



**SKILL GAPS, STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, AND
STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY AND
CAREER ADAPTABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATION (ECDE) GRADUATES IN KENYA**

Metrine Sulungai¹ⁱ,

Dinah Were²

Ahmed Wangara³

¹Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
Kaimosi Friends University,
Kenya

²Department of Educational Foundations, Psychology and Management,
Kaimosi Friends University,
Kenya

³Department of Social Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University,
Kenya

Abstract:

This study examined skill gaps, stakeholder perceptions, and strategies for enhancing the employability and career adaptability of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) graduates in Kenya. Despite increased investment in ECDE teacher education, concerns persist regarding graduate employability and alignment between university training and labour market demands. The study was guided by Yorke's Employability Theory, Harvey's Graduate Employability Perspective, and the CareerEDGE Model. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted. The study targeted ECDE student trainees, employers, and policymakers from selected counties in Kenya, including Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Kakamega, and Kisumu. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 80 ECDE stakeholders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and presented in tables and charts. Findings revealed significant skill gaps among ECDE graduates, particularly in lesson planning, child assessment, classroom management, and differentiated instruction. The main cause of these gaps was excessive theoretical training with limited practical exposure. Employers reported generally positive perceptions of ECDE graduates' competence but identified weaknesses in communication and classroom management skills. The study further found that unemployment among ECDE graduates remains high, with many working

ⁱ Correspondence: email metrinesulungai@gmail.com

outside the education sector or engaging in self-employment. Additionally, most respondents indicated that current ECDE policies are ineffective in enhancing graduate employability. The study concludes that there is a clear mismatch between ECDE training and labour market expectations, particularly in practical teaching competencies. It recommends strengthening teaching practice, enhancing school–institution partnerships, integrating ICT in ECDE training, and aligning curricula with labour market needs to improve graduate employability and career adaptability in Kenya.

Keywords: skill gaps, stakeholder perceptions, strategies for enhancing, employability, early childhood development education (ECDE)

1. Introduction

Employability has emerged as a paramount issue in higher education, as governments, employers, and educational institutions strive to guarantee that graduates acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies for the labor market (Mutembei, 2024). Employability denotes graduates' capacity to secure, sustain, and advance in work by effectively utilizing pertinent skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics. In the modern labor market, graduates are anticipated to not only obtain employment but also exhibit career flexibility, defined as the ability to respond effectively to shifting workplace needs, technological innovations, and changing professional landscapes (Siringi, 2025).

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) is essential for the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth of children. Consequently, ECDE professionals are anticipated to have specialized pedagogical skills, child-centered teaching competences, communication proficiency, creativity, and adaptation to varied learning situations (Kogo, 2019). Kenyan universities and teacher training institutions have augmented ECDE programs to address the expanding need for trained early childhood educators, driven by government investments in pre-primary education and the execution of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Notwithstanding this expansion, apprehensions have arisen concerning the employability of ECDE graduates and the degree to which their training corresponds with labor market demands (Ssewanyana et al., 2023).

The shift from higher education to employment continues to pose difficulties for numerous graduates in Kenya. Employers often indicate shortcomings in practical skills, communication proficiency, computer literacy, problem-solving ability, and professional competences among graduates entering the labor market (Ochieng, 2025). These concerns prompt inquiries on the sufficiency of ECDE courses in equipping graduates for modern educational and non-educational work prospects. Moreover, the swiftly evolving job market necessitates that graduates perpetually refine their skills and competences to maintain relevance and competitiveness (Kobugabe, 2024).

Employers, policymakers, educational institutions, and graduates possess differing views on the employment readiness of ECDE graduates. Comprehending these perceptions is crucial for detecting current skill deficiencies and formulating measures to enhance graduate employability and career adaptability (Sitati et al., 2014). Strategies may encompass curriculum evaluation, strengthened industry collaborations, experiential learning initiatives, professional development programs, and the incorporation of transferable skills into teacher education curricula (Kirui, 2024).

This study aims to investigate the determinants affecting the employability and career adaptability of ECDE graduates in Kenya by identifying critical skill deficiencies, analyzing stakeholder views, and recommending measures to enhance graduates' employment prospects and long-term career success. The study's findings are anticipated to yield significant insights for universities, legislators, employers, and other stakeholders engaged in the training and employment of ECDE experts.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 General Objective

To assess the skill gaps, stakeholder perceptions, and strategies for enhancing the employability and career adaptability of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) graduates in Kenya.

1.2.3 Specific Objectives

- 1) To identify the major skill gaps affecting employability among ECDE graduates.
- 2) To explore perceptions of employers, graduates, and policymakers regarding the employability of ECDE graduates.
- 3) To recommend strategies to enhance the employability and career adaptability of ECDE graduates in Kenya.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) Which skills are ECDE graduates lacking that hinder their employability?
- 2) What are the perceptions of employers and policymakers on the future of ECDE graduates in the labor market?
- 3) What strategies can enhance the employability of ECDE graduates in Kenya?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation into the employability of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) graduates is anchored in contemporary employability theories that view employability as a multidimensional construct extending beyond mere employment attainment. The study is primarily guided by Yorke's Employability Theory, Harvey's Graduate Employability Perspective, and Pool and Sewell's Career EDGE Model.

According to Mantz Yorke (2006), employability refers to "*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 perspective is embodied in the USEM model, which comprises Understanding, Skills, Efficacy Beliefs, and Metacognition. The model emphasizes that employability is developed through the entire educational experience rather than through subject knowledge alone. In the context of ECDE training, the theory suggests that graduates become employable when university curricula provide relevant knowledge, practical competencies, professional confidence, and reflective learning capabilities. The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for examining the alignment between ECDE curricula and labour market requirements.

The study is further informed by the graduate employability perspective advanced by Lee Harvey (2001). Harvey argues that the role of higher education institutions is not merely to prepare students for specific jobs but to develop adaptable, critical, and reflective graduates capable of lifelong learning. This perspective recognizes that labour markets are dynamic and that graduates must possess transferable skills that enable them to respond to changing employment conditions. For ECDE graduates in Kenya, where employment opportunities exist in public institutions, private schools, non-governmental organizations, and self-employment ventures, adaptability and continuous professional development are essential determinants of employability. Harvey's perspective, therefore, supports the study's examination of graduate employment outcomes and the extent to which university training equips graduates for diverse labour market opportunities.

Additionally, the study draws upon the CareerEDGE Model developed by Lorraine Dacre Pool and Peter Sewell (2007). The model identifies five key elements that contribute to employability: career development learning, work and life experience, subject knowledge and understanding, generic skills, and emotional intelligence. These elements collectively contribute to self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem, which ultimately enhance graduate employability. The model underscores the importance of practical experiences such as teaching practice, internships, and field attachments in developing competencies valued by employers. Within the ECDE sector, these experiences enable graduates to acquire classroom management skills, child development competencies, communication abilities, and professional confidence necessary for successful employment.

Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding ECDE graduate employability. They suggest that employability is influenced by the interaction between curriculum relevance, acquisition of professional and transferable skills, practical learning experiences, personal attributes, and labour market conditions. Consequently, the study examines the extent to which ECDE university curricula align with labour market requirements and how such alignment influences the employability of ECDE graduates in Kenya. The theories, therefore,

provide a basis for analyzing both the educational factors and labour market dynamics that shape graduate employment outcomes.

2.2 Literature Review

The employability theories advanced by Yorke (2006), Harvey (2001), and Pool and Sewell (2007) are supported by contemporary studies conducted within East Africa. For instance, Mutembei (2024) established that institutional factors such as curriculum relevance, quality of training, practical learning opportunities, and availability of learning resources significantly influence the development of employability skills among graduates of technical training institutions in Kenya. This finding aligns with Yorke's USEM model, which emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, efficacy beliefs, and reflective capacities as key determinants of graduate employability.

Similarly, Siringi (2025) found that Kenyan universities face challenges in adequately preparing graduates with the skills and competencies demanded by employers. The study highlights the importance of curriculum responsiveness, practical training, and industry engagement in enhancing employability outcomes. These findings reinforce Harvey's (2001) argument that higher education institutions should focus on producing adaptable graduates equipped with transferable skills rather than merely transmitting academic knowledge.

Within teacher education, Ochieng (2025) emphasizes the role of lifelong learning and competency-based training in improving graduate employability. Using the ADDIE framework, the study demonstrates that teacher education programs that integrate continuous skills development, practical experiences, and learner-centered approaches are more likely to produce graduates who meet labour market expectations. This perspective complements the CareerEDGE model proposed by Pool and Sewell (2007), which identifies career development, learning and practical experience as critical employability components.

Studies focusing specifically on ECDE further underscore the importance of curriculum relevance and professional preparation. Njiru and Odundo (2024) found that teacher preparedness for implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) depends largely on the adequacy of professional training and continuous professional development opportunities. Their findings suggest that ECDE graduates require both theoretical knowledge and practical competencies to effectively respond to emerging educational reforms and workplace demands.

Likewise, Sitati et al. (2014) emphasize the role of stakeholders in supporting the professional development of ECDE teachers. The study demonstrates that collaboration among educational institutions, employers, government agencies, and professional bodies contributes significantly to the acquisition of competencies necessary for effective teaching and career advancement.

From a broader ECDE implementation perspective, Kogo (2019) identified challenges affecting the management and implementation of ECDE programs in Kenya,

including inadequate resources, staffing constraints, and policy implementation gaps. These factors influence employment opportunities and working conditions for ECDE graduates, highlighting the importance of considering labour market and institutional contexts when examining employability.

Further evidence is provided by Ssewanyana et al. (2023), who found that the successful implementation of early childhood development programs depends on supportive institutional structures, stakeholder collaboration, adequate resources, and professional competencies among practitioners. These findings suggest that employability in the ECDE sector extends beyond individual qualifications to include broader organizational and contextual factors.

At the regional level, Kobugabe Rwomushana (2024) reported significant skill gaps among higher education graduates in Uganda, which negatively affect their employability. The study highlights the persistent mismatch between higher education training and labour market expectations, a challenge that mirrors concerns raised within the Kenyan context and reinforces the need to examine the alignment between ECDE university curricula and labour market requirements.

Collectively, these studies support the proposition that graduate employability is influenced by curriculum relevance, practical training experiences, professional development opportunities, institutional support, and labour market conditions. They therefore provide empirical support for Yorke's Employability Theory, Harvey's Graduate Employability Perspective, and the CareerEDGE Model, which collectively underpin the current study's examination of the relationship between ECDE university curricula and graduate employability in Kenya.

3. Study 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 will offer 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, Kakakmega, and Kisumu counties). 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, Kakakmega, and Kisumu. They were 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 included County ECDE Directors from the selected regions, who will be included to offer the governmental perspective on employment, deployment, and the specific skill needs within their jurisdictions. Further 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.

Employers, including headteachers of public and private ECDE centers (n=30), and County ECDE Directors (n=5). Policymakers and curriculum developers from the Ministry of Education (MoE), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), and Commission for University Education (CUE) (n=10).

3.3 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 75 ECDE student trainees who participated in the study. The instrument was designed to efficiently collect standardized data across four key areas: demographic characteristics, perceptions of curriculum alignment with labour market requirements, employability skills acquired during training, and factors influencing graduate employability. This approach ensured the collection of robust quantitative data that were analyzed to identify patterns, relationships, and trends regarding the preparedness of ECDE graduates for the labour market.

The questionnaire comprised both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, enabling respondents to provide measurable information on their experiences and perceptions. Prior to administration, the instrument was reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Data collection was conducted after obtaining the necessary permissions from relevant university authorities and informed consent from the respondents. The completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency before being coded and prepared for analysis. This process facilitated the generation of reliable data for assessing the alignment between ECDE university curricula and labour market requirements as well as the employability prospects of ECDE graduates in Kenya.

3.4 Data Analysis Presentation and Discussion

Data collected from the respondents were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, levels of employability skills, and perceptions regarding the alignment between ECDE university curricula and labour market requirements.

The analyzed data were then presented in the form of tables, charts, and graphs to enhance clarity, ease of interpretation, and comparison of key variables. Frequencies and percentages were mainly used to describe categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were used to summarize Likert-scale responses on employability skills and curriculum relevance.

The findings were discussed in relation to the study objectives and theoretical framework. The discussion focused on identifying patterns and trends in the data, particularly regarding how ECDE training experiences influenced graduates' perceived employability. The results were further interpreted in light of Yorke's Employability Theory, Harvey's Graduate Employability Perspective, and the CareerEDGE Model, which emphasize the role of skills development, curriculum relevance, and practical experience in enhancing graduate employability. Overall, the descriptive analysis provided a clear summary of the data, enabling meaningful interpretation of ECDE graduate employability patterns within the study context.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents were female (56%), while males accounted for 44%. This suggests that ECDE teaching is largely dominated by female teachers. This pattern reflects a broader trend in early childhood education, where the profession is traditionally viewed as more aligned with nurturing and caregiving roles, which are often socially associated with women. The higher representation of female teachers may also be influenced by cultural expectations, career preferences, and the perceived nature of ECDE work, which emphasizes child development, emotional support, and foundational learning. Additionally, the relatively lower number of male teachers could be attributed to factors such as lower remuneration, limited career progression opportunities, and societal perceptions that discourage men from pursuing early childhood education careers. However, the presence of male teachers, though smaller, remains important as it contributes to gender diversity in the learning environment. A balanced gender representation can provide children with varied role models and support holistic development. Therefore, there may be a need for policies

and incentives aimed at encouraging more male participation in ECDE teaching to promote inclusivity and diversity within the sector.

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	33	44.0%
Female	42	56.0%
Total	75	100%

4.2 Level of Training of Respondents

The findings show that the majority of respondents have either a diploma (40%) or a degree (40%), indicating a relatively high level of professional training among ECDE teachers. A smaller proportion (20%) hold certificate qualifications, while none of the respondents reported lacking ECDE training. This suggests that all teachers in the study possess formal training in early childhood development and education, which is essential for effective teaching and learning. The high proportion of diploma and degree holders may also reflect increasing professionalization and emphasis on higher qualifications within the ECDE sector.

Level of Training	Frequency	Percent (%)
Certificate	15	20.0%
Diploma	30	40.0%
Degree	30	40.0%
Not trained in ECDE	0	0.0%
Total	75	100%

4.3 Respondents in Contact with ECDE Classmates

The findings indicate that a majority of respondents (58.7%) are still in touch with their classmates who graduated as ECDE teachers, while 41.3% are not. This suggests a fairly strong professional and social network among ECDE graduates. Maintaining contact with former classmates can be beneficial for sharing job opportunities, professional experiences, and teaching resources. However, a notable proportion not maintaining such connections may indicate limited networking structures or reduced collaboration after graduation, highlighting the need to strengthen alumni engagement and professional networking within the ECDE sector.

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	44	58.7%
No	31	41.3%
Total	75	100%

4.4 Employment Status of Colleagues as ECDE Teachers

The findings reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) indicated that not all their colleagues are employed as ECDE teachers, while only 4% reported that all

their colleagues are employed in the field. This suggests low absorption of ECDE graduates into the teaching profession, pointing to significant employability challenges. Possible reasons may include limited job opportunities, oversupply of graduates, or unattractive working conditions, such as low pay. The results highlight the need for improved job creation, better alignment between training and labor market demands, and enhanced support for ECDE graduates to secure employment in their field.

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	3	4.0%
No	72	96.0%
Total	75	100%

4.5 Awareness of Colleagues Not Employed as ECDE Teachers

The findings show that a vast majority of respondents (96%) are aware of colleagues who are not employed as ECDE teachers, while only 4% are not aware of such cases. This strongly reinforces the earlier indication of low employment uptake among ECDE graduates. It suggests that unemployment or underemployment within the ECDE field is widespread and visible among peers. This situation may be attributed to factors such as limited job opportunities, a mismatch between training and labor market demands, or unfavorable working conditions. The results highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve employment prospects and retention of ECDE graduates within the teaching profession.

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	72	96.0%
No	3	4.0%
Total	75	100%

4.6 Current Engagement of ECDE Graduates Not Employed in ECDE Teaching

The findings indicate that nearly half of the respondents (45.3%) reported that some of their colleagues are not employed at all, highlighting a significant level of unemployment among ECDE graduates. A notable proportion (26.7%) are employed in other sectors outside ECDE teaching, suggesting a mismatch between training and available job opportunities in the education sector. On a more positive note, 14.7% of the graduates are heading ECDE centres, while 13.3% have started their own ECDE centres, indicating some level of entrepreneurship and leadership within the field. This shows that although formal employment in ECDE teaching is limited, a portion of graduates are creating self-employment opportunities or advancing into administrative roles. Overall, the results reflect both unemployment challenges and adaptive career pathways among ECDE graduates, emphasizing the need for increased job creation and support for entrepreneurship within early childhood education.

Metrine Sulungai, Dinah Were & Ahmed Wangara
 SKILL GAPS, STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING
 THE EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER ADAPTABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
 DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) GRADUATES IN KENYA

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Heading an ECDE centre	11	14.7%
Begun own ECDE centres	10	13.3%
Not employed	34	45.3%
Employed in other sectors	20	26.7%
Total	75	100%

4.7 To identify the major skill gaps affecting employability among ECDE graduates

The findings reveal clear and consistent evidence of significant skill gaps among ECDE graduates that negatively affect employability. The most commonly lacking skill is lesson planning (42.7%), followed by child assessment skills (30.7%), classroom management (16.0%), and professional conduct (10.7%). This indicates that graduates struggle most with core instructional planning and assessment competencies required for effective teaching.

In terms of pedagogical challenges, the most critical gap is differentiating instruction (45.3%), suggesting difficulties in addressing diverse learner needs. Other important gaps include integrating play-based learning (20.0%), managing large classes (18.7%), and learner-centered approaches (16.0%). These results show that practical classroom application skills are weaker compared to theoretical knowledge.

The main contributing factor to these skill gaps is too much theoretical training (60.0%), indicating that ECDE programs may be overly classroom-based with insufficient practical exposure. Limited teaching practice (20.0%), inadequate mentorship (12.0%), and ICT resource constraints (8.0%) also contribute, reinforcing the need for more hands-on training experiences.

To address these gaps, respondents identified extended teaching practice (46.7%) as the most effective solution, followed by stronger school–training institution partnerships (32.0%). ICT integration (14.7%) and mandatory in-service training (6.7%) were also suggested, though less emphasized. This highlights a strong demand for more practical and collaborative training models.

Importantly, a large majority (89.3%) confirmed that there is a skills gap between ECDE training and job market expectations, showing clear misalignment between training outcomes and workplace demands. Despite this, most respondents (74.7%) reported being very satisfied with their training, suggesting that satisfaction does not necessarily reflect job market readiness. Finally, 78.7% of respondents believe there is bias against graduate ECDE teachers, indicating perceived unfairness in hiring or recognition practices, which may further limit employability.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Skills most commonly lacking	Classroom management	12	16.0%
	Lesson planning	32	42.7%
	Child assessment skills	23	30.7%
	Professional conduct	8	10.7%
	Total	75	100%

Metrine Sulungai, Dinah Were & Ahmed Wangara
 SKILL GAPS, STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING
 THE EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER ADAPTABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
 DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) GRADUATES IN KENYA

Pedagogical skill gap affecting employability	Learner-centered approaches	12	16.0%
	Managing large classes	14	18.7%
	Differentiating instruction	34	45.3%
	Play-based learning integration	15	20.0%
	Total	75	100%
Main cause of skill gaps	Too much theoretical training	45	60.0%
	Limited teaching practice exposure	15	20.0%
	Inadequate mentorship	9	12.0%
	Limited ICT resources	6	8.0%
	Total	75	100
Key improvement to reduce skill gaps	Extended teaching practice	35	46.7%
	School-training institution partnerships	24	32.0%
	ICT integration in training	11	14.7%
	Mandatory in-service training	5	6.7%
	Total	75	100%
Skills gap between training and job expectations	Yes	67	89.3%
	No	8	10.7%
	Total	75	100%
Adequacy of ECDE training	Very satisfied	56	74.7%
	Satisfied	6	8.0%
	Not sure	9	12.0%
	Not satisfied	4	5.3%
	Total	75	100%
Perceived bias towards graduate ECDE teachers	Yes	59	78.7%
	No	16	21.3%
	Total	75	100%

4.8 To explore perceptions of employers, graduates, and policymakers regarding the employability of ECDE graduates.

The findings show mixed but generally critical perceptions regarding the employability of ECDE graduates. Employers rate most ECDE graduates as competent (60.0%) or very competent (30.7%), indicating a generally positive perception of their ability to perform teaching duties. However, a small proportion (9.3%) still consider them only moderately or not competent, suggesting some variability in graduate quality. When hiring, employers prioritize academic qualifications (76.0%), followed by teaching experience (12.0%), ICT competence (6.7%), and professional conduct (5.3%). This demonstrates that hiring decisions are still heavily influenced by formal qualifications rather than practical or digital skills, limiting emphasis on 21st-century competencies.

Despite this, employers report high satisfaction with practical skills, with 85.3% being very satisfied. However, key concerns remain, particularly communication skills (44.0%) and classroom management (42.7%), indicating that while graduates are generally acceptable, they still lack strong classroom interaction and control skills. Graduates themselves have a high perception of preparedness, with 57.3% feeling very well prepared and 36.0% well prepared. Their strongest perceived area is child development knowledge (74.7%), showing confidence in theoretical understanding.

Metrine Sulungai, Dinah Were & Ahmed Wangara
 SKILL GAPS, STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING
 THE EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER ADAPTABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
 DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) GRADUATES IN KENYA

However, practical teaching skills are less recognized (5.3%), indicating awareness gaps between theory and practice.

The main challenge graduates face in securing employment is limited job opportunities (60.0%), followed by low salary expectations (20.0%) and high competition (13.3%). This highlights that unemployment is driven more by structural labour market constraints than individual competence alone. Finally, a significant majority (86.7%) believe that current ECDE policies are not effective in promoting employability, indicating dissatisfaction with policy implementation and support systems. Only 8.0% view them as effective, while none consider them very effective.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percenta
Employer rating of ECDE graduate competence	Very competent	23	30.7%
	Competent	45	60.0%
	Moderately competent	4	5.3%
	Not competent	3	4.0%
	Total	75	100%
What employers value most when hiring	Teaching experience	9	12.0%
	Academic qualification	57	76.0%
	Professional conduct	4	5.3%
	ICT competence	5	6.7%
	Total	75	100%
Satisfaction with practical skills of ECDE graduates	Very satisfied	64	85.3%
	Satisfied	5	6.7%
	Slightly satisfied	3	4.0%
	Not satisfied	3	4.0%
	Total	75	100%
Main employer concern about ECDE graduates	Classroom management skills	32	42.7%
	Communication skills	33	44.0%
	ICT skills	5	6.7%
	Curriculum knowledge	5	6.7%
	Total	75	100%
Graduates' perception of preparedness	Very well prepared	43	57.3%
	Well prepared	27	36.0%
	Slightly prepared	5	6.7%
	Not prepared	0	0.0%
	Total	75	100%
Graduates' strongest area	Child development knowledge	56	74.7%
	Practical teaching skills	4	5.3%
	Communication skills	15	20.0%
	Total	75	100%
Main challenge in securing ECDE employment	Limited job opportunities	45	60.0%
	High competition	10	13.3%
	Lack of experience	5	6.7%
	Low salary expectations	15	20.0%
	Total	75	100%
Effectiveness of	Very effective	0	0.0%

Metrine Sulungai, Dinah Were & Ahmed Wangara
 SKILL GAPS, STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING
 THE EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER ADAPTABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
 DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION (ECDE) GRADUATES IN KENYA

ECDE policies in promoting employability	Effective	6	8.0%
	Slightly effective	4	5.3%
	Not effective	65	86.7%
	Total	75	100%

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that ECDE graduate employability in Kenya is significantly influenced by the alignment between university training and labour market requirements. While ECDE graduates demonstrate adequate theoretical knowledge and positive perceptions of their preparedness, there are persistent gaps in essential practical teaching skills such as lesson planning, child assessment, classroom management, and differentiated instruction. It is further concluded that the dominance of theoretical training over practical exposure is a major contributor to skill deficiencies among ECDE graduates. Limited teaching practice opportunities, inadequate mentorship, and insufficient collaboration between training institutions and schools have weakened the development of job-ready competencies.

The study also concludes that there is a noticeable mismatch between ECDE training outcomes and employer expectations. Although employers generally view ECDE graduates as competent, they express concerns regarding communication skills and classroom management abilities, indicating partial alignment between training and workplace demands. In addition, ECDE graduate unemployment remains a significant challenge, with many graduates either unemployed, working outside the education sector, or engaging in self-employment. This suggests that labour market absorption capacity within the ECDE sector is limited and does not fully match the increasing number of trained graduates.

Finally, the study concludes that existing ECDE policies are not sufficiently effective in enhancing graduate employability. Weak implementation mechanisms, limited practical training support, and inadequate integration of industry needs into curriculum design continue to hinder the production of fully employable ECDE graduates. Overall, the study concludes that improving ECDE graduate employability in Kenya requires stronger integration of practical training, enhanced school–institution partnerships, and better alignment of curricula with evolving labour market demands.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the employability and career adaptability of ECDE graduates in Kenya. First, ECDE training institutions should strengthen practical training components within the curriculum. This can be achieved by increasing the duration and quality of teaching practice, ensuring structured mentorship during school attachments, and exposing trainees to real classroom environments. This will help bridge the gap between

theoretical knowledge and practical teaching competencies. Second, universities and teacher training colleges should enhance collaboration with ECDE centres and employers. Strong school–institution partnerships will ensure that training programs are aligned with labour market needs and that students acquire relevant skills such as classroom management, differentiated instruction, and child assessment practices.

Third, the study recommends curriculum review and reform to better align ECDE training with current educational demands. The curriculum should place greater emphasis on competency-based training, ICT integration in early childhood education, communication skills, and learner-centred pedagogical approaches. Fourth, the government and relevant education authorities should address the issue of limited employment opportunities for ECDE graduates. This may include increasing public investment in ECDE centres, creating more teaching positions, and supporting private sector participation in early childhood education service provision.

Fifth, ECDE graduates should be encouraged to embrace entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities within the education sector, such as establishing private ECDE centres. This requires support through access to funding, training in educational management, and business development skills. Finally, education policymakers should strengthen policy implementation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that ECDE training standards are effectively enforced. Continuous professional development programs should also be introduced to support graduates in upgrading their skills and adapting to changing labour market demands. Overall, the implementation of these recommendations will enhance the employability, professional competence, and career adaptability of ECDE graduates in Kenya.

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Kirui, C. C. (2024). Determinants Of the Choice of Teaching-Learning Methods in Early Childhood Development and Primary Education in Mount Elgon Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya [PhD Thesis]. University of Eldoret. Retrieved from <http://erepository.uoeld.ac.ke/handle/123456789/2261>
- Kobugabe Rwomushana, L. (2024). Skill Gap and Employability of Higher Education Graduates in Uganda. Retrieved from <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/9175832/file/9175833.pdf>
- Kogo, L. (2019). Challenges facing the devolution of early childhood education programmes in Kenya: A study of Nandi County public ECDE centers [PhD Thesis]. University of Eldoret. Retrieved from <http://erepository.uoeld.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/1241/LYDIAH%20KOGO.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Mutembei, L. N. (2024). The Nexus between Institutional Factors and Development of Employability Skills of Technical Training Institutions Graduates in Meru County, Kenya [PhD Thesis]. KeMU. Retrieved from <http://repository.kemu.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/1811/Ndumba%20Final%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Ochieng, P. (2025). Enhancing Lifelong Learning and Graduate Employability in Teacher Education Programs: ADDIE Framework Approach. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO*, 5(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v12n4p91>
- Siringi, E. (2025). Putting Skills First: Analysis of Kenyan Universities' Preparedness in Shaping Graduates Skills Knowledge for Employability. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5228458
- Sitati, E. M., Bota, K., & Mwangi, N. (2014). The role of stakeholders in professional development of ECE teachers in Kakamega County, Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice* 5(30). Retrieved from <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/viewFile/16648/17022>
- Ssewanyana, D., Martin, M.-C., Angwenyi, V., Kabue, M., Proulx, K., Zhang, L., Malti, T., Njoroge, E., Nasambu, C., Marangu, J., & others. (2023). Stakeholders' perspectives of enablers and barriers to successfully implementing an integrated early childhood development program in an informal urban settlement in Kenya. *Sage Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231208986>