

POLICY BRIEF

ECE FINANCING & GOVERNANCE

Funding the Classroom, Not the Family

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early Childhood Education is a constitutional right for every Kenyan child. Yet a rapid review of 28 empirical studies (2015–2025) found that devolved governance has not delivered consistently funded classrooms. Responsibility splits between the National Government, which sets curriculum and standards, and County Governments, which manage staffing and infrastructure. That split produces coordination gaps and uneven funding. Many head teachers lack early-years-specific budget and resource-management training. Quality Assurance and Standards Officers rarely deliver the regular, supportive supervision that would catch these gaps early. **The result is predictable: management failures push costs onto families, and the burden falls hardest on communities that can least afford it.**



PRIORITY ACTION

NATIONAL TREASURY & MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ring-fence ECE funding at national and county level.

Protect a dedicated ECE budget line from national to county level, released on a predictable schedule and shielded from mid-year cuts. **This is the direct fix for the review's clearest equity finding: where formal financing and resource-allocation systems fall short, a pattern present in 4 of the 14 studies examining ECE governance structures, families are the ones who quietly cover the difference.**

Its effectiveness depends on three additional supporting actions:

MoE & KICD	Harmonize national–county ECE policy. so financing rules and standards no longer contradict each other across counties.
COUNTY ECDE DIRECTORATES	Mandate resource-management training. so centre managers can plan and account for budgets, not just receive them.
QASOs (DQAS)	Require termly supportive supervision. so funding gaps are flagged and corrected before they reach parents' pockets.

METHODOLOGY

This brief draws on a PRISMA-compliant rapid evidence review of 28 empirical studies (2015–2025) on ECE leadership and management in Kenya. Of these, 14 examined governance structures and processes directly, the subset this brief's financing figures are drawn from.

28 Empirical studies reviewed (2015–2025)	14 of 28 Examined governance structures directly	4 counties Governance tiers a shilling must pass through
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KEY FINDINGS

Three patterns, drawn from the governance-focused subset, trace the path from national policy to a parent’s pocket.

4 of 14 studies Allocation, Not Just Scarcity Where resource-allocation and staffing systems were weak, funding that existed often failed to reach the classroom.	4 of 14 studies Untrained Leaders, Wasted Budgets Weak leadership capacity and instructional supervision meant even available funds were poorly planned and tracked.	3 of 14 studies Parents as the Fallback Plan Parental engagement was documented as a governance mechanism in its own right — families informally financing gaps left by the system
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WHERE THE FUNDING GAP FORMS

National Budget Policy & standards set	County Allocation Uneven capacity, no ring-fence	Centre-Level Gap Untrained managers, weak tracking	Parental Top-Up Families cover the shortfall
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Ring-fencing funding at the first two stages is the intervention point that prevents the gap from ever reaching the fourth

“Quality education begins with quality management, not with a parent’s wallet.”

Without ring-fenced funding and trained financial leadership, Kenya’s ECE policies remain promises rather than practice.

CONCLUSION

Kenya’s ECE legal framework is strong; its funding discipline is not. Ring-fenced financing, paired with trained budget-literate leaders and regular supportive supervision, is what turns a constitutional right into a funded classroom without asking families to make up the difference.

Source: Saoke, V. O., Chege, W. L., Chege, W. L., Okal, J., Mburu, J. M., Olao, E. M., Ndolo, O. E., Tsuma, F. A., Nyaga, F. W., & Natasha, W. (2026). The Influence of Leadership and Governance Practices on Learner Experiences in Early Childhood Education Centres in Kenya: A Rapid Evidence Review. Discover Education.

