them there. Because they think they will be wasting their time at the lower level they instead send them to the upper classes.

Early Childhood Educator One:

I think the whole issue has to do with the way society frowns on early childhood education. It will interest you to know that some of the trained teachers still do not want to come to early childhood centers. You know, there are a number of training colleges offering early childhood education programs in addition to what is offered by

the universities. However, when most of the teachers at the training colleges graduate from school scarcely will you find them posted to the KG. Through their own connections they work things out to get them posted to the JHS, because teaching there, society turns to see you as one who is good and intelligent. So every teacher trained in early childhood education especially from the teacher training college is anxious to be posted to the higher basic level.

The above assertion even though not affirmed by the National Early Childhood Coordinator, she shared a similar perspective. The following response by the coordinator illustrates this position.

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

I can say that there is this culture in Ghana where more or less children are supposed not to be heard and the priority is unfortunately not on them. Rather, the focus is more on higher levels and if you want to measure some impact at the early childhood level what are you measuring? Of course you will measure it may be at the end when these children are writing their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and that is what in my view has been a contributing factor to the emphasis on the JHS than at the KG level. So you can understand why much emphasis and resources are spent at the JHS level rather than at the KG level, when unfortunately people tend to forget that the early childhood level serves as the foundation of the educational process.

With regards to challenges associated with infrastructure, most participants attributed reasons to lack of resources. For instance this is how a head teacher puts it.

Head Teacher One:

I think one of the problems with infrastructure has to do with the release of funds. This problem has to do with the public schools. When you go in to ask for funds for any program, you should not be surprised to be told that either the capitation grant has not arrived or the money has already been spent. So the teaching and learning aids that you are suppose to use in teaching these children are even not there, so how would you expect to build that foundation?

With challenges associated with early childhood educational practices at the Winneba municipality captured, as well as factors that have contributed to these challenges identified, the study went further to answer research question three; what recommendations can be provided in addressing the identified challenges? Responses with regard to research question three by participants of this study centered on the need for education and awareness on the part of the general public. The following are responses by participants.

Early Childhood Educator Six:

It is all about awareness creation, sensitization, and education. For some of us, we have been fortunate to have had this training, I mean early childhood education, so we know the essence of early childhood education and so we would want to be there but those who do not know still believe that as it was yesterday is still what is practiced today. So for some people, the center is just to take care for their children whiles they go to work. So I think we need enough education and sensitization on the part of the public for them to be aware of the essence of early childhood education for them to attach a lot of importance to it.

Early Childhood Educator Four:

I will also share the same opinion and will say that the education should not be geared towards a group of people like parents but should start from the education directorate. I think a memo should be sent to the education directorate here in Winneba for them to understand the essence and relevance of early childhood education to the total educational development of the learner. Also, we should also organize periodic in service training not just for parents and teachers in early childhood education but also those in management positions. There is the need to organize workshops on early childhood education and also ensure that what is taught is put into practice. I remember sometime ago, we used to visit market places, radio stations, churches, mosques and so forth and I believe this will help.

Early Childhood Educator Three:

I think when teachers are posted to their districts, they should actually be placed at where they were trained for and not sent to upper classes. Sensitization as described by my colleagues is also very important because if a foundation is well laid, building on it will not be that difficult, so I think parents and all those involved in early childhood education should know that the course is something which is really going to help children.

In terms of recommendations, parents on their part saw the need for them to be involved in issues pertaining to school administration. The following was the concern of a parent regarding school – parent collaboration.

Parent Four:

I think one of the major problems that we have is the lack of education for us parents by the teachers. Usually, when we attend PTA meetings all what the teachers talk about are contributions from parents for this or that. Never will you hear of teachers wanting to explain to parents new developments on early childhood educational practices, and what we the parents can do to improve the education of our children. So when this is not done, how do you expect us to understand what is going on in the school? I think we need to be involved in what takes place in the schools.

On the question of lack of trained teachers at early childhood centers, some parents called for the posting of trained teachers to private institutions. For example, the following recommendation was suggested by a parent.

Parent Two:

I honestly do not know why teachers from the training colleges are not posted to the private schools. I think if that is done, this will improve the situation of untrained teachers at the private schools. I think the private schools will have to take the initiative by sending their teachers to training colleges or higher institutions for upgrade. This will help deal with the challenges of untrained teachers at the private schools.

In addition to the above, some parents called for free feeding at various early childhood centers. Below is the perspective of a parent on this subject.

Parent One:

I think government should be able to provide early childhood centers with enough teaching and learning materials as well as food for the children. You know, because

most schools do not provide food for the children, it is always the case when you find most children not going to school because of the long stay in school and the chances of being hungry. So when government makes it a policy of providing feeding to all early childhood centers in the country, it will serve as a motivational tool.

For her part, the National Early Childhood Coordinator stated that she believes certain policy initiatives already in place would in future go a long way in addressing certain challenges associated with early childhood education in the country. Below is a recommendation to that effect.

National Early Childhood Coordinator:

Currently we have a plan that aims at maybe changing the name of the profession and then also try to educate people to let them know that there is specialty, and that not only women get engaged in early childhood education even though they are the most passionate about things that concern children. I think men also have a vital role to play when it comes to early childhood education. They just need to be encouraged, educated to understand and accept their place in this important enterprise. In certain countries, you find out that men play very important roles in early childhood education, but here in Ghana maybe because of our cultural practices men seem to have a problem when it comes to child upbringing. I think the only way we can break this mindset is through education and sensitization.

For some Heads of early childhood centers, teaching and learning materials need to be made more readily available. In addition, the need for collaboration between various tertiary institutions and the Ghana education service in the provision of quality early childhood education programs according to Heads of centers is important. Below is the perspective of a Head teacher on this subject.

Head Teacher Three:

I think teaching and learning materials will have to be made readily available at the various centers. You know at the early childhood level, you cannot engage in any efficient teaching if the child cannot feel what is being taught. That is why government will have to strive hard to ensure that the various centers are provided with adequate teaching and learning materials. Besides, I also think the university, I mean the one here in Winneba will have to create an early childhood education center or unit to keep some of the samples of teaching and learning materials which will be like a resource center for schools to visit and take inspiration from. These materials can even be rented out to schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of this study indicate several important challenges that affect the efficiency and quality of early childhood educational practices in the Winneba municipality. Undoubtedly, as evidenced in responses by participants of this study, the whole concept of early childhood education regarding what it entails, its practices, and its relevance to the total education and development of the young child is still not well engrained in the psyche of the Ghanaian populace. Definitely, challenges revealed by participants representing public prejudice and stereotypes, as well as a lack of parental involvement and inadequate infrastructure can among other factors, be traced to a lack of education and understanding on the part of the public about early childhood education.

This study even though it is limited to a small geographical area, the Winneba municipality, its findings especially as evidenced in responses of the National Coordinator of Early Childhood programmes in Ghana could be applicable to most areas of the country. Recommendations by participants can be summed up as; the need for a robust educational and sensitization programme for the public about the important place of early childhood education in the educational development of the child. In fact recommendations as evidenced in findings of this study reveals a call by stakeholders to government to be more committed and supportive of early childhood programmes, and most importantly for parents to exhibit concern regarding their children's education especially at the early childhood level.

It is the suggestion of this study that more effort should be made to encourage parental participation and partnership in early childhood educational programs. Notwithstanding the benefits associated with free compulsory universal basic education as practiced in Ghana, as revealed in this study funding and support represented in capitation grants aimed at augmenting the non-payment of school fees by parents needs to be more timely and forthcoming. In addition, it is very important that individuals managing early childhood education programs at the district, regional, and national offices have a background of studies and experience in early childhood education. The Government of Ghana will definitely have place a greater priority on early childhood educational programs especially since they are still at an embryonic stage.

In light of the foregoing results, future research should look in greater depth at parental perspectives regarding the place and relevance of early childhood education in the totality of the child's educational development. Studies should also be conducted to identify alternative funding for early childhood educational programs. Again, studies on how to encourage and foster collaboration between local institutions such as the community and early childhood centers in the use of local resources would be very critical. Investigating the place and role of men in early childhood education would also be worth pursuing.

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