

Factors Impeding Implementation of Education Policies in the Pre-schools in Mokhotlong

Malikoro Alleta Tiela, Isaiah M. Makhetha

Thuto-Ke-Leseli Primary School

P. O. Box 4047 Seababeng 104 Lesotho

National University of Lesotho

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Foundations

P. O. Roma 180 Lesotho

Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether variables such as shortage of qualified teachers and lack of parental involvement in the education of their children impede implementation of education policies as well as establishing the challenges which hamper implementation of education policies. In this study, we adapted a mixed methods research design comprising quantitative and qualitative research representations. The population for the study was 51 people. The sample for quantitative part of the study was 34 respondents while that of the qualitative study was also 34 participants. The results of this investigation revealed that shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policies. The study also revealed that lack of parental involvement in the education of their children does not affect implementation of education policies. Finally, the findings of this study showed that factors such as imposition of policies on a target population, lack of supervision as well as poor infrastructure hamper implementation of education policies. On the basis of the results of this study, it was concluded that shortage of qualified teachers is a variable which impedes implementation of education policies and also that imposition of policies on people as well as poor infrastructure hamper implementation of education policies.

Key words: Challenges; impeding; implementation; policy; early; childhood; care; pre-schools;

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays an important role in the development of children's intellectual abilities since it enhances their maturity in expressing creative ideas (Ghazali, Alias, & Nasri, 2023). ECE does this by enabling children to participate in various educational programmes and activities (Ghazali et al., 2023). The early years of the children's lives, from birth to 5 years of age, are considered to be an appropriate period in which their development, sense of identity, health, learning, safety, resilience and happiness can be positively influenced (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024).

ECE is a foundation of children's learning and as such it facilitates their acquisition of skills as they grow up (Kalinde, Mambwe, Sichula & Kaluba, 2024). In many countries including Lesotho, provision of ECE takes both formal and informal learning (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022; Kalinde et al., 2024). In this regard, formal ECE relates to school-based learning through which children receive formal education normally guided by the teachers which from this perspective, ECE programmes are usually designed specifically for children of different age groups and provided in the settings such as nursery schools, day-care, pre-schools and kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022; Kalinde et al., 2024). In the context of informal learning, ECE entails part of a everyday life of a child, within the family and community contexts (Kalinde et al., 2024). The family, particularly, parents and caregivers play a primary role as first teachers to facilitate and support the development of a child (Kalinde et al., 2024).

Early childhood education has emerged as the most important feature on the global education agenda which consequently triggered enormous interest among development agencies, international organisations and

governments (Kalinde et al., 2024). For example, the conference for Education for All, which was launched in the early 1990s, involved various international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank (World Bank, 2000). Lesotho signed the World Declaration on Education for All, which was adopted in Thailand in 1990 and set an overall vision which universalises access to education for all (World Bank, 2000). It is in the light of this interest that the Ministry of Education and Training formulated the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). Consequently, the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPIECD) is consistent with Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because it strives to give Basotho children the opportunity to attend school freely at the reception classes that are attached to primary schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016).

The main goal behind the formulation and implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development is to ensure that Basotho children attain Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD) services that are of high quality which can enable them to acquire better foundation skills (Ministry of Education and Training, 2013:61). In line with this, the policy intends to promote the stabilised growth and learning for each learner in a favourable, empowering and appealing surrounding that shapes and prepares them for primary education schooling (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016). However, due to the extreme rate of poverty, especially in the highlands, learners end up having a negative attitude towards schooling. They normally dropout of school even before transiting into primary education. We suspect that this problem is a result of inefficient and ineffective implementation of this policy. Therefore, this investigation endeavours to establish factors which impede a successful implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in the pre-schools in Mokhotlong.

Statement of the problem

Implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development started in 2013, yet the quality of pre-school education still declines, especially in the rural areas of Lesotho. Pre-school learners face some problems in acquiring foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. Mwaipopo (2019) notes that destitute learners in the rural areas are disadvantaged in matters relating to access and quality education. Glass, Bynner and Chapman (2020) support this view by arguing that the needs of young people in the rural areas are often 'invisible' meaning that they are taken for granted because their geographies are viewed by society at large as 'idyllic', 'natural' and 'peaceful' rural settings. This impacts negatively on learners' academic performance as they continue with their learning. Learners who have poor foundation skills tend to have negative attitudes towards schooling which resultantly sometime leads to poor academic performance then consequently to dropout. In a nutshell, this situation may force some learners to abandon school at a very young age, thus, even before completing their primary education. This state of affairs, may lead to a situation in which young people resort to improper ways of living, such as herding which is common in Mokhotlong where male learners are hired out to look after livestock or they engage in crime. Female learners, on the other hand, might resort to early marriages with some becoming domestic workers, thus increasing the rate of dependency in Lesotho.

Ineffective implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development may result in a number of problematic outcomes. English and Sesotho are the official languages in Lesotho and as such, learners who are unable to read and write English and Sesotho properly might encounter problems in their lives. They might fail to be absorbed into the institutions of higher learning as English and Sesotho are core subjects that learners are expected to master in order to secure their admission into tertiary institutions. In addition, learners may not secure proper jobs to support their families in the future. Likewise, learners who lack numerical skills or basic mathematics would also be hindered to reach their full potential in life. This is because without proper knowledge of mathematics, it is not easy for learners to study courses that require knowledge of mathematics such as engineering. Conclusively, poor implementation of this policy has a negative impact on learners' progress with their learning. While a proper implementation of policy is crucial to effect a smooth transition of children from the pre-school to the primary level of education, we are not aware of the studies which investigate the challenges which hinder effective

implementation of national education policies in the basic education sector in Lesotho. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to fill that gap.

Objectives of the study

This investigation aims at achieving the following objectives:

- Evaluate whether shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policy.
- Determine whether lack of parental involvement impedes implementation of education policy.
- Establish challenges which hinder the implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in the pre-schools in Mokhotlong.

Research hypotheses

The following statistical hypotheses were tested in this investigation:

- Shortage of qualified teachers does not impede implementation of education policy.
- Lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy.

Research question

This study seeks to answer the following research question:

- Which challenges are hindering the implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in the pre-schools in Mokhotlong?

Literature review

A review of literature addresses the following areas:

- Shortage of qualified teachers as a variable that impedes implementation of education policy.
- Lack of parental involvement as a variable which impedes implementation of education policy.
- Challenges hindering implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development.

In this section, literature review covers shortage of qualified teachers as a variable that impedes implementation of education policy. Researchers view shortage of qualified teachers as a critical problem which impedes implementation of education policies (Ikechukwu & Chukwuemeka, 2013; Ramteke, 2024). In this case, Chukwuemeka (2013) records that lack of qualified teachers, especially relating to expertise and skilled attributes, leads to failure of effective policy implementation. Thus, Chukwuemeka (2013) substantiates this view by indicating that children are special and, therefore, deserve to be taught by teachers who are more knowledgeable and having special skills to guide them. Ramteke (2024) supports this stance by arguing that implementation of education policies is hindered by a lack of skilled human resources. Teachers should be in a position to identify children who are shy and help the extroverts to participate during teaching and learning sessions, all of which are the requirements for an effective implementation of education policies (Chukwuemeka, 2013).

In support of Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka (2013) and Chukwbikem (2013), Mwaipopo (2019) attests that teachers with high levels of education, especially in the specialised fields, are capable of implementing policies appropriately compared to those with lower education. For instance, in the rural areas, most of the pre-school teachers are unqualified and as such, they lack expertise which is a barrier that hampers them from implementing educational policies effectively and efficiently (Mwaipopo, 2017). In the same manner, Okoro (2020) argues that requisite manpower and expertise are needed in order to effectively implement policies. Specifically, Okoro (2020) indicates that lack of expertise impedes policy implementers from executing their duties effectively.

Lack of parental involvement in the educational activities of the children, is considered as the other variable which impedes implementation of education policies (Fioriello, 2024). It is observed that children whose parents are not actively taking a leading role in guiding them in the activities related to schoolwork, generally perform poorly in nearly every sphere of life (Fioriello, 2024). That is, lack of parental involvement in the education of children impacts negatively on children's cognition, developmental skills, rational skills, emotional skills and social skills (Fioriello, 2024). Non-participation of parents in their children's education, denies them opportunities of learning important values such as respect for teachers and humility (Fioriello, 2024). In a nutshell, Fioriello (2024) observes that lack of parents' involvement in

children's education hinders a smooth implementation of education policies while, on the other hand, collaboration between parents and teachers fosters the academic and personal success of learners which eventually results in effective implementation of education policies. This argument is also supported by Motshusi, Ngobeni and Sepeng (2024). lack of involvement of parents in school activities hinders efforts to actualise the implementation of education policies which in turn leads to poor performance of learners (Motshusi et al., 2024).

With regard to the challenges that impede implementation of education policies, scholars observe a number of such challenges (Ajulor, 2018; Selepe, 2023). According to Ajulor (2018), one of these challenges is an imposition of the policies by a government on a target group without their involvement during a period of drafting of the concerned policies. Thus, Ajulor (2018) is of a view that when the target group is not given an opportunity to contribute in policy formulation, such a policy will face problems during its implementation. Selepe (2023), also, avers that imposition of the policies by a government on the target group is a barrier that hinders implementation of policies. Selepe (2023) notes that failure to get the target beneficiaries to participate in the policy process does not only impede policy implementation but it also violates the constitutional rights of the relevant stakeholders. It is further argued that lack of consultation between the government and relevant stakeholders can lead to non-compliance on the part of the target group (Selepe, 2023).

Lack of adequate financial resources is considered as the other problem which hampers implementation of education policies (Mwaipopo, 2019). Mwaipopo (2019) further points out that in the less developed countries, public financial support allocated to the pre-schools is only 1% of their national education budget. This becomes an obstacle which inhibits proper execution of pre-school activities (Mwaipopo, 2019). Okoro (2020) also supports this view and argues that most governments in the developing countries do not allocate enough funds for the implementation of policies which makes it difficult to implement policies. Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021) also reiterate that inadequate funding is one of the major problems that hinder the implementation of education policies.

The rural pre-schools are affected by poor infrastructure which is not conducive to effective teaching and learning (Mugambi, 2017). This is another problem that hinders an implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in the rural pre-schools of Lesotho. To this effect, Mugambi (2017) records that the less developed countries are lagging behind and do not consider infrastructure as one of their developmental priorities. According to Mugambi (2017) this condition impedes effective implementation of education policies. Mwaipopo (2019) also notes that in the less developed countries, early childhood centres, especially those located in the rural areas, are facing a challenge of poor infrastructure. Poor infrastructure that lacks appropriate facilities and equipment hampers execution of teaching and learning services which in turn hinders effective implementation of the education policies (Mwaipopo, 2019).

Materials and methods

This section highlights the methodological issues which the researchers adapted in this study. The issues are dealt with in detail in the subsequent sections.

Research approach

In this study, the researchers adapted a mixed methods research approach comprising quantitative and qualitative research representations. This approach is a methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative research methodologies within a single investigation (Ahmed, Pereira, & Kimberly, 2024). A mixed methods research approach was adapted for a purpose of combining the strengths of these two methodologies, with a view to triangulate data, validate findings and gain deeper insights into a research problem under investigation (Ahmed et al., 2024). This approach allowed us to explore diverse perspectives which consequently enabled us to collect rich data that called for an analysis of textual data alongside numerical data (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Population and sample

The population for this study comprised 51 people. The sample for the quantitative part of the study comprised 34 respondents (17 principals and 17 reception class teachers) while that of the qualitative study

was also made of 34 participants (17 reception class teachers and 17 parents). In either case, the sample was drawn from the population using purposive sampling.

Data collection

Data for the quantitative study were generated through a use of a questionnaire. This instrument had been developed by the researchers. Specifically, this tool was employed to collect data on the following measures:

- Shortage of qualified teachers as a variable that impedes implementation of education policy.
- Lack of parental involvement as a variable that hampers implementation of education policy.

Data for the qualitative study were collected through a use of the focused group discussions. This tool generated data on measure of the challenges that hinder implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development. Once more, this instrument had been developed by the researchers. The validity and reliability of the two instruments mentioned above, were ascertained through a pilot study in which five teachers and five parents were engaged. The outcome of the pilot study revealed effectiveness of the validity and reliability of the instruments.

Data analysis and results

The aim of analysing data was to determine whether shortage of qualified teachers is a variable that impedes implementation of education policy and also to establish whether lack of parental involvement is a variable that hampers implementation of education policy. In this regard, the following statistical hypotheses were tested:

- H_0 : Shortage of qualified teachers does not impede implementation of education policy.
- H_0 : Lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy.

Data were analysed using a chi-square test (χ^2). The following chi-square formula was used to test the two hypotheses mentioned above:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{n(f_o - f_e)}{f_e}$$

For the purpose of data analysis, using the chi-square, we presented data in contingency tables where:

χ^2 was the chi-square statistic.

\sum was the sum of all cells in the problem.

n was the number of total observations in the columns.

f_o was the proportion of observed frequencies in the cells.

f_e was the proportion of expected frequencies in the rows.

chi-square test

First null hypothesis tested:

- H_0 : Shortage of qualified teachers does not impede implementation of education policy.

In testing the first statistical hypothesis, two important procedures were observed, which entail calculation of the expected frequencies (f_e) and computation of a chi-square (χ^2) statistic. For a purpose of promoting the readers' appreciation of quantitative research techniques, these procedures are highlighted in detail in the subsequent sections of this study.

Computation of expected frequencies (f_e)

For the researchers to be able to compute the chi-square statistic (χ^2) value, the expected frequencies (f_e) for each of the six (6) were computed. The following formula was then used to compute the expected frequencies (f_e):

$$f_e = \frac{(\sum f \text{ column}) (\sum f \text{ row})}{\text{Grand total}}$$

Where

f_e was expected frequency

(Σf column) sum of scores in the column categories

(Σf row) sum of scores in the row categories

Grand total was sum of all totals in the categories

$$\frac{(12)(17)}{34} = 6$$

$$\frac{(12)(8)}{34} = 2$$

$$\frac{(12)(9)}{34} = 3$$

$$\frac{(22)(17)}{34} = 11$$

$$\frac{(22)(8)}{34} = 5$$

$$\frac{(22)(9)}{34} = 5$$

The chi-square statistic (χ^2)

For a purpose of concluding whether shortage of qualified teachers is a variable that impedes implementation of education policy, a χ^2 value was calculated using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{n(f_o - f_e)}{f_e}$$

A summary of the results of a chi-square analysis is presented in Table 1. In this table, 10.954 is a chi-square (χ^2) statistic. This value was calculated by using the data which were collected from a sample of 34 teachers. A chi-square (χ^2) statistic is a measure of a difference between the observed and expected frequencies of the outcomes of a set of events or variables (Hayes, 2022).

Table 1: Computation of a χ^2 value (chi-square statistic)

f_o	f_e	$(f_o - f_e)$	$(f_o - f_e)^2$	$(f_o - f_e)^2 \div f_e$
2	6	- 4	16	2.667
5	2	3	9	4.5
5	3	2	4	1.333
15	11	4	16	1.454
3	5	- 2	4	0.8
4	5	- 1	1	0.2
Calculated value	χ^2			10.954

Note: Table 1 is a simplified version of the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{n(f_o - f_e)}{f_e}$$

As reflected in Table 1, the chi-square analysis yielded the chi-square (χ^2) statistic of 10.954. This value was then used with the degree of freedom (df) in the research problem where $df = (\text{rows} - 1)(\text{columns} - 1)$, rows and columns being the number of categories in the frequency distribution. In this instance, $df = (2-1)(3-1) = 2$. In testing the first statistical hypothesis, the researchers located the critical value of 9.21, in the chi-square distribution table by using the $df = (2-1)(3-1) = 2$ and the p-value = 0.01. When the chi-square statistic (10.954) was compared with the critical value (9.21), the results revealed that the chi-square statistic was greater than the critical value ($10.954 > 9.21$). Since the chi-square statistic of 10.954 is greater than the critical value of 9.21, it was concluded that shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policy. Thus, the research hypothesis (H_1) was retained and the statistical hypothesis (H_0) which states that shortage of qualified teachers does not impede implementation of education policy was rejected. Conclusively, this study reveals that shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policy. This finding is consistent with that of the qualitative part of this study, presented in Table 2.

Shortage of qualified teachers and implementation of education policy

In support of the outcomes of the chi-square analysis presented in Table 1, qualitatively analysed data, confirm that shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policy. This point is demonstrated by the findings reported in Table 2. In this regard, 50% of the respondents suggested this point. Many reasons were stated in support of this argument, for example, respondent number 25 (R25) explained, "*shortage of qualified teachers does not only threaten learners' ability to learn but it also reduces teachers' effectiveness to implement education policies*".

Table 2: Impact of shortage of qualified teachers on policy implementation

Responses	Frequencies			Percentages
	Principals	Teachers	Totals	
Yes	2	15	17	50
No	5	3	8	24
Undecided	5	4	9	26
Totals	12	22	34	100

Second null hypothesis tested:

- H_0 : Lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy.

Procedurally, the first step of conducting a chi-square analysis entails calculation of the expected frequencies and in this instance, the readers are referred to a subsequent section.

Computation of expected frequencies (f_e)

The following formula was used to calculate the expected frequencies (f_e) and the outcomes are presented below:

$$f_e = \frac{(\Sigma f \text{ column})(\Sigma f \text{ row})}{\text{Grand total}}$$

$$\frac{(13)(17)}{34} = 6$$

$$\frac{(13)(9)}{34} = 3$$

$$\frac{(13)(8)}{34} = 3$$

$$\frac{(21)(17)}{34} = 10$$

$$\frac{(21)(9)}{34} = 5$$

$$\frac{(21)(8)}{34} = 4$$

The chi-square statistic (χ^2)

In analysing data in relation to the second hypothesis, a chi-square analysis was carried out to determine a measure of a difference between the observed and expected frequencies. A summary of the results of a chi-square analysis is presented in Table 3. In this table, 5.7 is a chi-square (χ^2) statistic. This value which was calculated using the data which were collected from 34 respondents.

Table 3: Computation of a χ^2 value (chi-square statistic)

f_o	f_e	$(f_o - f_e)$	$(f_o - f_e)^2$	$(f_o - f_e)^2 \div f_e$
5	6	- 1	1	0.167
6	3	3	9	3

2	3	- 1	1	0.333
12	10	2	4	0.4
3	5	- 2	4	0.8
6	4	2	4	1
Calculated value χ^2				5.7

Note: Table 3 is a simplified version of this formula: $\chi^2 = \sum \frac{n(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$

Referring to Table 3, the chi-square analysis yielded the chi-square (χ^2) statistic of 5.7. This value was, therefore, used with the degree of freedom (df) in the research problem where $df = (\text{rows} - 1)(\text{columns} - 1)$, rows and columns being the number of categories in the frequency distribution. In which case, $df = (2-1)(3-1) = 2$. In testing the second statistical hypothesis, we located the critical value of 5.99, in the chi-square distribution table by using the $df = (2-1)(3-1) = 2$ and the $p\text{-value} = 0.05$. When the chi-square statistic (5.7) was compared with the critical value (5.99), the results revealed that the chi-square statistic was less than the critical value ($5.7 < 5.99$). Since the chi-square statistic of 5.7 is less than the critical value of 5.99, it was concluded that lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy. Meaning, the statistical hypothesis (H_0) was retained and the research hypothesis (H_1) which states that lack of parental involvement impedes implementation of education policy was rejected. This finding is inconsistent with the finding of the qualitative part of this study, presented in Table 4.

Lack of parental involvement and implementation of education policy

Contrary to the findings of the chi-square analysis presented in Table 3, qualitatively analysed data, show that lack of parental involvement impedes implementation of education policy.

Table 4: Effect of lack of parental involvement on policy implementation

Responses	Frequencies			Percentages
	Parents	Teachers	Totals	
Yes	6	12	18	52
No	5	3	8	24
Undecided	2	6	8	24
Totals	13	21	34	100

As recorded in Table 4, 52% of the participants reported that lack of parental involvement impedes implementation of education policy. In support of this claim, participant number 6 (P6) professed, “*policy implementation is a joint venture which calls for a participation of both parents and teachers. Lack of collaboration between these two groups is a stumbling block which hampers effective implementation of education policies*”. However, on the one hand, 24% of the participants indicted that lack of parental involvement does not affect education policy implementation while on the other hand, the other 24% of the participants declared that they were not sure whether lack of parental involvement has any impact on policy implementation.

A research question answered

The following research question was answered and data in response to it are presented in Figure 1.

- Which challenges are hindering the implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in the pre-schools in Mokhotlong?

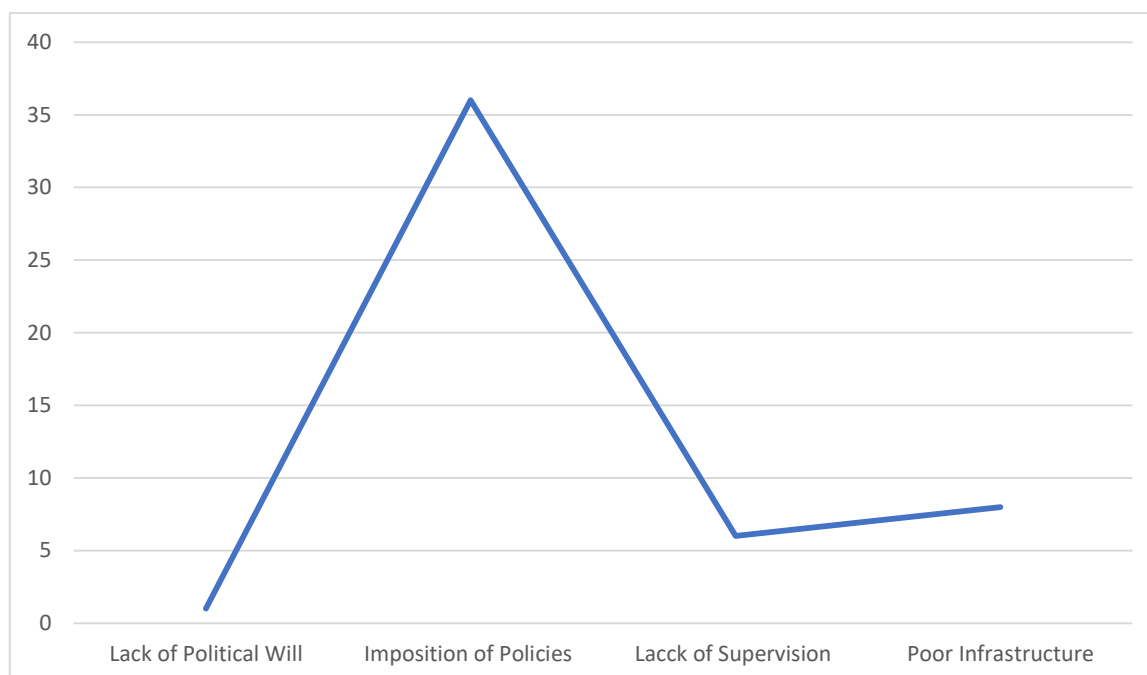


Figure 1: Challenges hindering the implementation of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development in preschools

Referring to Figure 1, a number of challenges which impede implementation of education policy are identified and they range from lack of political will to poor infrastructure. According to the information presented in this figure, lack of political will, seems to be an insignificant challenge that hampers policy implementation as this point was suggested by just one person. On the one hand, the majority of the participants (36 people), were agreeable that imposition of policies on a target population was a great challenge which hampers policy implementation. It is also worth mentioning that lack of supervision and poor infrastructure impede implementation of education policies. These issues were noted by 6 and 8 people respectively.

Discussions and conclusions

This investigation adapted a mixed methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods. In the first place, as reflected in Tables 1 and 2, both the findings of the quantitative ($10.954 > 9.21$ as depicted in Table 1) and qualitative (50% of the respondents as shown in Table 2) studies, reveal that shortage of qualified teachers impedes implementation of education policy. On the basis of this consistency between the results of these two studies, it is concluded that shortage of qualified teachers is a variable which impacts implementation of education policies negatively.

In the second instance, there is a disparity between the results of the quantitative ($5.7 < 5.99$, refer to Table 3) and qualitative (52% refer to Table 4) studies. The result of the quantitative study depicts that lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy while the finding of the qualitative study illustrates that lack of parental involvement impedes implementation of education policy. Despite the disparity between the findings of the quantitative and qualitative investigations, I suggest that for this particular study, lack of parental involvement does not impede implementation of education policy. My argument is based on Ghanad's observation that quantitative research is preferred over qualitative research because it is more scientific and objective due to its reliance on the use of numbers (Ghanad, 2023). Moreover, on the same matter, Ahmad (2024) argues as follows:

Quantitative research provides an unbiased study report by utilising standard frameworks and assessment standards while remaining impartial and unbiased.

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