

**AN INVESTIGATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUTRITION
AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECE IN
RIAKANAU ZONE, MBEERE SOUTH SUB-COUNTY,
EMBU COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Participation of preschool children in ECE has been poor and has been a concern to many education stakeholders. Thus, the main objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between nutrition and preschool children's participation in ECE in Riakanau Zone in Mbeere South Sub-county, Embu County. The literature was reviewed to establish the relationship between nutrition and preschool enrollment, attendance, transition and completion rates and research gaps identified. The study adopted qualitative and quantitative methods. The study applied concurrent triangulation research design which enabled the researcher to use the quantitative and qualitative methods during the same timeframe and with equal weight. Questionnaires, interviews and observation checklists were used to collect data from preschool managers and teachers, parents' representatives and preschool children respectively. Pilot survey was conducted twice amongst 1 preschool manager, 1 preschool teacher, 3 parents' representatives and 15 preschool children to establish validity and reliability as determined using test retest method. The reliability coefficient was determined using Pearson's Correlation Method. Riakanau Zone has 30 public preschools and thus; the target population of this study was 30 preschool managers, 30 preschool teachers, 60 parents' representatives and 1280 preschool children totaling to 1400. From these data, preschool managers constituted 2.14%, preschool teachers 2.14% whereas parents' representatives and preschool children constituted 4.29% and 91.43% respectively of the target population. Using the Central Limit Theorem, a sample of 9 preschools was selected, that is, 30% of the targeted 30 preschools. Based on the same theorem, the researcher sampled 300 respondents, that is, 21.43% of 1400. The researcher applied stratified random sampling to create 5 different strata or sample units each consisting of 6 preschools. From each stratum, at least 2 preschools were sampled using simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was applied to identify at least 1 preschool manager and 1 preschool teacher. Simple random sampling was applied to select 2 parents' representatives and 55 preschool children from each stratum. This sampling procedure enable the researcher to realize a sample of 7 preschool managers, 7 preschool teachers, 13 parents' representatives and 273 preschool children. The separately, but concurrently, collected data was analyzed inferentially using quantitatively and qualitatively and then merged into one overall interpretation in which the researcher related the quantitative results to the descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Frequency counts of the responses were obtained to generate information about the respondents and to illustrate the general trend of findings on the various variables that were under investigation. Quantitative data was analyzed using ANOVA in Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 21). The findings of the study were presented using percentages, tables and charts. The study has established that nutrition is a key dynamic in enhancing preschool children's participation in ECE programmes and thus recommends that policies should be formulated to enforce adherence to National Nutrition Action Plan of 2012 which advocates for preschool nutrition as a tool for achieving children's rights to basic education.