Family Structure And Quality Of Pre-Primary School Education In Machakos County, Kenya

Helen Musyoka
Prof. Catherine G. Murungi
Dr. Ong'ang'a H.M Ouko

Abstract

In Kenya's Machakos County, there are still considerable gaps in enrollment as only 3 out of 10 preschool children are in school, which highlights the necessity of improving early childhood education as a top priority. The study assessed the influence of family structure on quality of pre-primary education. The study was grounded on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The study employed mixed method approach where descriptive and correlational designs were utilized. The target population was 56 public and private pre-primary school centers in Machakos County. The collection of data was done using structured questionnaires and interview guides, and the analysis was performed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics mean, standard deviation, percentage, and inferential statistics regression and correlation analysis were used in analyzing quantitative data. Results were presented in tables and graphs, and qualitative insights were conveyed through verbatim quotes and descriptions. The research indicated a very strong correlation between family structure and pre-primary education quality. Family structure positively influenced education and child's development. Qualitative insights indicated that low-income households take out children from school, and they emphasized that the child should have a supportive home and the parents' assistance at the same time. The study then concludes that a friendly and supportive home environment along with strong family structures is the major factors to improve the quality of pre-primary education.

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I.   Introduction

High-quality early childhood education (ECE) is the pillar of lifelong learning and the foundation of the education system's overall efficiency and the society's general welfare (Pelletier et al., 2025). The best early childhood education programs (ECE) are the ones that eventually turn out to be the best investments in society and the economy while encompassing all the human rights aspects of children's education and being the key inputs for the drawing up of new human capital (Pelletier et al., 2025). The value of quality pre-school education is the predictor of exceptionally performance well cognitively, socially, and emotionally for future academic succession the contrary, children with poor early educational experiences suffer not only from being unprepared for school but also from being future poor with limited life opportunities (Xiao, 2025). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is such that there is very little access to quality pre-primary education due mainly to underfunding, socio-economic inequalities and resources that are not equally distributed (UNICEF (2024). The home environment in this context has a substantial influence on children's readiness for school. Family arrangement has been linked to access to educational resources determining the extent of children's first learning process and eventually their ability to benefit from ECE programs.

In Kenya, early childhood education is not only a crucial part of the education system but also a major factor in the success of the (CBC) implementation. With the government's change from the 8:4:4 systems to the 2:6:3: 3:3curriculums, the focus is now on students' capabilities, active participation in learning, and comprehensive care for the child (Mwita, 2023). The early years of schooling are expected to build up the essential skills that will make the transition to and success in primary education smooth. Nonetheless, the pre-primary education sector in Kenya is greatly affected by the domestic atmosphere. Parents' encouragement, economic situation, learning resources, and family support are some of the factors that determine the extent of children's readiness for school and their responsiveness to the new curriculum (Kubai, 2024). Machakos County is characterized by a diverse socioeconomic picture with its urban and rural populations and a poverty incidence of approximately 35.6% (Machakos County Government, 2022). It is this very diversity that in turn manifests itself through the imbalanced distribution of educational resources and the variations in the learning conditions at homes. The family unit which can be a nuclear, extended, or single-parent type, together with the different

levels of family support play a critical role in accessing of qualified teachers, adequate teachers resources and accepted teacher-student ratio for quality education in of pre-primary schools.

Problem Statement

In improving the quality of education in preschools, family structure is very significant. Parents' involvement is one of the responsibilities for realizing the best quality in education (Zhang & Lau, 2024). Family structure represents one of the most fundamental influences on children's early educational development, shaping their ability to interact, communicate, and form relationships (Xie et al., 2023). Preschool learners come from family settings that are diverse, where a learner may come from a complete nuclear family, adopted, single parent where Specifically, there is a lack of knowledge about the joint impact of family structure on the quality of pre-primary education. Studies done on family structure Xiao, 2025; Oluoch and Mbirithi, (2024) have all pointed out that parental income, education, and household composition play a critical role in determining quality of education in pre schools.

Contemporary family structures in Kenya have become increasingly diverse, including nuclear families, extended families, single-parent households, and blended families (Boh et al., 2023). Each structure presents unique opportunities for children's social development. Research consistently demonstrates that family environments serve as a determinant of quality of preprimary education quality (Su-Russell & Russell, 2023). Family structures are particularly diverse and linked to quality of learning in preprimary schools. Despite the recognized importance of family influence on child development, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how specific family structures affect quality of preprimary quality education in Machakos county Kenyan preschools centers. To be more specific, there has not been any thorough research conducted in Machakos County that systematically investigated how family structure, influence the quality of pre-primary education.

II. Theoretical Framework

The ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, serves as the foundational framework for this study. This theory, assumes that a child's development was influenced by a complex interplay of interactions across multiple environmental systems. It was emphasized that kids are not single and stand-alone beings; on the contrary, they are influenced and molded by things around them, like their families and schools, as well as the larger cultural values, laws, and customs in their society (Pelletier et al, 2025). According to the basic premises of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the development occurs through interactions within five overlapping systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each of the systems is different in terms of the level of influence on the child's development, with the microsystem being the closest and thus the most influential. The theory further states that these systems were interdependent, i.e., the alterations or disputes in one system affected the others. This interdependence aspect brings out the need to take into account the wider setting where the children grow and learn as such the theory is considered as a case through which one can study the home environment dynamics with children (Smith, 2025).

The applicability of Bronfenbrenner's theory was apparent when it came to the specific aims of the research. To begin with, the theory made it possible to recommend family structure as a main factor in the quality of preschool education. Different family arrangements can be sources of different emotional and financial support which, in turn, will impact children's readiness and engagement in learning. Secondly, the role of parental involvement was assessed in the context of the microsystem, stressing the point that active participation in education is a positive outcome (Shikwambane, 2023). Thirdly, the influence of family socioeconomic background was interpreted as part of the exosystem where external factors such as income and availability of resources determine one's educational experiences. Lastly, the role of family support systems was again pointed out through children's emotional and practical support, stressing the point that a nurturing environment is very crucial for the best quality education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework given below shows the expected relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The anticipated impact of the interactions between the IV and DV was also presented. The illustration is shown in Figure 1.
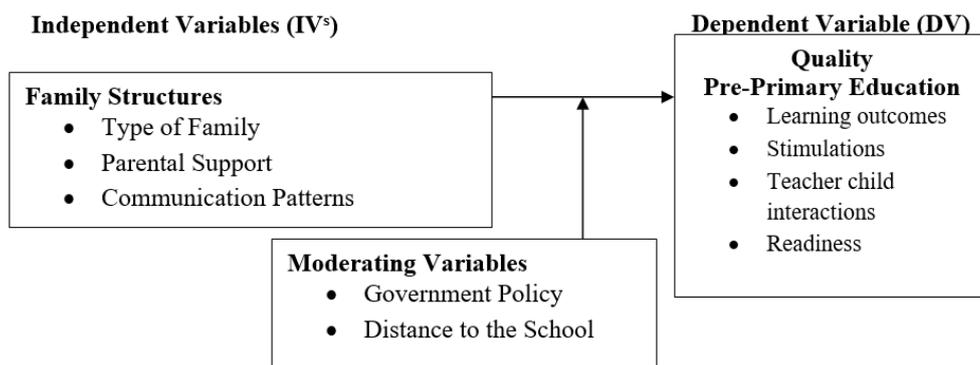
Independent Variables (IVs)

Family Structures
- Type of Family
- Parental Support
- Communication Patterns

Moderating Variables
- Government Policy
- Distance to the School

Dependent Variable (DV)

Quality Pre-Primary Education
- Learning outcomes
- Stimulations
- Teacher child interactions
- Readiness

Figure 1: Conceptual framework Diagram

Family structure and effects on pre-primary quality

Family structure refers to the composition and organization of a household, including nuclear, single-parent, extended, and blended family arrangements. In early childhood education, family structure matters not merely as a household label but through the caregiving stability, emotional climate, routines, and support systems it enables. Children's home-based conditions are the major factors influencing their readiness for structured learning, socio-emotional regulation, and participation in pre-primary classrooms.

The empirical evidence and studies done in the entire world point to the fact that stable caregiving relationships are always the best for very young children in terms of early learning. Ludeke et al. (2021) mentioned in their study that family relational stability significantly correlates with positive childhood developmental outcomes, especially during the early years when children are very much dependent on their caregivers for responsiveness. The study, though not Kenyan, has identified relational mechanisms like consistency, communication, and emotional warmth as being universally relevant to the early childhood context. Nonetheless, the study's principal reliance on self-reported family measures limited its ability to directly assess classroom-level quality, thus demarcating its explanatory power with respect to pre-primary education outcomes. There is a consensus that relational stability is essential but there is a dearth of empirical studies that indicate how particular family structures turn into observable quality indicators in Kenyan pre-primary settings.

Likewise, Otieno and Kariuki (2020) reported from their examination of public ECDE centres in Kisumu County that children from single-parent family backgrounds suffered from poor home-school continuity which in turn had a negative impact on their participation and attention in class. The study was limited by its descriptive design, which although contextually relevant, restricted causal inference. The existing studies in Kenya acknowledge the domain of shortcomings related to one-parent families but do not clearly differentiate the impact of family structure from socio-economic and educational factors. Living with extended family is the norm in Kenya, and they can be a source of both protection and risk. The findings by Njoroge and Gathigia (2019) indicated that when one adult takes on the consistent duty of looking after the child, then that child is never left behind in learning during the pre-primary stage through the influence of the whole family. On the other hand, if there are no clearly defined who does what caregiver's roles, then the child is likely to get inconsistent discipline and limited cognitive stimulation. The study was based on a specific context; however, it did not employ standardized tools for measuring home stimulation, which in turn made its methodological rigor weak. Therefore, there is still a lot of empirical uncertainty around the specific conditions under which extended family structures either enhance or impede the quality of pre-primary education in the Kenyan contexts.

III.   Research Methodology

The research study employed mixed method approach to meet its goals and objectives. The research design also allows triangulation and application of multifaceted data collection and analysis to data analysis. Further mixed method design allows collection of rich data that to be collected in large amounts. In reference to Creswell (2022), for the descriptive research design to be utilized and efficiently, it was a suitable method that will let the researcher get findings and information from the larger group of the population.

The researchers decided to take a descriptive research design to the study variables being characterized, counted, sorted according to the trends and categories. The method provided a vivid picture of the contemporary educational environment in Machakos County by asking questions that focused on the what, where, when, and how. Simultaneously, the correlational research design was applied to disclose the connections among the research variables. Thus, this design was particularly useful in ascertaining the extent of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables and thus being able to make informed predictions and conclusions.

The study deployed mixed-methods approach in this study. It allowed used of multi faceted data analysis techniques in an effort to determine the relationship between family structure and quality of education in preschool in Machakos County, Kenya

The research covered all 78 public and 102 private pre-primary schools (PP1 & PP2) in Machakos County. 270 teachers and caregivers of pre-primary schools were the main respondents of the study. The total number of teachers from the sampled centres was 270, out of which 56 teachers were chosen randomly and invited to take part in the study. Data was collected using structured questionnaire and interview guide as data collection instruments deemed very comprehensive and met the study's objectives. The selection and implementation of research instruments were justified in a very careful way so as to avoid any doubts about the study's credibility and methodological rigor, and to keep it relevant to the question of how the family structure affects pre-primary education quality in Machakos County, Kenya. An observation proforma was utilized to gather direct data regarding the standard of pre-primary school education in the chosen schools. The proforma, which was organized as a checklist, made it possible to methodically observe certain aspects like learning resources in the classroom, students' participation, the interaction between teachers and students, and the overall learning environment.

In the process of assessing the data, it was edited for completeness and coding by using SPSS version 20. It was due to its ease of reviewing and analyzation. Any coded information found, gave data entry and information using SPSS version 20. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods of analysis and review were used in analyzing the findings. In reference to Quantitative data analysis, it involved a generation of percentages, descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies, mean and standard deviations. The data presentation was done using tables, charts and cross tabulations. Tables was used to present responses and ease analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis was applied as supported by (Hoffmann &Nortjé, 2020).that the qualitative data, and it involved rigorous procedures for recognizing, analyzing family structures and quality of education in pre schools in Machakos County.

The study also used inferential statistical techniques, regression and correlation examine the strength of association between variables and relationship between family structures and quality of education in pre schools in Machakos County .which is found between identified variables. The study adopted a regression model $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \varepsilon$ to test the study hypothesis. The study use F-statistics to test whether the hypothesized model was significant at 95% significance level. Examination of variances (ANOVA) or the F-test was utilized to test perfection and fitting of the model that is the general importance of the model parameters. The research hypothesis was tested at 95% level of confidence in order to provide for drawing conclusions

IV. Findings And Discussion

Introduction

The study focused on determining the extent family structure influence quality education in pre schools in Machakos County. Data was collected from 50 teachers out of the 56 questionnaire administered constituting to 89.3% response rate. Most 26 of the respondents had 31-35 years (52%), other 13 of the respondents had 36 years and above 9 (18%) had between 26-30 years while 2(4%) had 20 to 25 years .This demonstrated that respondents were mature in age and in a position to provide information on family structures and quality education in pre schools in Machakos County.During the inquiry into the type of school represented, the majority of the respondents (64%) were in preschools in public sector while 36% (18) were from preschools in private sector providing a broad based view on family structure and quality of education in preschools.

The results revealed that academic qualifications majority 72%,of the respondents have a Diploma in Education, while the minority (28%, or 14 respondents) have a Certificate. The Bachelor's degree or above category constitutes only 10% of the sample which means that most of the educators are equipped with mid-level qualifications. On training level, 60% (30 respondents) have a Diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and 88% have qualifications at or below the Bachelor's level. Accessibility of qualified and trained teachers implied that learners were likely to have quality education in preschools level. This view is further supported by majority of teachers having long period of years in teaching between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience, indicating the professional knowledge is foster provision of quality education in preschools.

Descriptive Statistics
Family structure and effects on pre-primary quality

This objective aimed at identifying the family structure effects on the quality of preschool education in Machakos County, Kenya. The number of respondents' perceptions was summarized by descriptive statistics using mean scores, standard deviations, and sample size (N = 50) for each item measured on a four-point Likert scale. Higher mean values signified stronger agreement with the statements, whereas lower standard deviations signified greater agreement among respondents.

Table 1: Family Structure and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools

Family Structure and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools	SD %	D %	A %	SA %	Mean	St Dev
Parental participation between public and private pre-primary schools	2.0	8.0	76.0	14.0	3.020	.553
It does not matter the type of school when enrolling a child in pre-primary school	16.0	50.0	28.0	6.0	2.240	.7969
Most parent are often concerned about the type of school when enrolling their children in preprimary school	0.0	9.0	60.0	22.0	3.040	.6376
There is more enrolment in public than private pre-primary schools	8.0	12.0	30.0	50.0	3.220	.954
Learning in public schools is of better quality than in private preprimary schools.	4.0	38.0	40.0	18.0	2.7200	.809
Public preprimary schools are preferred to private preschools	0.0	40.0	46.0	14.0	2.740	.694

The findings on family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County are presented in Table 1. Results on item one, 6% of respondents agreed that there was parental participation in public and private pre-primary schools, 14% of the respondents strongly agreed, 8% of the respondents disagreed while 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed. The results clearly exhibit that parental participation in both public and private pre primary schools foster quality education as supported by a mean of 3.020 with a standard deviation of 0.553. Respondents on whether it does not matter the type of school when enrolling a child in pre-primary school, 50% of the respondents disagreed, 28% agreed, 16% strongly disagreed while 6.0% strongly agreed. It was clear that whether in public or private pre schools student is enrolled in quality of education accessed by the learner's key as supported by a mean of 2.240. The results concurred with Njoroge and Gathigia (2019) that adult involvement in children education foster success in learning during the pre-primary stage through the influence of the whole family.

On the extent the respondents agreed on most parents are often concerned about the type of school when enrolling their children in preprimary schools. From the results, 60% of the respondents agreed that most parents were often concerned about the type of school when enrolling their children in preprimary schools, 22.0% strongly agreed while 9.0% disagreed. Majority of the respondent agreed as indicated by a mean of 3.040 and standard deviation of .6376 that indeed .6376 most parent were often concerned about the type of school when enrolling their children in preprimary schools implied the concerns of parent on quality education provided in pre primary schools in Machakos County.From the findings, most 50% of the respondents strongly agreed supported by a mean 3.220 with a standard deviation of 0.954 that there is more enrolment in public than private pre-primary schools,30% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed while 8.0% strongly disagreed that there is more enrolment in public than private pre-primary schools.

The results on the extent respondents agreed that learning in public schools is of better quality than in private preprimary schools. 40% agreed, 38% disagreed, 18% strongly agreed while 8.0% strongly agreed. The results clearly respondents agreed as supported by a mean of 2.740 with a standard deviation of 0.809 that learning in public schools is of better quality than in private preprimary schools. The results on the extent respondents agreed on public preprimary schools are preferred to private preschools, 46.0% agreed, 14.0% strongly agreed while 40.0% disagreed. This clearly indicated that respondents prefer public preschools as indicated by a mean of 2.740 with a standard deviation of 0.694 which signified social economic background of families as private preschools are regarded as expensive.

Table 2: Teacher-learner and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools

Teacher-learner ratio Quality Education in Preprimary Schools	SD %	D %	A %	SA %	Mean	St Dev
All pre-primary schools have adequate staffing	36.0	42.0	10.0	12.0	1.980	.979
Most schools have optimal teacher child-ration of 1:25	18.0	44.0	30.0	8.0	2.280	.858
Most pre-schools have a high teacher child ratio of above 1:40	16.0	6.0	58.0	20.0	2.820	.941
Teacher-ratio is a consideration when enrolling pupils	2.0	44.0	50.0	4.0	2.560	.611
High teach-child ratio affects access, participation and quality of Pre-primary school education in the county.	0.0	4.0	92.0	4.0	3.000	.286

The findings on teacher-learner ratio and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County are presented in Table 1. Results on item one, 42% of respondents disagreed that all pre-primary schools have adequate staffing, 36% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 12% of the respondents strongly agreed while 10% of the respondents agreed. The results clearly exhibit that preschools experience under staffing affecting quality education as supported by a mean of 1.980 with a standard deviation of 0.979.Results on most schools have optimal teacher child-ration of 1:25, most 44% of the respondents disagreed, 30.0 % agreed, 18% of the

respondents strongly disagreed while 8.0% strongly agreed. This implied that teacher-child ration of 1.25 has not been attained as supported by a mean of 2.280 and standard deviation of .858. The results in Table 2, most 58% of the respondents agreed that most pre-schools have a high teacher child ratio of above 1:40, 20.0% strongly agreed, 16.0% strongly disagreed while 6.0% disagreed. This demonstrated that the teacher-kind ration of 1:40 is the present cases hindering quality of education in preschools centers as supported by a mean of 2.820 and standard deviation of 0. 941.The respondents 50.0% agreed that teacher-ratio is a consideration when enrolling pupils, 44.0% disagreed, 4.0% strongly agreed while 2.0% strongly disagreed clearly demonstrating that teacher ratio is a factor to consider while enrolling preschool learners as supported by a mean of 2.560 and 0.611. This clearly indicated that teacher-child ratio with wider margin contribute to lower quality of education in preschool centers in Machakos County.Further, results indicated that majority 92.0% of the respondents agreed that high teach-child ratio affects access, participation and quality of Pre-primary school education in the county, 4.0% strongly agreed while 4.0% disagreed. This demonstrated that most of the respondents agreed as supported by a mean of 3.000 with a standard deviation 0..286 that high teach-child ratio affects access, participation and quality of Pre-primary school education in the Machakos County.

Correlation Analysis

The study used correlation analysis results to detect the strength and the direction of the relationship between variables. The correlation matrix results for the family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County. Pearson Product moment correlation coefficients (rs) and P-values were used in criterion decision in making inferences. The significant value was tested at 0.01 or 0.05.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

		SACCO Growth
Teacher –Learner Ratio	Pearson Correlation	.672**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.008
	N	50

*- Correlation is significant at the 0.01 (2 tailed)

The results in Table 3 indicates that, there exists a strong, significant and positive correlation between family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County as indicated by correlation factor, r=0.672, PV=0.008<0.01). The result predicts a strong and positive correlation between family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County. This clearly demonstrated that family structure is a significant predictor of quality education in preprimary schools, Therefore learners may be enrolled in schools with adequate teaching resources, access to school with better learning structures. The results concurred with Ludeke et al. (2021) that family relational stability significantly correlates with positive childhood developmental outcomes, especially during the early years when children are very much dependent on their caregivers for responsiveness

Multiple Regression Analysis

The study sought to determine the influence of family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County. In seeking to achieve the objective, the study tested the hypothesis which was: HO$_1$: There is no significant relationship between family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County in Kenya.

Table 4: Model Summary of relationship between Family Structure and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools in Machakos County

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.572[a]	.297	.294	2.23219

R-Squared is 0.297 indicated that there existed variation or correlation between family structure and quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County in Kenya. The model summary results in Table 3 shows R^2 is 0.297, Std Error= 2.23219 indicating that there was a significant variation at 29.7% between quality education and family structure in preschools.

ANOVA Results
The result in Table 5 presents results on goodness of fit of the regression model.

Table 5: ANOVA Results on relationship between Family Structure and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools in Machakos County

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.352	1	38.352	7.697	.008[b]
	Residual	239.168	48	4.983		
	Total	277.520	49			

a. Independent Variables: (Constant), Family Structure

b. Dependent Variable: Quality Education in Preprimary Schools in Machakos County

These results in Table 5 indicate that the model had an F-ratio of 7.697, P=0.000<0.05. This result ascertain the regression model, $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$ adopted by the study had a significant goodness of fit as F=7.697and far exceeds the F=statistic 0.9635 and PV=0.008<0.05.

The results on Table 6 shows the regression beta coefficients analysis

Table 6: Beta Regression Coefficients of Relationship between Family Structure and Quality Education in Preprimary Schools in Machakos County

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	6.475	2.244		2.885	.006
Family Structure	.363	.131	.372	2.774	.008

c. Independent Variables: (Constant), Family Structure

d. Dependent Variable: Quality Education in Preprimary Schools

The resultant univariate regression model took the form:

$Y=6.475+0.363X_1+ \varrho$.

The regression results also indicated that predictor family structure had a significant, positive relationship with Quality Education in Preprimary Schools as β_1 = 0.363, PV=0.008, t= 2.774. This clearly indicated that a unit improvement in family structure on would lead to a significant improvement in accessing quality education in preprimary schools in Machakos County. The result concurred with Boh et al., 2023 that mordern family structures in Kenya have become increasingly diverse, including nuclear families, extended families, single-parent households, and blended families determiningt of quality of preprimary education quality.

V.   Summary Of Major Findings

The family structure was regarded as the key factor among others, influencing the quality of pre-primary education. The application of regression analysis uncovered a favorable connection between family structure and quality educational results, indicating those children's learning experiences are improved by family configurations that are stable. Professional remarks pointed out the importance of ties with the extended family and community, as parents revealed that close family bonds helped them in getting better educational advice and monitoring. The results indicate that family structure not only determines the immediate home support for education, which in the end together determines the quality of pre-primary schools.

VI.   Conclusions

Family structure significant positively influenced the quality of pre-primary education This shows that stable, friendly, and supportive family arrangements are likely to be associated with better pre-primary education experiences in the present sample, even if their direct predictive strength is limited. Family support, although it was a theoretically relevant variable, is a strong predictor of educational quality. Accordingly, the involvement of family is factors that significantly positively influence quality of education in preschools.

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