



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ALIGNMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) UNIVERSITY CURRICULA WITH LABOR MARKET REQUIREMENTS AND THE EMPLOYABILITY OF ECDE STUDENT TRAINEES IN KENYA

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Abstract:

The employability of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) graduates has become a growing concern in Kenya despite the increasing expansion of ECDE training programmes in universities and teacher training institutions. This study examined the relationship between the alignment of ECDE university curricula with labour market requirements and the employability of ECDE student trainees in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which ECDE curricula align with labour market demands and to analyze employability trends of ECDE graduates over the past five years. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design and was conducted in selected counties representing urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. A sample of 300 ECDE teacher trainees was selected using stratified random sampling, while employers and policymakers were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that ECDE curricula moderately address labour market requirements, particularly in classroom preparation and practical skill development. However, significant gaps exist in the integration of transformative teaching methodologies, digital literacy, innovation, entrepreneurship, and other competencies demanded by contemporary employers. Although 64.1% of respondents agreed that the curriculum reflects current labour market needs, 54.0% perceived the overall alignment between training and employer expectations as weak. The study further established that employability prospects for ECDE graduates have deteriorated over the past five years. Most respondents reported declining employment opportunities, low labour market demand, limited absorption capacity, and widespread engagement in contract or temporary employment. Only a small proportion of graduates' secure permanent employment, while low salaries and job

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instability remain prevalent challenges. The study concludes that there is a significant mismatch between ECDE training outcomes and labour market expectations in Kenya, which negatively affects graduate employability. The study recommends regular curriculum review, stronger university-industry partnerships, enhanced practical training, integration of digital and entrepreneurial skills, and the establishment of graduate tracking systems to improve employment outcomes. These interventions are expected to strengthen the relevance of ECDE training and enhance the employability of future graduates.

Keywords: early childhood development education, curriculum alignment, labour market requirements, employability, ECDE graduates

1. Background of the Study

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) is a cornerstone of sustainable development and is critical in achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). ECDE is also globally recognized as a foundation for lifelong learning and development. In Kenya, ECDE has gained prominence under the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Basic Education Act (2013), and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Universities and teacher training institutions have increased their enrollment in ECDE programs to meet the rising demand for qualified teachers. However, despite the high number of graduates, employability remains a significant challenge. Graduates often face limited absorption into formal teaching positions. This research seeks to investigate the existing skills gaps in ECDE graduates' training, assess their future employment prospects, and design and recommend strategies that universities and policymakers can adopt to enhance ECDE graduates' career pathways to enhance their career opportunities.

The global consensus firmly positions quality Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) as a critical investment for fostering cognitive development, school readiness, and long-term socio-economic productivity (World Bank, 2018). Aligning with this perspective, Kenya's education reforms, particularly the devolution of ECDE to county governments under the 2010 Constitution, aimed to decentralize management and enhance service delivery (Cheeseman, 2019). This shift catalyzed a rapid expansion of colleges and universities offering ECDE qualifications, significantly increasing the supply of certified graduates (Kipkoech *et al.*, 2021).

Paradoxically, this growth in qualified personnel coincides with reports from employers, including county administrations and private nursery schools, of a scarcity of truly job-ready practitioners (Amondi, 2020; Mwamisi, 2019). This contradiction underscores a profound skills-employment gap, a disconnect between the competency's graduates possess and those required to excel in ECDE settings. Employability, defined here as the possession of a synergistic blend of skills, understandings, and personal

attributes that facilitate the acquisition and success in an occupation, is therefore a central concern for the sector's sustainability (Kamar, 2022). This paper provides an exhaustive review to deconstruct the root causes of this employability gap and to synthesize evidence-based strategies for enhancing the career prospects of ECDE graduates in Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) sector in Kenya represents a critical paradox between ideal aspirations and stark reality. The ideal, as envisioned in national policy frameworks like the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is a virtuous cycle where robust teacher training produces highly skilled graduates who secure dECDEnt work, thereby delivering quality foundational education that fuels national development (MoE, 2019; Republic of Kenya, 2010). In this envisioned scenario, graduates are innovative, digitally literate practitioners, equipped with both pedagogical expertise and entrepreneurial acumen to thrive in diverse professional settings. The reality, however, is a systemic failure that disrupts this cycle. Despite the annual production of numerous ECDE graduates from Kenyan universities, their transition to the labour market is severely constrained, leading to a significant wastage of human capital (Kipkoech *et al.*, 2021). This crisis is characterized by a fundamental misalignment between training and market needs. University curricula persistently emphasize theoretical knowledge at the expense of the practical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills demanded by employers, resulting in a workforce perceived as ill-prepared for the complexities of the modern classroom (Kamar, 2022; Ng'asike & Oburu, 2021). Consequently, while the supply of graduates grows, their absorption remains limited, as both government and private schools lack the capacity or confidence to employ them (Amondi, 2020). This mismatch is compounded by a narrow perception of career pathways among graduates, who often see formal teaching as their only option, despite the potential for roles in curriculum development, NGO work, or private enterprise (Bunyi & Kariuki, 2020). Employers consistently report critical skill deficiencies in areas such as classroom management, communication, innovation, and ICT integration, which act as formidable barriers to employment (Mwamisi, 2019). The outcome is a prevalence of underemployment, unemployment, or the exodus of trained talent to unrelated sectors. Without structured, evidence-based interventions, this employability gap will continue to widen, undermining the quality of early childhood education, constraining economic growth, and negating the substantial investments made in the sector, thereby jeopardizing the achievement of both SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (DECDEnt Work and Economic Growth). While existing literature has effectively diagnosed the symptoms of the ECDE employability crisis in Kenya, noting curriculum misalignment and skill gaps, a critical gap remains in the development and empirical testing of integrated intervention models. Studies by Kamar (2022) and Kipkoech *et al.* (2021) have convincingly outlined the problems, primarily

focusing on identifying deficiencies from the perspectives of graduates or employers in isolation. However, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research that synthesizes the tripartite perspectives of graduates, training institutions, and employers to co-create a holistic employability enhancement framework. Specifically, as noted by Bunyi and Kariuki (2020), there is a "*dearth of actionable research on scalable models for integrating entrepreneurial and digital competencies into the ECDE curriculum in a way that is contextually relevant to the Kenyan socio-economic landscape.*" Furthermore, while the problem of graduate unemployment is acknowledged, few studies have moved beyond description to propose and validate multi-stakeholder strategies that bridge the identified gaps. This study is warranted to fill this void by not only investigating the root causes but also designing, proposing, and piloting a cohesive framework that addresses curriculum reform, practical mentorship, entrepreneurial upskilling, and policy advocacy in an integrated manner, thereby providing an actionable roadmap for stakeholders to transform the ECDE graduate profile from unemployable to highly sought-after.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

To Examine the Relationship Between the Alignment of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) University Curricula with Labor Market Requirements and The Employability of ECDE Student Trainees in Kenya.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- 1) To examine the extent of alignment between ECDE university curricula and labor market requirements.
- 2) To analyze the employability rates of ECDE graduates in Kenya over the past five years.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) How does the current ECDE curriculum align with labor market demands?
- 2) What are the current employability trends of ECDE graduates in Kenya?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offered a transformative opportunity to address a critical bottleneck in Kenya's education system, delivering a high return on investment by converting the challenge of ECDE graduate underemployment into a strategic national asset. The benefits are multi-faceted and impactful. It will equip universities and teacher training institutions with a precise, evidence-based blueprint for curriculum revolution, moving beyond generic advice to provide granular diagnostics on specific skill gaps in areas like inclusive pedagogy, digital integration, and classroom management (Kamar, 2022; Ng'asike & Oburu, 2021). This enables a paradigm shift in teacher preparation, enhancing

institutional relevance and competitiveness by producing graduates with demonstrably superior employability, thereby attracting more students and partnership opportunities. For government at both national and county levels, this study provides the indispensable data needed to formulate coherent, effective policies. It will empower county governments to develop rationalized teacher recruitment and deployment strategies, create standardized career progression pathways, and harmonize remuneration, directly tackling the issues of poor morale and high attrition that plague the sector (Kipkoech *et al.*, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). This maximizes the return on public investment in education by ensuring that funds allocated to ECDE translate into a stable, competent, and effective teaching workforce, thereby strengthening the very foundation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and securing the future of Kenya's educational reforms (MoE, 2019). Crucially, this work directly empowers ECDE graduates themselves, transforming their career prospects from a narrow path of seeking often unavailable formal employment to a broad horizon of diverse opportunities. It will provide a clear roadmap for them to become job creators—equipped with entrepreneurial skills to establish and manage high-quality ECDE centres as well as to excel as educational technologists, curriculum developers, and NGO program officers (World Bank, 2018). This elevates the entire profession by advocating for its recognition as a specialized field worthy of decent work conditions and career-long development, fostering a new generation of confident, resilient, and economically empowered educators (ILO, 2022).

Furthermore, the study de-risks and guides investments for development partners, NGOs, and the private sector. For organizations like UNICEF and the World Bank, it pinpoints the exact human capital constraints within the ECDE sector, enabling targeted and effective interventions that guarantee sustainable impact (Pisani & Dowd, 2022). For the private education sector, it promises a larger pipeline of job-ready talent, reducing their recruitment and training costs while enabling higher standards of service. Ultimately, by systematically enhancing the quality of the foundational learning environment, this research promises a profound societal return: the cultivation of a generation of Kenyan children who are more cognitively, socially, and emotionally prepared for lifelong success, directly accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and fostering a more equitable, prosperous, and knowledge-driven society (World Bank, 2018; African Union, 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation into the employability of Early Childhood Education (ECDE) graduates is anchored in contemporary employability theories that move beyond the simplistic notion of securing a job to encompass a broader set of capabilities. Yorke (2006) provides a foundational definition, conceptualizing employability as "*a set of achievements, skills,*

understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations." This framework, often encapsulated in the USEM model (Understanding, Skills, Efficacy Beliefs, and Metacognition), emphasizes that employability is an outcome of the entire educational experience, not just disciplinary knowledge.

Complementing this, Harvey (2001) critically examines the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in fostering employability. He argues that employability is not about providing vocational training but about developing critical, reflective graduates capable of lifelong learning and adaptability in a volatile labour market. This perspective is crucial for the ECDE sector in Kenya, where the labour market is characterized by a mix of formal, informal, and self-employment opportunities. Furthermore, Pool and Sewell (2007)'s Career ECDE model adds depth by highlighting the importance of career development learning, experience (work and life), subject knowledge, and generic skills, all underpinned by self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem. These theoretical models collectively suggest that analyzing ECDE graduate employability requires a multi-dimensional approach that scrutinizes curriculum design, practical experiences, graduate attributes, and the socio-economic context of the labour market.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 To Examine the Extent of Alignment between ECDE University Curricula and Labour Market Requirements

The alignment between academic curricula and the demands of the labour market is a perennial concern in higher education globally. In the context of Kenyan ECDE, this misalignment is particularly acute and has been extensively documented, albeit with varying methodological approaches.

2.2.1.1 International Comparative Perspectives

Contrasting the Kenyan situation with other countries highlights alternative approaches to curriculum alignment. In Finland, renowned for its high-quality ECDE system, teacher education is a research-based master's degree program. As noted by Fonsén and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019), the Finnish curriculum emphasizes pedagogical reflection, research skills, and the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in diverse practical situations. The curriculum is co-constructed with the teaching profession and municipalities (employers), ensuring its relevance. Similarly, in Singapore, the National Institute of Education (NIE) employs a "Partnership Model" with schools. Tan (2017) describes how this model ensures that ECDE curricula are continuously refined based on feedback from a partnership board comprising policymakers, senior educators, and researchers. This stands in stark contrast to the more top-down and less dynamic curriculum review processes often observed in Kenya.

In Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) explicitly links curriculum outcomes to educator practices. Barblett, Hadley, and Harrison (2017) discuss how Australian universities align their courses with the EYLF, ensuring that graduates are proficient in the mandated principles and practices. Their methodology often involves large-scale graduate destination surveys coupled with iterative curriculum mapping against national professional standards. The United States addresses alignment through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards, which mandate that teacher preparation programs provide evidence of how their curricula address specific competency areas. Hyson, Tomlinson, and Morris (2009) evaluated the impact of such accreditation, finding that it drives curriculum improvement and better prepares graduates for the workforce.

National Studies and Their Findings

A consistent theme in Kenyan literature is the theory-practice divide. Kamar (2022) conducted a qualitative case study of three teacher training colleges, utilizing document analysis of curricula and in-depth interviews with teacher trainers. The study found that the curriculum was heavily skewed towards theoretical child development models at the expense of practical pedagogical skills. Trainers reported a lack of resources to implement practical modules and insufficient time allocated for teaching practice. Similarly, Kipkoech, Kindiki, and Bitok (2021) employed a mixed-methods approach, surveying 150 ECDE graduates and conducting focus group discussions with employers in Nakuru County. Their findings revealed that over 80% of graduates felt the curriculum did not adequately prepare them for classroom management, while employers lamented the graduates' inability to create low-cost, culturally relevant learning materials. This points to a curriculum disconnected from the resource-constrained realities of many Kenyan ECDE centers.

A significant area of misalignment is the lack of focus on inclusive education and digital literacy. Ng'asike and Oburu (2021), in an ethnographic study, observed ECDE classrooms and interviewed teachers, finding a profound gap between the rhetorical commitment to play-based learning in curriculum documents and the teacher-centered, chalk-and-talk methods prevalent in practice. They argue that the curriculum fails to incorporate indigenous knowledge and local cultural practices, which are essential for contextualized learning. Furthermore, Mbugua (2018) surveyed university curriculum documents and found minimal integration of technology and digital literacy components, a critical shortcoming in an increasingly digital world. This finding is echoed by Nyaga and Nyandoro (2020) in a study that used competency assessments to demonstrate that ECDE graduates lacked proficiency in using basic digital tools for lesson planning or child assessment.

2.2.2.2 Comparative Analysis of Methodologies

The methodologies used in these studies vary significantly. Kenyan studies, like those of Kamar (2022) and Mbugua (2018), often rely on small-scale qualitative designs or single-

case studies, which provide deep contextual insight but lack generalizability. The mixed-methods approach of Kipkoech *et al.* (2021) is more robust, triangulating data from graduates and employers. In contrast, international studies from Finland (Fonsén & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019) and Singapore (Tan, 2017) often employ program evaluation and policy analysis methodologies, reflecting their more systemic and integrated approach to curriculum development. Studies from Australia and the US frequently utilize large-scale quantitative surveys and correlational studies to link curriculum components to employment outcomes, a methodology that is still nascent in the Kenyan ECDE research landscape. This comparison suggests a need for more large-scale, longitudinal, and mixed-methods research in Kenya to robustly document the curriculum gap and its impact. To analyze the employability rates and trends of ECDE graduates in Kenya over the past five years.

Quantifying the employability rates of ECDE graduates in Kenya is challenging due to fragmented data systems, but existing studies and official reports paint a consistently bleak

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2.2.2.4 National Data and Trends

The most cited source of national data is the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and reports from the Ministry of Education (MoE). The MoE (2019) National Education Sector Strategic Plan acknowledged a surplus of trained teachers against a backdrop of limited formal vacancies. This is particularly true for ECDE, which, post-devolution, falls under county governments with constrained budgets. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC), which handles primary and secondary teacher employment, has a minimal role in ECDE, creating a significant data and employment vacuum. Mwangi (2019) analyzed county government employment records in three counties, finding that less than 30% of ECDE graduates from local universities found permanent and pensionable employment within two years of graduation. The majority were engaged on temporary, low-paying contracts with no job security or benefits.

Academic research corroborates these trends. Amondi (2020) conducted a tracer study of 240 ECDE graduates from a public university between 2015 and 2019. The study, employing surveys and follow-up interviews, found that only 35% were employed in ECDE-related roles that utilized their training. A significant proportion (40%) were underemployed, working in ECDE but in roles with poor pay and conditions, while 25% were either unemployed or working in completely unrelated sectors. This high rate of underemployment is a critical issue often missed by simple employment/unemployment binaries. Kirui and Kipkemboi (2022) used a longitudinal design to track a cohort of graduates, finding that employability rates declined over the first three years post-graduation, as graduates became disillusioned and left the profession for other opportunities.

International Context and Comparative Analysis: The challenge of graduate employability is not unique to Kenya, but its manifestations and causes differ. In high-income countries, ECDE graduate employability is often high due to substantial public investment in early years services. For instance, in New Zealand, Meade, Robinson, and Smorti (2020) reported that over 90% of ECDE graduates were employed in the sector within six months of graduation, attributed to strong government funding and a well-regulated qualification framework. However, even in these contexts, issues of underemployment, such as part-time work and precarious contracts, persist, particularly in the private and community-based sectors (Logan *et al.*, 2020).

In other Global South contexts, parallels with Kenya can be drawn. In Nigeria, Adeyemo (2021) found similar issues of mass production of ECDE graduates by universities with limited absorption into the formal sector. His study, using a quantitative survey of 500 graduates, revealed high unemployment rates driven by a public sector hiring freeze and a private sector unable to offer competitive wages. In India, Kaul and Sharma (2019) documented the phenomenon of "educated unemployment" among ECDE teachers, where graduates hold qualifications but lack the specific practical skills demanded by affordable private schools, leading to a mismatch.

2.2.2.5 Methodological Appraisal

The primary methodologies for analyzing employability rates are tracer studies and analysis of administrative data. Tracer studies, as used by Amondi (2020) and Adeyemo (2021), are powerful for capturing detailed data on employment status, job satisfaction, and skill utilization. However, they can suffer from low response rates and may not be representative. The analysis of government data, as in Mwangi (2019), provides a broader picture but is often hampered by poor data collection systems at the county level in Kenya. International studies, particularly from OECD countries, often benefit from robust national graduate outcome surveys (e.g., the Australian Graduate Survey), which provide reliable, annual data. The absence of a similar systematic mechanism in Kenya is a significant research gap.

2.2.3 To Identify the Major Skill Gaps Affecting Employability among ECDE Graduates

The identification of skill gaps is a well-researched area, with consensus emerging on both hard and soft skill deficiencies among ECDE graduates.

2.2.3.1 International Validation and Contrast

The identified skill gaps in Kenya are reflected, but addressed differently, internationally. In England, the Early Years Educator standards mandate specific competencies in assessment, safeguarding, and partnership with parents. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2020) discuss how these standards drive curriculum content in colleges, ensuring graduates possess these employability skills. In Canada, Corter and Pelletier (2021) highlight the emphasis on "pedagogical documentation" a skill of observing, recording, and interpreting children's learning as a core competency for ECDE graduates, which is rarely emphasized in Kenyan training.

The technological skill gap is a global issue, but the response varies. In Estonia, a leader in digital education, Nuti and Toding (2022) describe how ECDE teacher training programs seamlessly integrate robotics and coding into play-based pedagogy. This contrasts sharply with the Kenyan focus, where digital literacy is often an afterthought. Regarding entrepreneurship, in the Philippines, where private ECDE provision is significant, Dela Cruz and Reyes (2019) document how some universities have incorporated social entrepreneurship modules into their ECDE programs, empowering graduates to set up community-based programs.

2.2.3.2 Domestic Evidence on Skill Gaps

Practical and Pedagogical Skills: A recurring finding is the deficit in applying theory to practice. Mwamisi (2019), in a qualitative study involving classroom observations and interviews with headteachers, found that graduates struggled with fundamental tasks like developing a scheme of work, managing large, multi-age classes, and using child-

centered pedagogical methods like play and inquiry. Employers consistently reported that new graduates required "retraining" on the job, a cost they were reluctant to bear.

2.2.3.3 Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence

Kosgei (2021) conducted a study using standardized assessments and surveys to measure soft skills among ECDE graduates. The study identified significant gaps in communication skills (both with children and parents), teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity. Bunyi and Kariuki (2020) argued that the lack of these "21st-century skills" is a major barrier to employability, as ECDE centers increasingly seek educators who can foster these competencies in children.

2.2.3.4 Digital Literacy and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

The digital divide is stark in ECDE. Odhiambo and Wanjiru (2023) surveyed 200 ECDE centers in urban and rural settings and found that while 70% of headteachers believed digital skills were important, less than 20% of their teaching staff could effectively integrate technology into learning. This gap was more pronounced in graduates from universities with limited technological infrastructure.

2.2.3.5 Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills

With formal employment scarce, the ability to create one's own job is critical. Chepchumba and Simatwa (2022) assessed the entrepreneurial intentions of ECDE graduates and found them to be low. They attributed this to a complete absence of entrepreneurship education in the ECDE curriculum, leaving graduates without the skills to establish and manage their own ECDE centers or related businesses.

2.2.3.6 Methodological Synthesis

The methodologies for identifying skill gaps are diverse. Kenyan studies often rely on perception surveys (e.g., Kipkoech *et al.*, 2021) where employers and graduates rate the importance and presence of various skills. While useful, this can be subjective. Direct assessment methods, like the classroom observations used by Mwamisi (2019), provide more objective data but are resource-intensive. International studies often use competency frameworks and rubrics for assessment (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2020), a method that could be productively adopted in Kenya to create a standardized measure of graduate readiness.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This approach involved simultaneously collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzing them separately, and then merging the results to draw comprehensive conclusions. The

quantitative component provided broad, generalizable data on employability rates and skill gaps, while the qualitative component offered rich, detailed insights into stakeholder experiences and perceptions.

3.2 Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted in selected counties in Kenya, chosen to represent urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts (e.g., Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Kakamega, and Kisumu).

3.3 Study Area and Target Population

This study was strategically conducted across selected counties in Kenya to ensure a comprehensive and representative data set. The chosen counties are Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Kakamega, and Kisumu. They are purposively selected to capture the diverse socio-economic and educational landscapes of the nation, encompassing characteristically urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. This geographical variation is critical for understanding how employability challenges and opportunities manifest differently across the country, thereby ensuring that the findings and subsequent recommendations are not limited to a single context but are nationally relevant and applicable.

The target population is meticulously defined to include all key stakeholders whose experiences and insights are essential for a holistic analysis of the employability gap. The first population consists of ECDE graduates from a mix of five public and three private universities, specifically targeting those who graduated between 2018 and 2023. This rECDEnt cohort ensures that the data reflects the current state of the labour market and the most rECDEnt training experiences, with an estimated accessible population of 2,500 individuals, providing a substantial base for quantitative analysis.

The second population encompassed employers on the front lines of hiring ECDE graduates. This included a purposively selected group of headteachers from both public and private ECDE centers, who can provide firsthand accounts of the competencies and shortcomings they observe in job applicants and new employees. Additionally, County ECDE Directors from the selected regions were included to offer the governmental perspective on employment, deployment, and the specific skill needs within their jurisdictions.

The third population focused on the architects of the education system: policymakers and curriculum developers. This includes key informants from pivotal national bodies such as the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission, and the Commission for University Education. Their inclusion is vital for understanding the policy environment, the intent behind current curricula, and the systemic challenges that may impede the alignment between graduate training and labour market demands. Engaging these three distinct populations allows for rich data triangulation, ensuring that the research captures the full spectrum of perspectives from those who train, employ, and govern the ECDE workforce in Kenya.

The study was conducted in selected counties in Kenya, chosen to represent urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts (e.g., Nairobi, Nakuru, and Kisumu counties). The target population included:

Population 1: ECDE graduates from five public and three private universities (graduation cohorts 2018–2023). Estimated population: 2,500.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The selection of participants for this study was conducted using a strategic and deliberate sampling approach to ensure both representativeness and depth of insight. For the large and diverse population of ECDE graduates, a stratified random sampling technique will be employed. This method involves dividing the total graduate population from the eight selected universities into distinct subgroups, or strata, based on key characteristics such as the type of university they attended and their year of graduation. A random sample was then drawn from within each of these strata to select a final representative sample of 300 graduates. This rigorous process guarantees that the views and experiences captured in the survey accurately reflect the diversity of the entire graduate population, allowing for meaningful statistical generalizations to be made from the findings.

In contrast, for the groups of employers and policymakers, a purposive sampling technique was utilized. This approach is specifically chosen to target individuals who possess the particular knowledge, expertise, and professional roles that are most relevant to the research questions. The selection of 35 employers, including headteachers and county directors, will be based on their direct experience in hiring and supervising ECDE graduates and their ability to speak to the practical demands of the labor market. Similarly, the 10 key informants from policymaking bodies will be chosen specifically for their involvement in curriculum development, teacher certification, and education sector planning. This purposive strategy ensures that the qualitative data collected is information-rich and directly pertinent to the systemic and policy-oriented dimensions of the employability gap, providing the deep, contextual understanding that is essential for developing actionable recommendations.

Graduates: A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 300 graduates from the list of the eight universities.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

A multi-faceted approach to data collection was implemented to gather both breadth and depth of information, utilizing several distinct instruments tailored to specific data types and participant groups. For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire was developed and administered through both online platforms and physical distribution to the 300 graduate respondents. This instrument is designed to efficiently collect standardized data across four key areas: demographic background, current employment status and history, self-assessed competency across a range of skills identified in the literature, and a systematic evaluation of their training program's relevance to the labor

market. This approach ensured the collection of robust statistical data that can be analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and trends across the graduate population.

The qualitative dimension of the research employed two primary methods to gather rich, detailed insights. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 35 employers and 10 policymakers. This format utilizes a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perceptions, experiences, and recommendations while ensuring that key topics are consistently covered across all participants. Additionally, six Focus Group Discussions, each comprising 8-10 graduates, were organized to facilitate a dynamic exploration of their collective training experiences and employment challenges. The group setting is particularly valuable for generating data through the interaction of participants, where one individual's comment can spark insights and memories in others, leading to a deeper understanding of shared and divergent experiences.

To complement these primary data sources, a systematic document analysis was undertaken. This process involves a critical review of relevant curricula from the selected universities, national employment reports from bodies like the Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education, and key policy documents. This analysis provided crucial contextual evidence, helping to verify claims made by participants, understand the official framework within which training and employment occur, and trace the evolution of policies that have shaped the current landscape.

The analysis of the collected data proceeded through two parallel, rigorous pathways corresponding to the data type. The quantitative data gathered from the graduate questionnaires will be processed using statistical software. It has undergone cleaning and coding before being subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to summarize the data through measures like frequencies, means, and standard deviations. This provided a clear profile of the graduate cohort. Subsequently, inferential statistical tests were employed to examine relationships between variables, such as the potential correlation between specific training experiences and employment outcomes. Concurrently, the qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and documents will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved systematically transcribing the audio recordings, immersing oneself in the data, generating initial codes, and then identifying, reviewing, and defining broader themes that capture the salient patterns of meaning across the datasets. The ultimate strength of this analytical plan lies in the final phase, where the separate quantitative and qualitative findings will be integrated and interpreted together. This triangulation allowed the statistical trends to be explained and given deeper meaning by the nuanced narratives, resulting in a comprehensive and evidence-based answer to the research questions. A structured online and physical questionnaire was administered to the 300 graduate respondents. It captured data on demographics, employment status, perceived skill competencies, and curriculum relevance. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with six groups of graduates (8-10 per group) to discuss their training experiences and employment challenges. Curricula

from selected universities, national employment reports (TSC, MoE), and policy documents will be reviewed.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Data from questionnaires were cleaned and analyzed using SPSS Version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) will be used to summarize data. Inferential statistics (e.g., Chi-square tests) may be used to examine relationships between variables. **Qualitative Data:** Interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis, following the steps by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. **Data Integration:** The quantitative and qualitative findings were merged during the interpretation phase to provide a coherent and comprehensive answer to the research questions.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from a relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Data was stored securely and used solely for the purpose of this study.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 General Information

4.1.1 Response Rate

The study targeted a total of 300 ECDE teacher trainees, out of which 287 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned, while 13 questionnaires were not returned. This resulted in a response rate of 95.7%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70% and above is considered adequate for analysis and reporting in social science research. Based on this benchmark, the achieved response rate of 95.7% was considered excellent and sufficient for data analysis. The high response rate reduces the possibility of non-response bias and enhances the reliability and generalizability of the study findings.

Table 1: Response Rate

Response Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Questionnaires distributed	300	100.0
Questionnaires returned	287	95.7
Questionnaires not returned	13	4.3
Total	300	100.0

4.1.2 Trainees' Gender Distribution

The results indicate that out of the 287 ECDE teacher trainees who participated in the study, 126 (43.9%) were male, while 161 (56.1%) were female. This shows that female trainees formed the majority of respondents. The findings suggest that ECDE training

programs are slightly female-dominated, which is consistent with the traditional perception of early childhood education as a profession largely associated with caregiving roles. However, the presence of a significant proportion of male trainees (43.9%) indicates increasing gender inclusivity in ECDE teacher training, reflecting gradual changes in societal attitudes towards male participation in early childhood education.

Table 2: Trainees' Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	126	43.9
Female	161	56.1
Total	287	100.0

4.1.3 Age Distribution of ECDE Teacher Trainees

The findings show that the majority of ECDE teacher trainees were aged between 21 and 25 years (64.1%), followed by those aged 26–30 years (23.3%). A smaller proportion of respondents were below 20 years (12.5%), while no respondents fell within the 31–35 years or above 35 years categories.

This indicates that ECDE teacher training programs are predominantly composed of young adults, particularly those in the early stages of higher education and professional development. The dominance of the 21–25 age group suggests that most trainees enter ECDE training immediately after secondary education, reflecting a youthful workforce in early childhood education preparation.

Table 3: Age Distribution of ECDE Teacher Trainees

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percent (%)
Below 20 years	36	12.5
21–25 years	184	64.1
26–30 years	67	23.3
31–35 years	0	0.0
Above 35 years	0	0.0
Total	287	100.0

4.1.4 Type of Institution Enrolled by ECDE Teacher Trainees

The findings indicate that the majority of ECDE teacher trainees were enrolled in public universities (44.6%), followed by those in public diploma teacher training colleges (34.8%). A smaller proportion of respondents were from private universities (13.6%) and private diploma teacher training colleges (7.0%). These results suggest that public institutions dominate ECDE teacher training, accounting for the largest share of trainees. This dominance may be attributed to factors such as affordability, wider accessibility, and government support. The significant proportion of trainees in public diploma teacher training colleges also highlights the continued importance of practical, skills-based training pathways in ECDE education. Overall, the distribution reflects a strong reliance

on public education systems in preparing ECDE teachers, while private institutions play a relatively smaller but still relevant role in teacher training.

Table 4: Type of Institution Enrolled by ECDE Teacher Trainees

Institution Type	Frequency	Percent (%)
Public University	128	44.6
Private University	39	13.6
Public Diploma Teacher Training College	100	34.8
Private Diploma Teacher Training College	20	7.0
Total	287	100.0

4.1.5 Number of ECDE Students Enrolled per Cohort

The findings reveal that the majority of ECDE teacher trainees (55.4%) reported that their cohort size ranges between 51–100 students, making it the most prevalent enrollment category. This is followed by 151–200 students (17.1%), indicating that a significant number of institutions operate with relatively large class sizes. Further, 13.6% of respondents indicated cohort sizes of 101–150 students, while 8.4% reported smaller cohorts of 1–50 students. A smaller proportion (5.6%) reported very large cohort sizes of 200 students and above, suggesting that such high enrollment levels are less common but still present in some institutions. Overall, the results suggest that ECDE training programs are generally characterized by moderate cohort sizes, particularly within the 51–100 range. These class sizes may support effective interaction and supervision; however, institutions with larger cohorts may face challenges such as limited individual attention and strain on teaching resources, especially given the practical and interactive nature of ECDE training.

Table 5: Number of ECDE Students Enrolled per Cohort

Enrollment Range	Frequency	Percent (%)
1–50 Students	24	8.4
51–100 Students	159	55.4
101–150 Students	39	13.6
151–200 Students	49	17.1
200 and above	16	5.1
Total	287	100.0

4.1.6 Trainees' Preference for the ECDE Course

The findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of ECDE teacher trainees (97.9%) reported that they like the ECDE course they are being trained in, while only 2.1% expressed dissatisfaction. This suggests a very high level of satisfaction and positive attitude towards the ECDE program among trainees. The strong preference for the course may be attributed to factors such as interest in early childhood education, perceived career opportunities, and the relevance of the training to real-world teaching environments. The small proportion of trainees who do not like the course may reflect

individual differences in career interests or challenges experienced during training. Overall, the results indicate that ECDE programs are generally well-received and align with the expectations and aspirations of most trainees.

Table 6: Trainees’ Preference for the ECDE Course

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	281	97.9
No	6	2.1
Total	287	100.0

4.1.7 Trainees’ Career Intentions After Graduation

The findings indicate that nearly half of the ECDE teacher trainees (49.8%) intend to seek employment in public ECDE centers after graduation, making it the most preferred career path. This is followed by those who plan to seek employment in private ECDE centers (20.9%), suggesting that both public and private sectors play a significant role in absorbing ECDE graduates. A notable proportion of trainees (16.4%) expressed the intention to pursue further studies, indicating a desire for academic advancement and professional growth. Additionally, 10.5% of respondents indicated that they plan to start their own ECDE centers, reflecting entrepreneurial ambitions among some trainees. Only a small percentage (2.4%) reported being uncertain about their future plans, suggesting that most trainees have clear career goals. Overall, the results demonstrate that ECDE teacher trainees are largely career-oriented, with a strong preference for employment in public institutions, while also showing interest in private sector opportunities, further education, and entrepreneurship within the ECDE field.

Table 7: Trainees’ Career Intentions After Graduation

Career Intention	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Seek employment in public ECDE centers	143	49.8
Seek employment in private ECDE centers	60	20.9
Start own ECDE center	30	10.5
Pursue further studies	47	16.4
Not sure	7	2.4
Total	287	100.0

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Extent of Alignment between ECDE Curriculum and Labour Market Requirements

The study examined the extent to which the ECDE curriculum aligns with labour market requirements in Kenya by analyzing trainees’ perceptions across several indicators, including curriculum relevance, practical preparedness, integration of employer-required skills, teaching methodologies, and overall alignment with job market expectations.

Regarding the relevance of the ECDE curriculum to current labour market needs, the findings show that a majority of respondents (64.1%) agreed that the content taught

reflects current labour market demands in Kenya. Specifically, 43.2% strongly agreed and 20.9% agreed, while 20.9% disagreed and 15.0% remained neutral. This suggests that although the curriculum is generally perceived as relevant, a notable proportion of trainees feel that some content gaps still exist in relation to labour market expectations.

On whether the programme adequately prepares students for real classroom situations, the results were strongly positive, with 79.8% of respondents agreeing (50.5% strongly agree, and 29.3% agree). Only 10.8% disagreed, while 9.4% were neutral. This indicates that ECDE training institutions are largely effective in equipping trainees with practical classroom readiness skills, which are essential for early childhood education practice.

Similarly, the integration of practical skills required by employers was rated positively, with 74.5% of respondents agreeing (47.7% strongly agree and 26.8% agree). A small proportion (8.0%) disagreed, while 17.4% remained neutral. These findings suggest that the ECDE curriculum fairly incorporates practical competencies that are valued in the labour market, although there is still room for improvement in fully strengthening practical skill development.

In terms of preparation for the current job market, the results show a strong positive perception, with 71.5% of respondents agreeing (53.0% strongly agree, and 18.5% agree). However, 12.2% disagreed, and 16.4% remained neutral. This implies that while most trainees feel job-ready, a minority still perceive gaps in employability preparation.

Contrary to the generally positive findings above, the results on the emphasis of transformative teaching methodologies reveal a weak performance. A majority of respondents (78.8%) disagreed with the statement (42.9% disagree and 35.9% strongly disagree), while only 9.8% agreed. This indicates that modern, learner-centered, and innovative teaching approaches are not sufficiently emphasized in ECDE training programmes. This is a significant gap, especially in a contemporary education system that increasingly values creativity, critical thinking, and learner-centered instruction.

Finally, when asked about the overall alignment between ECDE training and employer expectations, the majority of respondents (54.0%) indicated weak alignment (18.8% weak and 35.2% very weak). Only 34.8% perceived strong alignment (11.5% very strong and 23.3% strong), while 11.1% indicated moderate alignment. This suggests that despite strengths in classroom preparation and practical skills, the overall curriculum alignment with labour market needs is perceived as moderate to weak.

In summary, the findings present a mixed but leaning weak overall alignment between ECDE curriculum and labour market requirements. While the curriculum is perceived as effective in preparing trainees for classroom practice and integrating some practical skills, significant weaknesses exist in the adoption of transformative teaching methodologies and overall alignment with evolving employer expectations. The results suggest that ECDE programmes in Kenya are still largely traditional in design and require further curriculum review and modernization to fully meet labour market

demands, particularly in integrating innovative, competency-based, and technology-enhanced teaching approaches.

Table 8: Extent of Alignment Between ECDE Curriculum and Labour Market Requirements

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percent
The content taught in my ECDE programme reflects current labour market needs.	Strongly Agree	124	43.2
	Agree	60	20.9
	Neutral	43	15.0
	Disagree	37	12.9
	Strongly Disagree	23	8.0
The ECDE programme adequately prepares students for real classroom situations.	Strongly Agree	145	50.5
	Agree	84	29.3
	Neutral	27	9.4
	Disagree	23	8.0
	Strongly Disagree	8	2.8
The ECDE curriculum integrates practical skills required by employers.	Strongly Agree	137	47.7
	Agree	77	26.8
	Neutral	50	17.4
	Disagree	13	4.5
	Strongly Disagree	10	3.5
The ECDE programme adequately prepares students for the current job market.	Strongly Agree	152	53.0
	Agree	53	18.5
	Neutral	47	16.4
	Disagree	20	7.0
	Strongly Disagree	15	5.2
The ECDE curriculum emphasizes the use of transformative teaching methodologies.	Strongly Agree	12	4.2
	Agree	16	5.6
	Neutral	33	11.5
	Disagree	123	42.9
	Strongly Disagree	103	35.9
Overall, there is strong alignment between ECDE training and employer expectations.	Very Strong Alignment	33	11.5
	Strong Alignment	67	23.3
	Moderate Alignment	32	11.1
	Weak Alignment	54	18.8
	Very Weak Alignment	101	35.2

4.2.2 To Analyze the Employability Rates of ECDE Graduates in Kenya Over the Past Five Years

The findings on the employability of ECDE graduates in Kenya indicate a generally weak and uncertain transition from training to employment. A large majority of respondents (81.9%) were not sure about the proportion of graduates who secure employment within one year after graduation, suggesting a lack of reliable tracking systems for graduate outcomes. Among those who expressed an opinion, most indicated that fewer than half of graduates obtain employment within the first year, pointing to relatively low immediate employability.

Regarding trends over the past five years, the results show a clear decline in employment opportunities for ECDE graduates. Most respondents reported that opportunities have either decreased slightly (42.9%) or decreased significantly (39.0%), while very few observed any increase. This pattern suggests that the ECDE labour market has been contracting, making it increasingly difficult for graduates to secure jobs.

In terms of employment sectors, the majority of ECDE graduates are absorbed into public (42.9%) and private (38.3%) ECDE centres. However, there is minimal absorption in NGOs, community-based organizations, or self-employment, with none of the respondents identifying these as major employment avenues. A notable proportion (11.5%) of graduates are employed outside the ECDE field, indicating a mismatch between training and available job opportunities.

The nature of employment further highlights the precarious situation of ECDE graduates. Most are engaged on contract (43.6%) or casual/temporary terms (30.3%), with only a small proportion (8.0%) securing permanent and pensionable positions. This is consistent with perceptions of job stability, where the majority rated employment as unstable (53.3%) or very unstable (23.3%). These findings suggest that even for those who are employed, job security is a major concern.

Salary levels for ECDE graduates are also perceived to be low, with 57.1% rating them as low and 21.6% as very low. Only a negligible proportion considered salaries competitive. This indicates that the profession may not be financially attractive, which could affect motivation, retention, and overall quality of service delivery in the ECDE sector.

Additionally, the demand for ECDE teachers is perceived to be low, as indicated by 72.1% of respondents, with a further 16.4% rating it as very low. This weak demand aligns with the finding that the labour market has limited capacity to absorb graduates. In fact, an overwhelming majority (84.7%) believe that the labour market cannot absorb the number of ECDE graduates produced annually.

Overall, the findings suggest that the employability of ECDE graduates in Kenya is constrained by declining job opportunities, low demand, inadequate labour market absorption, and poor employment conditions characterized by job insecurity and low pay. These challenges point to a mismatch between the output of training institutions and the capacity of the labour market, highlighting the need for policy interventions to improve employment outcomes in the ECDE sector.

Table 9: To analyze the employability rates of ECDE graduates in Kenya over the past five years

Question	Response	Frequency	Percent
To the best of your knowledge, what proportion of ECDE graduates from your institution obtain employment within one year after graduation?	More than 75%	0	0.0
	50–75%	0	0.0
	25–49%	32	11.1
	Less than 25%	20	7.0
	Not sure	235	81.9

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ALIGNMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) UNIVERSITY CURRICULA WITH LABOR MARKET
REQUIREMENTS AND THE EMPLOYABILITY OF ECDE STUDENT TRAINEES IN KENYA

In the past five years, employment opportunities for ECDE graduates in Kenya have:	Increased significantly	0	0.0
	Increased slightly	12	4.2
	Remained the same	24	8.4
	Decreased slightly	123	42.9
	Decreased significantly	112	39.0
	Not sure	16	5.6
Most ECDE graduates are employed in:	Public ECDE centres	123	42.9
	Private ECDE centres	110	38.3
	NGOs/Community-based centres	0	0.0
	Self-employment (own ECDE centre)	0	0.0
	Outside the ECDE field	33	11.5
	Not sure	21	7.3
The majority of employed ECDE graduates work on:	Permanent and pensionable terms	23	8.0
	Contract basis	125	43.6
	Casual/temporary basis	87	30.3
	Volunteer basis	0	0.0
	Not sure	52	18.1
How would you rate the job stability of ECDE graduates?	Very stable	0	0.0
	Stable	12	4.2
	Moderately stable	47	16.4
	Unstable	153	53.3
	Very unstable	67	23.3
	Not sure	8	2.8
In your opinion, the salary levels for ECDE graduates in Kenya are:	Very competitive	0	0.0
	Competitive	13	4.5
	Moderate	48	16.7
	Low	164	57.1
	Very low	62	21.6
	Not sure	0	0.0
The demand for ECDE teachers in Kenya over the past five years has been:	Very high	0	0.0
	High	10	3.5
	Moderate	23	8.0
	Low	207	72.1
	Very low	47	16.4
	Not sure	0	0.0
Do you believe the labour market can absorb the number of ECDE graduates produced annually?	Yes, fully	0	0.0
	Yes, to a large extent	0	0.0
	To a moderate extent	11	3.8
	To a small extent	33	11.5
	Not at all	243	84.7
	Not sure	0	0.0

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that although ECDE university curricula in Kenya provide trainees with foundational pedagogical knowledge and basic classroom management

competencies, they do not adequately align with the evolving requirements of the labour market. While most trainees perceived the curriculum as relevant in preparing them for classroom practice, significant deficiencies were identified in areas such as transformative teaching methodologies, digital literacy, innovation, entrepreneurship, and other twenty-first-century skills increasingly demanded by employers. The findings therefore suggest that the existing ECDE curriculum remains largely theoretical and traditional, limiting its effectiveness in preparing graduates for a dynamic and competitive employment environment.

The study further concludes that the employability of ECDE graduates in Kenya has declined over the past five years. Employment opportunities within the sector have reduced, and the labour market has limited capacity to absorb the growing number of graduates produced annually. Most employed graduates work under contract or temporary arrangements characterized by low salaries, poor job security, and limited career progression opportunities. Consequently, many graduates either remain unemployed, become underemployed, or seek employment outside the ECDE profession.

The findings also demonstrate a direct relationship between curriculum alignment and employability outcomes. Graduates whose training equips them with practical competencies, market-relevant skills, and workplace readiness are more likely to secure employment and adapt to changing labour market demands. Conversely, curriculum gaps contribute to skill mismatches that reduce graduate competitiveness and employability. Therefore, enhancing the alignment between ECDE curricula and labour market requirements is critical for improving employment outcomes among ECDE graduates in Kenya.

Overall, the study concludes that addressing graduate employability challenges requires collaborative efforts among universities, policymakers, county governments, employers, and professional bodies. Curriculum reforms that emphasize practical training, digital competencies, entrepreneurship, innovation, and stronger linkages with employers are essential for producing competent, adaptable, and employable ECDE professionals capable of contributing effectively to the achievement of quality education and sustainable economic development in Kenya.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

5.2.1 Recommendations for Universities and Teacher Training Institutions

Universities and teacher training institutions should undertake regular curriculum reviews to ensure that ECDE programmes remain responsive to changing labour market demands. Curriculum development should involve key stakeholders, including employers, county governments, professional bodies, and policymakers, to ensure that

the competencies taught correspond to workplace expectations. Institutions should strengthen practical training components by increasing opportunities for teaching practice, internships, mentorship programmes, and school-based experiences. Such exposure would enable trainees to acquire hands-on skills and improve their readiness for employment upon graduation. ECDE programmes should integrate digital literacy, educational technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship courses into the curriculum. These competencies would equip graduates with the ability to utilize modern teaching technologies and create self-employment opportunities through the establishment and management of ECDE centres and related educational enterprises. Universities should also strengthen career guidance and employability support services to help trainees understand emerging career opportunities beyond classroom teaching, including curriculum development, educational consultancy, research, non-governmental organizations, and community-based educational programmes.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Government and Policymakers

The Ministry of Education, the Commission for University Education, and county governments should establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of ECDE curricula to ensure alignment with national educational goals and labour market requirements. County governments should increase investment in ECDE programmes through enhanced recruitment of qualified teachers, improved remuneration packages, and the creation of clear career progression structures. Such measures would improve job attractiveness, employee retention, and overall quality of ECDE service delivery. The government should develop a national graduate tracer system for ECDE graduates to facilitate the collection of reliable data on employment outcomes, skill requirements, and labour market trends. This information would support evidence-based policy formulation and workforce planning. Policies should also be formulated to promote public-private partnerships aimed at expanding employment opportunities for ECDE graduates and enhancing collaboration between training institutions and employers.

5.2.3 Recommendations for Employers

Employers should collaborate closely with universities and teacher training institutions in curriculum design, student mentorship, and industrial attachment programmes. Such partnerships would help bridge the gap between academic training and workplace expectations. ECDE employers should establish structured induction and professional development programmes for newly employed graduates to facilitate a smooth transition from training to professional practice and improve job performance.

5.2.4 Recommendations for ECDE Student Trainees and Graduates

ECDE trainees should actively seek opportunities to develop complementary skills beyond academic qualifications, particularly in digital technology, communication, leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship. These skills are increasingly important in

enhancing employability and career advancement. Graduates should also explore diverse career pathways within the ECDE sector, including private enterprise, consultancy, educational content development, research, and non-governmental organizations, rather than relying solely on formal teaching positions.

5.2.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should examine the perspectives of employers, policymakers, and university lecturers regarding the skills and competencies required for ECDE graduates in contemporary labour markets. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of employability challenges within the sector. Further research should also investigate the effectiveness of internship programmes, mentorship initiatives, and entrepreneurship training in improving the employability outcomes of ECDE graduates. Longitudinal studies tracking graduates from training through employment would provide valuable insights into career progression and labour market transitions within the ECDE profession.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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