

Multi Stakeholder Interventions in Enhancing Early Childhood Care and Education in Lira District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The paper aspires to assess different strategies for enhancing ECCE programme in Lira District after realizing that the district has statistics which cast doubt on the future of ECCE but very limited effort has been made to improve the enrolment, retention and completion rate. The study aims to address specific objectives that included determining the significance of local community efforts, government interventions, and CSOs interventions in enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district. All the four nursery schools in Agweng sub-county, Lira district were sampled through census, and a sample size of 59 respondents was selected through probability sampling techniques. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS and the findings reveal that government interventions ($r=0.625$, $p<0.01$) is more significant in enhancing ECCE programme; and results of linear regression reveals that both government Interventions ($p<0.01$, $\beta= 0.49$); and local community efforts ($p<0.01$, $\beta= 0.38$) are significant in predicting ECCE programme enhancement in Lira district with an adjusted R^2 of 0.437. The study concludes that both government interventions and local community efforts would be very significant in enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district. The study recommends that Government of Uganda should consider offering financial support to the existing ECCE centers; undertake the creation of budget line or wage bills for ECCE care-givers; and undertake the establishment of ECCE learning centers in all government-aided primary schools in order to enhance the programme, not only in Lira district but to the entire country.

Keywords: Early-Childhood Education, Strategies, Civic Society, Community, Government

INTRODUCTION

An African proverb holds that “*a cockerel can easily be identified among day-old chicks*”. This proverb is very critical to Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE), which Ejuu (2021) opines that it provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. Gupta (2022) defines it as two or three-year pre-school programme available for infants or children within the eligible age range of 3-5 years. Ejuu (2021) asserts that it provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school.

Early childhood care and education programme could be traced way back in history. Rahiem (2021) writes that in 1779, Johann Fredrich Oberlin and Louise Scheppler founded an early establishment for caring and educating pre-school children whose parents were absent during the daytime. At about the same time, in 1780, similar infant establishments were created in Bavaria, and in 1802, Rivero and Pelegrín (2019) noted that Princess Pauline Zur Lippe established a preschool center in Detmold, the capital of the then principality of Lippe, Germany.

Early childhood education, also known as kindergarten is a pre-school educational approach based on playing, singing, and practical activities such as drawing, and social interaction as part of the transition from home to school (Chawla & Rivkin, 2014). Such institutions were originally made in the late 18th century in Germany, Bavaria, and Alsace to serve infants or young children whose parents both worked outside home (Rivero & Pelegrín, 2019).

According to Gordon and Browne (2015), the term kindergarten was coined by German pedagogue Fredrich Frobel, whose approach globally influenced early-years education. In the views of Sintonen (2020), today, the term is used in many countries to describe a variety of earlier educational institutions and learning spaces for children ranging from 2 to 6 years of age, based on a variety of teaching methods.

In South Africa, kindergartens provide preschool programs for children of all ages up to six, and Bridgman and von Fintel (2022) write that the Central Government has a big stake in the one to three-year programme, known as nursery, kindergarten 1 (K1), and kindergarten 2 (K2) which are meant to prepare children for their first year in primary school education. Some kindergartens in South Africa further divide nursery into N1 and N2.

In Sudan, Shaik (2022) contends that pre-school programme is compulsory, and that kindergarten is divided into private and public kindergarten, with the age spanning from 3–6 years, and the curriculum covers Arabic, English, religion, mathematics and more. In Egypt, Rahiem (2021) asserts that there exist the dual ownership by government and mosques of pre-school facilities where children may go to kindergarten for two years, commonly known as KG1 and KG2 between the ages of four and six

In Uganda, Ejjuu (2021) hints that kindergarten is nursery or pre-primary and usually covers ages 3 to 5, the three classes called baby class, middle class and top class, respectively, from where pupils graduating from top class then go on to enroll in P1 which is the first year of primary. Ebrahim (2023) opines that although pre-school programme is non-mandatory, most children in Uganda today attend these classes. In most parts of Uganda, nursery schools are specialized schools completely separate from regular primary school.

Lira district has a total of 22,349 children aged 0-6 which is statistically 16.03% of 139,379 people, presenting a great potential of high enrolment of learners in ECCE centers. According to Odit *et al* (2024), as of December 2023, there were 98 ECCE centers in Lira district, with a total enrolment of 3,234 learners, an average of 33 learners per center which is below the estimated national attendance rate of 52.7% of children.

The low enrolment and completion rates could be attributed to ignorance and poor attitudes towards ECCE where the local people make comparisons of the current education trend to the 1960s, in which one would enroll in P1 at the age of 9 years without necessarily going through nursery education (Ebrahim, 2023). Abject poverty in rural areas of Lira district, characterized by high dependency ration, forces households to have competing priorities to fund ECCE center requirements. UBoS Report (2022) indicated that 37.2% of households live below poverty line in the district, yet most ECCE are commercially driven making it disproportional to parents from poor households. There is statistically a great potential of ECCE programme to be successful in Lira district.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the involvement of government, civil society organizations, and local communities in promoting Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Lira District, enrolment, retention, and completion rates remain persistently low. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of stakeholder interventions. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these stakeholders' efforts influence ECCE participation outcomes in the district, creating a gap that this study seeks to address. Thus, the absence of empirical ingredient is a green light for this study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To establish the statistical significance of local community efforts in enhancing ECCE in Lira district
2. To examine the statistical significance of local and Central governments interventions in enhancing ECCE in Lira district
3. To analyze the statistical significance of CSOs interventions in enhancing ECCE in Lira district

Research Hypotheses

- 1 H₀₁. Local community efforts have no statistically significant effect on enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district
- 2 H₀₂. Local and Central governments interventions have no statistically significant on enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district

3 H₀₃. CSOs interventions have no statistically significant effect on enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district

Significance of the Study

Although there is the existence of statistics on ECCE features in Uganda, there is limited data especially on retention of learners, and completion rates of ECCE. Thus, the study will be very significant in providing an empirical data and information on the major features of ECCE programme in the rural settings.

Secondly, the study will provide data and information which is ripe for policy formulation and implementation by ECCE stakeholders such as local community, ECCE center management, CSOs operation in ECCE, and Local and Central government.

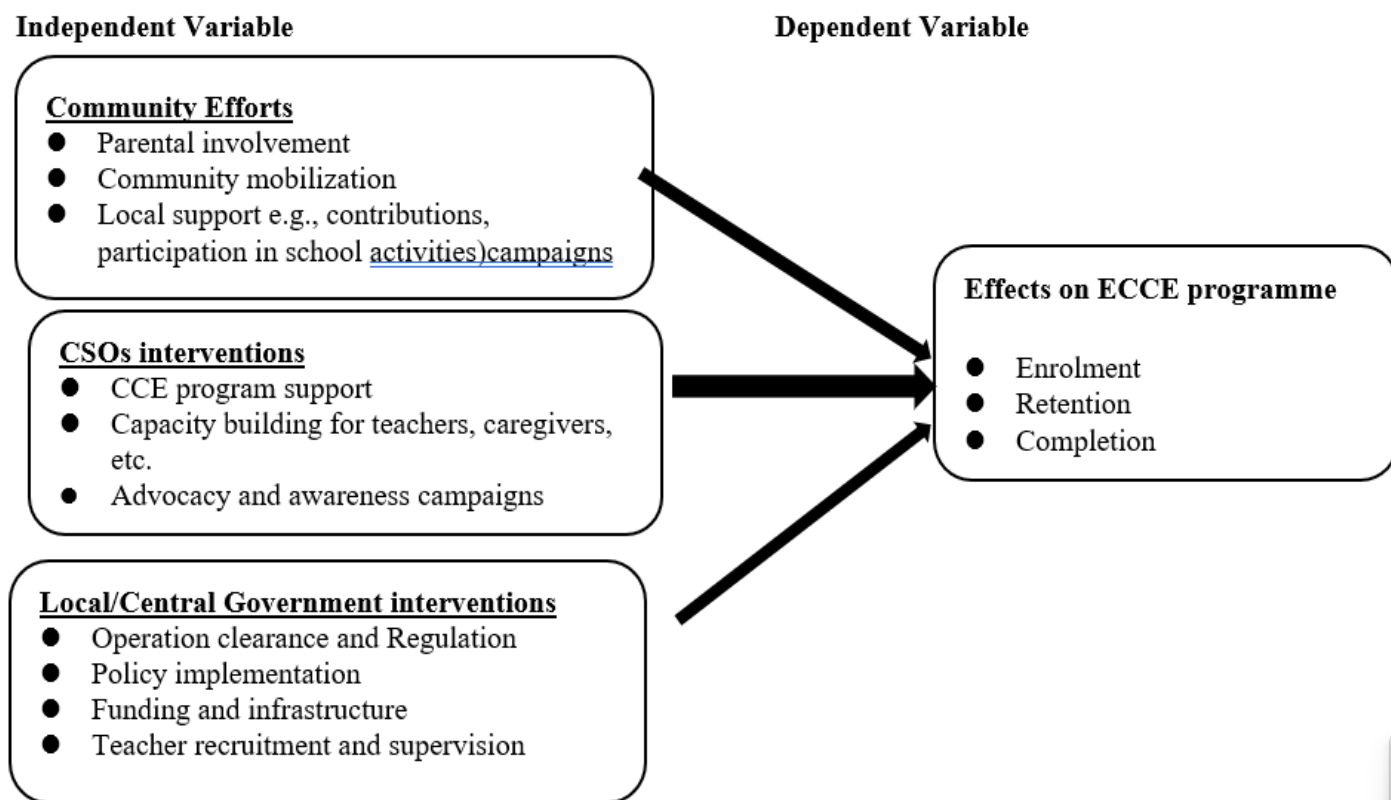
Scope of the Study

The study reviewed data from 2019 to 2025 and was conducted in the months of January, 2026 with a major focus on the determination of practical strategies to enhance ECCE programme. All the four nursery schools in Agweng sub-county, Lira district were considered for this study because it has the highest number of learners in ECD centers, and it is a sub-county which enjoys the support from CDC and Plan Uganda.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by stakeholder theory and participatory Theory. A conceptual framework shows multi-stakeholder intervention as the independent variable and ECCE programme as the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Showing the relationship between the perceived strategies that can be adopted and how they can enhance ECCE programme



Adopted from IC council-Alaska (2015) and applied by the researcher, (2026)

The study conceptualizes that multiple strategies can have individual varying significant effects on the ECCE programme in a society. Thus, strategies by community, CSO interventions, and Local and Central Government

will significantly but varyingly affect the enrolment, retention and completion of ECD learning in that a positive trend will also positively affect the ECCE programmes, but negative trends will negatively affect the ECCE programmes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“The study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative design using structured questionnaires, and a census approach was applied. This research involved describing the properties, values, attitudes and characteristics such as the mean, and standard deviation of findings. The design was preferred because it was not feasible to carry out the investigation in the entire district for reasons of time and resource constraints. The study was majorly quantitative in nature.

Study Population

The study considered key stakeholders in the ECCE circles, and a target population comprised of Para-Social workers in all the four parishes (8), Vice Chairpersons of villages surrounding all the ECD Centers in Agweng sub-county (8), all the Care-givers in ECD centers in Agweng (16), Proprietor/Director of all the four ECD Centers (4), CSOs operating in Agweng sub-county (2), Members of the PDC in all parishes in Agweng sub-county (20), and members of all the four Center Management Committees (12). This target population was preferred because the researcher expected to generate the much needed information on the study variables. Determined using Krajce and Morgan’s Table (1970), the sample size was 59 respondents, and was selected through census sampling techniques because of the small population.

Sources of Data and Instruments used for Data Collection

Documentation and questionnaires were used for the generation of data for this study. The study considered both primary and secondary data. The reason for these two sources was to ensure credibility in statistics regarding ECCE programme in the study area. The primary source provided data which was collected through field study using questionnaire as an instrument, while secondary source involved review of documents such as ECCE centre enrolment and other relevant information.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was established using expert judgement, and reliability was established using test retest using Cronbach Alpha to determine the internal consistency or average correlation of items in the data collection instrument to gauge its reliability. The overall value of Cronbach reliability coefficient of 0.784 indicated that the instrument was reliable.

Ethical Consideration

In conducting a research, people can choose to be either ethical or unethical. Coercion was avoided in this study because it limits the participants’ freedom of choice or ability to make a rational decision. In this study, each questionnaire to the respondents was accompanied by a consent form, so that they could always remember their rights. Permission was sought before the respondents were given the questionnaires.

Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and STATA computer packages were used to analyse quantitative. The process of analysis involved loading the excel file with all the data, importing the data into IBM SPSS and subsequently giving an SPSS command to run a factor analysis. The analysis generated both descriptive and inferential statistics which were later presented in percentages, figures, and tables.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The researcher faced some limitations during the study such as limited time to carry out this research because of the competing work schedules which involved a delicate balance. The researcher mitigated the effects of this on

time available for the study by selecting just a few manageable objectives for the study and prioritizing the study over all other responsibilities. Low response rate: Because of unethical practices by some researchers who misuse information given to them by research subject, the bulks of the population of Ugandans always have mistrust in research or researchers. The researcher remedied this by assuring respondents of confidentiality and professionalism in the handling of their responses. Conceptual problem: The researcher faced difficulties in deciding what to include or exclude in the questionnaires or within the scope of the study. However, this was remedied by getting expert guidance from the research supervisors on what to include and what not to include.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

The study registered a response rate of 81.36% of the sampled 59 respondents. It considered gender distribution of the respondents such as male and female; age of respondents which were categorized as between 18-30years, 31-50years, and over 50years; and the education status of the respondents. The results are presented below.

Table 3:1. Gender of the respondents

Gender distribution	Frequency	Percent
Male	33	68.75
Female	15	31.25
Total	48	100
Age group		
18-30	16	33.33
31-50	28	58.34
Over 50	4	8.33
Total	48	100
Educational Qualification		
Never Attended School	2	4.17
Attended Primary Education	30	62.5
Attended Post Primary Education	11	22.91
Attended Tertiary Education	5	10.42
Total	48	100

Source: Primary data (2026)

The table indicate that the total number of respondents was 48, out of which 33 (68.75 %) were male, and 15 (31.25%) of the respondents were female. This implies that both sexes were represented in this study despite a higher proportion of respondents being men, probably because of the patriarchal nature and practice in this area.

The results also show that more respondents 28 (58.34%) were in the age group of 31-50 years; 16 (33.33%) were in the age group of 18-30 years; and 4 (8.33%) were above 50 years. This implies that most of the respondents interviewed are mature and probably could give a well thought ideas in relations to the study variables.

In education qualification, majority of respondents 30 (62.5%) attended primary education and only 2 (4.17%) had not attended school. This implies that most of the respondents were literate.

Major Features of ECCE in Lira District

The study considered analyzing enrolment, retention, and completion in ECCE at Wii-gweng ECD Center as a case study to generalize the major features of ECCE learning in Lira district. Both enrolment of learners and completion rates have a plain statistical data extracted from Term 1 and 2, respectively. However, retention rate is explained in a negative form by calculating the drop-out rates using the simple formulae of:

$$\frac{\text{Enrolment} - \text{Completion}}{\text{Total Enrolment}} \times 100$$

Table 3:2. Showing the Major Feature of ECCE in all the 4 ECD Centers (Agweng sub-county, Lira District)

Classification	Enrolment (Term 1)		Completion (Term 3)		Retention Rate
Baby Class	(N=225)	% tage	(N=90)	%	(N=135) Drop-out %tage (61.00%)
Boys	137	60.89%	51	56.70%	(N=86) 38.22%
Girls	88	39.11%	39	43.30%	(N=49) 22.78%
Total					(N=135) 61.00%
Middle Class	(N=82)	(%)	(N=25)	%	(N=57) Drop-out %tage (69.51%)
Boys	44	53.66%	16	64.00%	(N=28) 34.14%
Girls	38	46.34%	9	36.00%	(N=29) 35.37%
Total					(N=57) 69.51%
Top Class	(N=22)	(%)	(N=8)	%	(N=14) Drop-out %tage 63.63%
Boys	15	68.18%	5	62.50%	(N=10) 45.45%
Girls	7	31.82%	3	37.50%	(N=4) 18.18%
Total					(N=14) 63.63%
Total enrolment===== (N=329): Baby Class (68.39%), Middle Class (24.92%), & Top Class (6.69%)					
Total Completion/Retention===== = (N=123): Baby Class (73.17%), Middle Class (20.33%), & Top Class (6.50%)					
Total Av. %tage of drop-out===== (N=206): Baby Class (65.53%), Middle Class (27.67%), & Top Class (6.80%)					

Source: Primary data (2026)

In baby class, a total of 225 learners were enrolled where 137 (60.89%) were boys and 88 (39.11%) were girls, but in the completion statistics, only 90 (40.0%) of the total enrolled learners were able to complete baby class from which 51 (56.70%) were boys, and girls were 39 (43.30%). The statistics of baby class further reveal that 135 (61.0%) of learners dropped-out, from which boys 86 (38.22%) registered more drop-out than girls 49 (22.78%).

In Middle Class, a total of 82 learners were enrolled where 44 (53.66%) were boys and 38 (46.34%) were girls, but in the completion statistics, only 25 (30.49%) of the total enrolled learners were able to complete middle class from which 16 (64.0%) were boys, and girls were 9 (36.0%). The statistics of middle class further indicate that 57 (69.51%) of learners dropped-out, from which boys 28 (34.14%) registered a slightly less drop-out than girls 29 (35.37%).

In Top Class, a total of 22 learners were enrolled where 15 (68.18%) were boys and 7 (31.82%) were girls, but in the completion statistics, only 8 (36.37%) of the total enrolled learners were able to complete Top Class from which 5 (62.50%) were boys, and girls were 3 (37.50%). The statistics of baby class further reveal that 14 (63.63%) of learners dropped-out, from which boys 10 (45.45%) registered more drop-out than girls 4 (18.18%).

The low enrolment, retention, and completion rates could be attributed to the reason that most community members generally have a negative perception towards ECCE because they make comparisons of the current education trend to that of the 1960s, where one would enroll in P1 at the age of 9years without necessarily going through nursery education. In addition to that, abject poverty in rural areas of Lira district, characterized by high dependency ration usually forces households to have competing priorities to fund ECCE center requirements. UBoS Report (2022) indicated that 37.2% of households live below poverty line in the district, yet most ECCE are commercially driven making it disproportional to parents from poor households.

Results of Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Descriptive statistics was specifically made to establish the frequencies of responses and made in terms of mean, and standard deviation from the likert scale rankings of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), & strongly agree (5), with “1” being the lowest scores and “5” highest scores, and the responses are presented in percentages.

Descriptive Statistics for ECCE programme in Lira district

The study considered respondents’ views on the possibility for enhancing enrolment of learners in ECCE centers in Lira district, the possibility enhancing retention of learners in ECCE, and the possibility of enhancing completion rate of ECCE learning in Lira district. The findings are indicated in the table below.

Table 3:3. Showing the Descriptive Statistics for Enhancing ECCE programme

Dependent Variables	Mean	SD	1-2	3	4-5
Possibility for enhancing enrolment of learners in ECCE centers	3.51	.67	21	12.3	66.7
Possibility enhancing retention of learners in ECCE centers	3.70	.48	12.6	6.6	80.8
Possibility for enhancing completion rate of ECCE learning	2.39	.87	51.5	19.8	28.7

Source: Primary data (2026)

In the table above, the findings reveal that 66.7% of respondents strongly agreed that it is possible for the enrolment of learners in ECCE centers to be enhanced in Lira district and was corroborated with a cumulative mean average (3.51). Similarly, 80.8% strongly agreed that it is possible for the retention of learners in ECCE centers to be enhanced in Lira district and this view is concreted by the cumulative average mean (3.70). However, 51.5% of respondents strongly disagreed that it is possible for completion rates of ECCE learning to be enhanced in Lira district.

Respondents’ views on Strategies to Enhance ECCE Programme in Lira District

Table 3:4. Showing the Respondents’ opinion on Strategies to Enhance ECCE programme

Independent Variables	Mean	SD
Local Community Efforts in enhancing ECCE programme	3.21	.81
Local/Central Government interventions in enhancing ECCE programme	3.49	.77
CSOs/NGOs Interventions in enhancing ECCE programme	2.77	.87

Source: Primary data, 2026.

In table 5, the cumulative average mean from local community efforts (3.21) and Local/Central government interventions (3.49) are above 3.0 indicating that they would be effective in enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district; but CSOs (2.77) is not effective in enhancing ECCE programme.

Inferential Statistics

Generally, the study set forth three objectives which were to establish how local community efforts can enhance ECCE programme, to examine whether Local and Central governments interventions can enhance ECCE programme, and to analyze the significance of CSOs interventions in enhancing ECCE in Lira district.

Results of Correlation Analysis

The study used Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to establish the strength of relationship between the proposed Strategies and ECCE programme enhancement in Lira district, and the results were interpreted on the assumption that when two variables are related, positively or negatively, they vary together. This research study considered the case where there were several independent variables and one dependent variable. In other words, the correlation scores show how well the independent variables are able to predict the dependent variable. In addition, correlations estimate the extent to which the changes in one variable are associated with changes in the other variable. If the coefficient of correlation is -1 it is considered a perfect negative correlation and if the correlation is +1 then it is considered a perfect positive correlation. The closer the value is to -1 or +1 the stronger the relationship is considered to be. The summary of correlations and their significance levels are presented below:-

Table 3:5. Pair wise Correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) ECCE Programme	1.000			
(2) Local Community Efforts	0.061	1.000		
(3) Local/Central Gov't Interventions	0.625**	0.073	1.000	
(4) CSOs/NGOs Interventions	0.096	0.437	0.228	1.000

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

The results in table 6 shows that ECCE programme enhancement in Lira district would be positively and significantly correlated to Local/Central Government Interventions ($r=0.625$, $p < 0.01$), than Local Community Efforts ($r=0.061$, $p < 0.01$) and CSOs Interventions ($r=0.096$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that as Local/Central Interventions increase, the scores in ECCE Programme enhancement would also increase.

Results of Linear Regression for Predicting ECCE programme Enhancement

The linear regression analysis was carried out to establish the predictive relationship between the proposed strategies and ECCE programme enhancement in Lira district. The results of this analysis are shown in the table below.

Table 3:6. Linear Regression for predicting ECCE programme Enhancement

ECCE Programme (DV)	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Local Community Efforts	0.38	0.11	3.59	0.000	0.161	0.556	**
Local/Central Gov't Interventions	0.49	0.14	0.82	0.00	-0.144	0.613	***
CSOs/NGOs Interventions	0.13	0.14	1.63	0.106	-0.047	0.371	
Constant	0.90	0.39	2.27	0.025	0.114	1.689	**

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Model Summary			
Mean dependent var.	3.20	SD dependent var.	0.67
Adjusted R-squared	0.437	Number of obs	48
F-test	11.016	Prob > F	0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	161.322	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	201.014

Source: Primary Data, 2026

In the above table, the findings reveal that both Local/Central Government Interventions ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.49$); and Local Community Efforts ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.38$) are significant in predicting ECCE programme enhancement in Lira district. On the other hand, CSOs Interventions would only explains ~13% variation of strategies that are likely to enhance ECCE programme in Lira district (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.437$) which indicates that there can be ~43.7% variability in ECCE programme enhancement even after taking a number of predictor variables. Generally though, the simultaneous variation of independent variables which explain ECCE programme enhancement to the extent of 43.7%, would imply that an increase of between 0.38 scores and 0.49 scores should be expected in ECCE programme enhancement for every unit increase in both the Local/Central Government Interventions and Local Community Efforts, assuming the constructs under CSOs Interventions are held constant.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

The first, second and third objectives of the study sought to determine the significance of local community efforts, local/central government interventions, and Civil Society Organization (CSO) interventions in enhancing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes in Lira District. The results from descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and linear regression provide important insights into how these actors contribute differently to ECCE programme enhancement.

Local and Central Government Interventions

The descriptive findings indicated that local and central government interventions recorded the highest aggregate mean score (3.49) among the three predictors examined. This suggests that respondents perceived government involvement as the most influential factor in enhancing ECCE programmes in Lira District. Government interventions in ECCE typically include policy formulation, curriculum development, teacher training frameworks, regulation of early childhood centres, and provision of financial and infrastructural support. The relatively high mean score therefore implies that stakeholders in the district recognize the central role played by the state in establishing an enabling institutional and regulatory environment for early childhood education.

The correlation analysis further reinforces this finding. The results showed that ECCE programme enhancement was positively and strongly correlated with local and central government interventions ($r = 0.625$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that improvements in government support mechanisms are associated with significant improvements in ECCE programme outcomes in the district. Such findings are consistent with the literature by Tesfaye (2014) which emphasizes that the effectiveness of early childhood programmes in developing countries largely depends on strong government commitment through funding, regulatory oversight, and policy implementation. The finding is also supported by Chawla and Rivkin (2014) which reveals that State authorities of Florida State had to enhance the retention and completion of kindergarten after a soaring high unemployment rates was recorded in 2009. In Uganda, Ejuu; Locoro; Nandera; Omoding; Mafabi; Kutosi; and Kharono (2022) asserted that most innovations that would help to provide inclusive early learning for children in marginalized communities sometimes collapse when the funders exit.

Regression results also confirmed the predictive importance of government interventions. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$) shows that government interventions significantly predict ECCE programme enhancement. This implies that for every unit increase in government support and intervention, ECCE programme performance improves substantially. This result aligns with Pence and Oduolowu (2023) writing on early childhood development that argues that government involvement is essential in scaling and sustaining ECCE programmes because the state possesses the institutional capacity and resources necessary to coordinate education initiatives at national and local levels. As envisioned by Kassa (2025), the findings could mean that local governments and central government can be instrumental in establishing infrastructures such as classrooms for learners, paying for teachers' salaries and wages; and that parents would only be left with the option of providing for scholastic materials for their children. In this scenario, the CSOs will be less active unless such a child is vulnerably categorized by society.

Local Community Efforts

The study also examined the role of local community efforts, which recorded an aggregate mean score of 3.21. Although slightly lower than government interventions, this score suggests that community participation is still perceived as an important contributor to ECCE programme enhancement. Community efforts may include parental involvement, community mobilization, local resource contributions, and participation in school management structures.

Interestingly, the Pearson correlation results revealed that ECCE programme enhancement had a very weak but statistically significant positive correlation with local community efforts ($r = 0.061$, $p < 0.01$). The weak magnitude of the correlation suggests that although community participation exists, its direct association with programme outcomes may be limited. This may be attributed to constraints such as poverty, limited awareness of ECCE benefits, and insufficient capacity among communities to support early childhood initiatives effectively.

However, the regression analysis paints a more nuanced picture. Local community efforts were found to be statistically significant predictors of ECCE programme enhancement ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that when combined with other factors, community participation contributes meaningfully to the improvement of ECCE programmes. The finding suggests that community engagement may operate indirectly by supporting school management, monitoring children's attendance, and providing supplementary resources to early childhood centers.

These findings, in the views of Gonzalez (2025) resonate with participatory development theories which argue that sustainable education programmes require the active involvement of local communities. Tigabu (2024) opines that community participation enhances programme ownership and accountability, which in turn supports the sustainability of education interventions. Nevertheless, the relatively weak correlation indicates that community efforts alone may not be sufficient without complementary institutional support from government structures.

CSOs/NGOs Interventions

The study further examined the contribution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to ECCE programme enhancement. The descriptive results revealed that CSO interventions had the lowest aggregate mean score (2.77) among the three variables examined. This suggests that respondents perceived CSO interventions as relatively less influential in enhancing ECCE programmes in Lira District.

The Pearson correlation results also revealed that ECCE programme enhancement had a weak but statistically significant positive correlation with CSO interventions ($r = 0.096$, $p < 0.01$). The weak correlation may reflect the limited scale, sustainability, or coverage of CSO-led ECCE initiatives in the district. In many developing contexts, CSO interventions are often project-based and may focus on specific communities or short-term programmes rather than system-wide educational development. Although CSOs are widely recognized for their role in advocacy, community mobilization, and service delivery in education, their impact may be constrained by limited funding, project timeframes, and coordination challenges with government institutions. Consequently, their contributions may be supportive rather than central in enhancing ECCE programmes.

Combined Influence of the Predictors

The regression model yielded an adjusted R^2 value of 0.437, indicating that approximately 43.7% of the variation in ECCE programme enhancement in Lira District is explained by the combined influence of local community efforts, local/central government interventions, and CSO interventions. This suggests that while these actors collectively play a substantial role in shaping ECCE outcomes, other factors like household socioeconomic conditions, teacher competence, infrastructure availability, and policy implementation challenges which are not included in the model may also influence ECCE programme. Overall, the findings demonstrate that government interventions constitute the most influential driver of ECCE programme enhancement, followed by community participation, while CSO interventions play a comparatively supportive role. The results highlight the importance of strengthening collaborative partnerships among the three actors for sustainable improvements in ECCE programmes.

To justify the contribution in causing high drop-out in nursery education in Lira district, reference can be made to literature by Irani; Rujumba; Mwaka; Arach; Lanyuru; Idro; and O'Neill (2022) who noted that the souring poverty ran-away poverty in most households greatly retards the potentials to offer quality education for their children at all levels of education. Furthermore, Pillar (2021) shares similar that through government interventions such as by paying for the salaries of care-givers, and providing other inputs to support ECCE learning.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The study concludes that a mixture of Local/Central Government Interventions, and Local Community Efforts would be very significant in enhancing ECCE programme in Lira district, but CSOs intervention is least significant in enhancing ECCE programme in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Central Government should consider offering financial support to the existing ECCE centers; undertake the creation of budget line or wage bills for ECCE care-givers; and undertake the establishment of ECCE learning centers in all government-aided primary schools in order to enhance the programme, not only in Lira district but

to the entire country. It is also recommended that vigorous awareness creation be made for the community members so as to embrace ECCE programmes in their localities.

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