Perceptions on the Interplay of Housemaids and Nurseries on Early Child Development (Ecd)

Evidence S. Matangi¹,*, Phoebe Kashora², Adwell Mhlanga¹, Jenneth Musiyiwa³

¹Department of Statistics, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe
²Department of Communication Skills, Women’s University in Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe
³Department of ECD, Women’s University in Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe

*Corresponding author: evidence_matangi@yahoo.com

Received May 22, 2013; Revised July 02, 2013; Accepted July 06, 2013

Abstract
This research seeks to investigate the perceptions of prospective early child development teachers on the interplay roles of housemaids and nurseries on early child development. Overall, the respondents agreed that these two though not pivotal were essential for the professional pursuit of mothers hence formed a support intervention for the overall development of children. They also agreed that housemaids and nurseries were not substitutes for time-poor parents. Nurseries and housemaids did not interact considerably with parents on child matters. Nurseries outweighed housemaids favorably in all aspects of child development except on their space requirements, personality and natural development. Nurseries promoted foreign language use in children whilst housemaids promoted local languages. Significant associations were revealed amongst the perceptions of the respondents and their demographic factors. In particular, the perceptions of the respondents on nurseries overwhelmed the influence of housemaids in early child development as evidenced by their significant associations with the respondents’ demographic features such as sex, age group, marital status, and Christian doctrine. Contrarily, insignificant associations were shown between the respondents’ perceptions and their employment status, religion and place of residence. Overall this study showed that the respondents perceived that nurseries outweighed housemaids in most early childhood development initiatives.

Keywords: association, early child development, housemaids, nurseries, perception


1. Introduction

Current research has shown that the years from 0-3 are critical for brain development in areas of socio-emotional, cognitive, health and language development. As such the family is the natural environment of the child where such development can take place flexibly. The socio-emotional development of the child requires a warm, stable relationship with a nurturing adult, usually the parent, and other children. The family provides the ideal environment for such development. Housemaids and nurseries are not the ideal environment for child development in the spheres of physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language development. Early Childhood Development (ECD) period is a critical period in child development which starts from conception to age 8. This period is the foundation stage, not only of the child’s education but also later of the adult’s physical, social, emotional, cognitive, health and language development. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine the interplay between housemaids and nurseries on ECD. Economic women empowerment is a factor that encourages working mothers to hire housemaids or to send their children to nurseries.

2. Literature Review

In developing countries home or nursery based care for young children is the women’s responsibility for the family and own welfare. Economic power is defined as the condition of having sufficient economic resources on or at someone’s command that gives the power to make and enforce economic decisions such as the allocation of resources and apportioning of goods and services [1]. In other words, being employed provides women who seek home or nursery-based care for children a sense of economic empowerment.

Women’s empowerment has five components: women’s sense of self-esteem; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change so as to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally [2]. This case means women are empowered from different dimensions. By hiring a housemaid to care for the children or leaving the children at a nursery centre, women would be choosing a
choice to access economic resources through employment. In developing countries the fundamental challenge is accessing a trained housemaid for the home or nursery based care.

A nursery is a centre-based service primarily for infants and toddlers. It includes all arrangements that provide care and education for young children. It supports children survival, growth, development, and learning including health, nutrition, hygiene, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development from birth to entry into primary school settings. Nurseries according to [3] provide better developmental opportunities for the children than in-home care by the maid. Ideally the services provided by nursery schools are an extension of the function of the home and not a substitute for it [4]. Likewise, housemaids’ services should also be an extension of the functions of the parents and not a substitute for parents.

On the other hand, housemaids take care of young children at home. [3] perceives housemaids as inexpensive and employed to help with rearing children and other tasks. Their salaries are less than the fees for a nursery place. [5] specifies that 60% of children in most countries, between birth and 5 years today spend time in the care of someone other than their own parents. About 1186 working women in government departments in Dubai pointed out that 62% of the children under the age of 4 years were reared at home by a housemaid, while 32% of them were reared by extended family members and 5% were enrolled in private nurseries. There are many reasons for preferring in-home care. Traditional family attitudes discourage placing young children in the nurseries. They perceive the good mother as the nurturer of her children and consider care giving to be more fulfilling than work. To them motherhood is the essence of feminine role fulfillment.

[3] noted that there was a conviction among women that young children are better reared at home. This idea is further demonstrated in Sweden where it is very rare to find a child in an Early Childhood Service before the age of 15 months. They achieve this through a funded parental leave policy for a period that lasts at least a year. Municipalities in Sweden have the obligation to provide a free playing place for every child in an Early Education service from the age of 15 months. Zimbabwe has early childhood development centre regulations which stipulate that no child may attend an early childhood centre before the age of 3 years. Housemaid or nursery based care promotes women’s or mothers’ employment which contributes to their personal and societal development through salaried work outside the home. However, most housemaids have little or no training in child-rearing and yet staffs working with children have a major impact on their early development and learning. Instead, a workforce that has more formal education and more specialized ECD training provides interactions with children. To support this, [2] in Zimbabwe clearly stipulates that nursery institutions shall be manned by appropriately qualified teachers or caregivers.

Staffs in nursery settings are more likely to have varied backgrounds, ranging from no training to a professional diploma or degree. In Zimbabwe, most settings are manned by females who have no training at all or para-professionals who are semi-skilled.

Both housemaids and nurseries afford women opportunities for empowerment and for bringing home some form of income that sustains the family. They both play a significant role in shaping the child’s performance in school and in achieving social outcomes of a good health, a stable family life and higher chances of employment in adult life. Research has also shown that

Housemaids are hired to care for children at home because there are not enough acceptable and affordable nursery places. For most women, nurseries are expensive and cannot be afforded by many. Whether the child is at a nursery or is reared by a housemaid at home, research is clear that a balance needs to be struck between maternal home care and outside services because the breastfeeding period is important for the health and well-being of infants and should be reasonably long. In Zimbabwe, children can be breastfed for 18-24 months which is quite long. [3] concluded that it is not advisable to place infants in nursery settings from the age of 2-3 months for long hours unless there is an emergency. Experts discourage child care for children in the first year of life. Children from one year can benefit from caring high quality programmes run by ECD professionals because they develop children’s knowledge and socio-emotional attitudes and skills such as trust, self-confidence and teamwork.

The child at-home model is reinforced by the availability of low paid labour. [7] noted the predominance of the “child-at-home” model of raising children below the age of four in the Gulf states due to the availability of low-paid nannies/housemaids, who unfortunately do not possess the necessary professional qualifications in child care. Research by [8] has shown that 58% of children under the age of 3 years in the Arabian Gulf are cared for by housemaids for 30 to 70 hours per week which is far greater than most institutional nursery hours especially in the US and in Europe. The hours are being criticized for being longer than required. [8] perceives the time spent in housemaid care as exceeding the duration recommended by major studies aimed at avoiding harm to maternal attachment and at preventing problem behavior. In Zimbabwe, [6] stipulates that the children shall be at a nursery between 3 to 5 hours per day, whether the families and nursery schools abide by the policy is another matter. [7] noted that of concern that the language of instruction Arabic was now being eroded into by English this was so in spite of the Ministry of Education’s prescribed regulation its use to be for one third of the schooling hours. Housemaid or nursery based care promotes women’s or mothers’ employment which contributes to their personal and societal development through salaried work outside the home. However, most housemaids have little or no training in child-rearing and yet staffs working with children have a major impact on their early development and learning. Instead, a workforce that has more formal education and more specialized ECD training provides interactions with children. To support this, [2] in Zimbabwe clearly stipulates that nursery institutions shall be manned by appropriately qualified teachers or caregivers.

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qualified and a well remunerated workforce is fundamentally important to the success of early childhood programmes.

3. Materials and Methods

A descriptive research design was used in this investigation and a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling, was used in the selection of the sample subjects. The study population consisted of Early Childhood student teachers at the Women’s University in Africa (WUA). The choice of the target population for this study was highly influenced by the fact that the major highlight of [9] on education reforms in Zimbabwe was the ECD emphasis as this would defined the overall performance of the pupils as also evidenced by [7] based on the Heckman’s curve on the human capital investment rates of returns based on different ages which is highest when the target group is 0 – 3 years of age. An appreciation of the perceptions of the prospective implementers, in this case, the Early Childhood student teachers would be a necessary but not an all sufficient starting point for ECD assessment. Data was collected in April 2013 through the administration of a questionnaire which we prepared based on our life experiences and findings in [1,3,5], and [8]. Content validation was used to assess the validity of the questionnaire; variables where first selected and then critically evaluated and revised to ensure that they covered the whole range of the aspects of the interplay between housemaids and nurseries in ECD, hence ensuring their sampling adequacy. Furthermore, in the reliability assessment using the Cronbach Alpha statistic, the case processing summary gave a validity of 52.5% which was reasonably well as these were qualitative variables on a Likert scale were the qualification of choices was predetermined. A Cronbach Alpha value of 86.9% showed that the 40 items considered in the analysis were reliably acceptable. A sample of size 61 was considered for this study.

The data was captured and analyzed using Statistical and Presentation System Software (SPSS) version 16. Explorative descriptive statistics were used to explore the perceptions of the students on the interplay of housemaids and nurseries on Early Child Development (ECD). Point estimates, notably percentages and proportions, were used to portray the students’ perceptions on the interplay. Chi-square tests of association amongst the demographic factors and the perceptions of the students on both the housemaids and nursery influence on early child development were investigated at the significance level of 5%.

4. Results and Discussion

The data showed that overall 89.7% of the respondents concurred that parental involvement in child growth should supersede both housemaids and nursery care, and that 89.8% at least agreed that economic and social changes had challenged the cultural beliefs on child rearing.

About 0.837 of the respondents perceived nurseries as a communal support intervention for mothers’ at the same time 0.817 of them considered housemaids as a private support intervention for mothers. The findings reveal that nurseries and housemaids were both considerable support interventions for mothers in their professional pursuits. The respondents did not overall agree with the notions of both nurseries (30%) and housemaids (33.9%) being providers of child care for time-poor parents. The low inclinations to both nurseries and housemaids being providers of child care for time-poor parents showed that these options were not a preserve of the working parents but non-working parents were also utilizing them.

Figure 1. Decision on nursery placement and housemaids hiring

Figure 1 above shows that overall 84.7% of the respondents perceived that parents’ social status contributed immensely to the nursery placement of their children and 67.9% of the respondents felt that the needs of the children contributed to the decision on housemaid hiring. The latter’s divergent positions on the inclusion of both housemaids and nursery in the family institution points to possible varying influences on the development and growth of children.

Figure 2. Perceptions on housemaids and nurseries in enhancing the children’s intellectual ability

Figure 3. The perceptions on the all-round development of children due to nurseries and housemaids
Figure 2 show that the respondents felt that nurseries enhanced children’s intellectual ability (89.7%) in contrast to housemaids (50%).

The social and general awareness of children was perceived to be highly promoted through nurseries (90.2%) compared to the influence of housemaids (45.8%). The respondents agreed that nurseries enhanced child development in a communal setting (96.7%) and that housemaids enhanced child development in a home environment (66.1%).

Figure 3 above shows that the all-round development of children was envisaged to be emphasized more by nurseries (81.7%) in contrast to the influence of housemaids (27.9%).

The self-reliance or independence of children was highly promoted in nurseries (80%) compared to the contribution by housemaids (30.5%). However the respondents agreed that both nurseries (44.3%) and housemaids (31.1%) were insignificantly influential in the natural (innovation and creativity) development of children.

Figure 4. Perceptions on activity engagement of children by housemaids and nurseries

Figure 4 show that the respondents felt that nurseries (85.2%) outweigh housemaids (27.9%) in activity engagement of children though they are more instructional than the housemaids.

Perceptions on the space requirements for the optimal growth and development of children showed that nurseries (31.1%) were slightly restricted in comparison to the set-up with the housemaid (45.8%).

Divergently it was perceived that nurseries considerably promoted foreign language use by children (73.8%) whilst housemaids promoted the mother tongue use by the children (77.0%). The respondents perceived that nurseries (93.4%) shaped a child’s discipline more than the housemaids (47.5%). The study showed that both housemaids (40.7%) and nurseries (37.9%) infrequently interacted with parents on children matters.

Figure 6. The perceptions on nurseries and housemaids on ensuring that children learnt good habits

Figure 6 above show that nurseries (87.7%) far outweighed housemaids (22.4%) in ensuring that children learnt good habits especially on health issues.

Nurseries (81.0%) were perceived to develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit in children more significantly than housemaids (32.2%) were. The respondents felt that nurseries (91.5%) far outweighed housemaids (28.8%) in the development of the cognitive ability of children.

Figure 7. The perceptions on nurseries and housemaids on the development of the motor skills of children

Figure 7 above shows that nurseries (91.2%) outclassed housemaids (44.6%) in the development of the motor skills of children.

The following demographic factors were insignificantly associated with the respondents’ perceptions on the interplay of housemaids and nurseries in ECD, residential place, employment status, birth order, and their faith/religion beliefs. A significant association was apparent between the respondents’ gender and perception on nurseries promoting foreign language use by children ($p$-value=$0.02$) where the female respondents were agreeing whilst the male respondents were disagreeing. The respondents’ age groups were significantly associated with their perception on nurseries being communal support interventions for mothers ($p$-value=$0.001$) with those below 30 and between 40 and 49 years agreeing,
and those above 50 and between 30 and 39 years disagreeing. Age group was also associated significantly with the perceptions on nurseries enhancing children’s intellectual ability (p-value=0.016), with the respondents aged below 50 years consenting and those above not consenting. A significant association was revealed between age group of respondents and their perception on nurseries promoting the children’s social and general awareness (p-value=0.017), whereas respondents above 50 years disagreed and those below agreed to this notion. The age group of respondents was significantly associated with their perceptions on both nurseries stimulating the all-round development of children (p-value=0.037), and nurseries promoting the self-reliance of children (p-value=0.028). In both instances, the respondents above 50 years were disagreeing and those below 50 years were agreeing.

The respondents’ marital status was significantly associated with their perceptions on maids being complimentary to nursery school (p-value=0.042), nurseries stimulating the all-round development of children (p-value=0.001), nursery facilities tending to limit space requirements for children’s optimal growth and development (p-value=0.012), and nursery teachers (p-value<0.001) and maids (p-value=0.001) respectively influencing children’s personalities. Notably the single, married and widowed respondents agreed whilst the divorced respondents disagreed to the above-mentioned notions.

A significant association was also observed between the respondents’ Christian doctrine and their perception on nursery facilities being limited in terms of the space requirements for the optimal growth and development of children (p-value=0.024). Those from the apostolic sects and the Protestant movements agreed whilst the Catholics, Anglicans and Pentecost disagreed.

The people who raised the respondents in their childhood were significantly associated with the respondents’ perceptions on both nurseries enhancing children’s intellectual ability (p-value<0.001), and nurseries stimulating the all-round development of children (p-value<0.001). Those respondents raised by either both parents or grandparents agreed whilst those raised by single parents disagreed in their perceptions.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research showed that the respondents perceived nurseries to outclass housemaids in early child development in regards to intellectual ability, social and general awareness, all-round development, communal development, self-reliance, activity engagement, discipline, good habits, cooperation, cognitive skills, and motor skills. Distinctly housemaids ensured that children developed in their use of the mother tongue whilst nurseries emphasized development in their use of foreign languages, in particular English. Both housemaids and nurseries did not influence pivotally the natural development, personality, space requirements for optimal growth and development of children, and in their interaction with parents on children matters.

The research findings led to the following conclusions: parental involvement in child growth should supersede both housemaids and nurseries; economic and social changes have challenged the cultural beliefs in child rearing; nursery placement hinges mainly on parents’ prestige; and the hiring of maids is significantly influenced by the needs of the children. The above facts show that the interplay of housemaids and nurseries facilities in the development of children have varying effects and that nurseries play a significant effect in their development both socially and academically.

The perceptions of the respondents were that nurseries overwhelmed the influence of housemaids in early child development as evidenced by their significant associations with the respondents’ demographic features such as sex, age group, marital status, and Christian doctrine. Insignificant associations were also shown between the perceptions and the respondents’ employment status, religion and place of residence.

We strongly recommend that further research be done on the complimentary roles of housemaids and nursery facilities in early child development and also on both the parents’ and housemaids’ perceptions on the interplays because in this study we focused only on the providers of ECD education’s perceptions, i.e. the prospective practitioners. The use of factor analysis in these researches could further help in the identification of the latent variables to explain the interplay. Furthermore research could be carried out on the risk perceptions and preferences on ECD including some multinomial regression modeling of the preferences based on the demographic factors of the respondents.

Statement of Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests.

List of Abbreviations

| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| WUA | Women’s University in Africa |

References