

POLICY BRIEF

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Designing Environments Where Children Thrive

BACKGROUND

Learning happens in a place, not just a curriculum. Whether an ECE classroom feels safe, well-resourced, and inclusive depends less on national policy than on how centre leaders manage space, staff, and daily routines. This brief asks a narrower question than governance reform: not who is accountable to whom, but what leaders can do this term to make the classroom itself a better place to learn.

THE ASK

COUNTY ECDE DIRECTORATES & HEADS OF INSTITUTIONS

Institute standard management routines at every ECE centre.

Require every centre to run a fixed termly cycle of planning, supervision, and resource coordination, not ad hoc management. This is the single strongest lever in the evidence: day-to-day management practice was the mechanism most frequently linked to the quality of the learning environment, cited in 11 of the 28 reviewed studies.



This approach requires three complementary actions to be effective:

KEMI & COUNTY ECDE DIRECTORATES

Train leaders in participatory styles.

So collaborative, inclusive leadership becomes the norm, not the exception.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS & TREASURIES

Invest in physical learning spaces.

Safe, accessible classrooms and adequate materials, prioritising underserved centres.

QASOs & HEADS OF INSTITUTIONS

Embed emotional & psychological safety.

Explicit inclusion practices for learners with diverse needs, not an afterthought.

METHODOLOGY

The review synthesized 28 empirical studies on leadership, management and learning in Kenyan ECE. Unlike the instructional-practice and parental-involvement questions examined elsewhere in the review, evidence on the learning environment came from across the full study set, coded into eight mechanisms; this brief reports the four most frequently cited.

28

Empirical studies reviewed on ECE leadership & management

8

Mechanisms shaping the learning environment identified

11

Studies pointing to management practice

KEY FINDINGS

1	11 of 28 studies — Management Practice Shapes Daily Conditions Planning, coordination, supervision and resource mobilization were tied to better classroom organization, staffing and service stability — the largest single group of studies.
2	8 of 28 studies — Leadership Style Sets the Climate Participatory, inclusive leadership was associated with positive school climates, higher teacher motivation, and stronger collegiality.
3	8 of 28 studies — Resourcing Shapes the Physical Space Classroom space, safety, accessibility and learning materials depended directly on how leaders allocated and mobilized resources.
4	7 of 28 studies — Inclusive Leadership Supports Emotional Safety Leadership practices that centred inclusion were linked to stronger emotional and psychological safety, particularly for marginalised learners.

“A well-managed centre is a well-learning classroom.”

Of the eight leadership mechanisms shaping ECE learning environments, day-to-day management practice was cited in 11 of 28 studies.

CONCLUSION

The learning environment is built, not inherited. Standardising management routines at centre level backed by trained leaders, safe physical spaces, and deliberate emotional inclusion gives every ECE classroom in Kenya the conditions children need to learn.

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.

