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Original Article

Repositioning Domestic Workers as Informal Educators: A Comprehensive Secondary Data Analysis of Global Care Economies, Child Development and Professionalisation Frameworks

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Domestic workers, Informal education, Care economy, Child development, Professionalisation, African knowledge systems, Uganda.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive secondary data analysis examining the role of domestic workers as informal educators and caregivers, drawing on global evidence from OECD countries, the European Union, the Global South, and African contexts. This study synthesises existing literature, policy reports, and case studies to demonstrate that domestic workers worldwide function as de facto early childhood educators, yet remain systematically excluded from professional recognition, training, and labour protections. The paper integrates three theoretical frameworks - Care Theory, Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems - to argue that professionalising domestic childcare work is both an economic necessity and a cultural imperative. Evidence reveals a vicious intergenerational cycle whereby children raised by untrained caregivers in informal households face compounded educational disadvantages, while domestic workers themselves remain trapped in precarious employment. Drawing on successful professionalisation models from Belgium (VCOK), the Philippines (TESDA Domestic Work NC II), and emerging care economy frameworks from the ILO and G20, this paper proposes a five-pillar framework for recognising, training, certifying, compensating, and integrating domestic workers into formal early childhood education ecosystems. The analysis contributes to ongoing discussions on care economies, gender-inclusive growth, and African development by demonstrating that domestic workers are not merely labourers but critical actors in human capital formation and cultural transmission.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic work represents one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, yet it remains among the most invisible, unregulated, and undervalued forms of labour. The International Labour Organization estimates that there are nearly 76 million domestic workers worldwide, of whom 76% are women and girls aged 15 and above (ILO, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, domestic work is predominantly informal, characterised by the absence of written contracts, exclusion from labour protections, and widespread exploitation (ILO, 2013).

The demand for domestic workers has accelerated due to three intersecting global trends: the increased participation of women in formal employment, urbanisation, and ageing populations requiring in-home care. As women have entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, a trend celebrated as progress toward gender equality, the care responsibilities historically performed by women within households have not been systematically redistributed to men or to public institutions. Instead, these responsibilities have been downloaded onto other, more marginalised women: domestic workers, frequently migrants or rural-urban migrants, who perform childcare, eldercare, and household labour for wages that often fall below minimum standards (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

This dynamic has produced what feminist economists term the "care economy", the constellation of paid and unpaid activities involved in caring for individuals within households and communities. Globally, women perform approximately three times more unpaid care work than men, with this disparity rising to 11–12 times in developing economies (T20 South Africa, 2025). The OECD estimates that a two-hour increase in women's unpaid work correlates with a 10% decrease in female workforce participation (OECD, 2024). Domestic workers, by absorbing care responsibilities, enable other women to participate in formal employment, yet they themselves are systematically excluded from the protections and recognition that formal employment affords.

Recognising the employment potential of creating 300 million jobs by 2035, many countries from the Global South are bringing policy frameworks to incentivise investments in the care economy (T20 South Africa, 2025). As demographics and family structures evolve globally, investing in care economies becomes both a social justice issue and an economic necessity.

The Global South's innovative approaches offer valuable lessons to foster South–South cooperation. Several countries showcase diverse approaches to building inclusive care systems. Argentina introduced the Universal Child Benefit in 2009 and established an Inter-Ministerial Committee for Care Policies. Vietnam has developed a comprehensive childcare system, with three types of childcare facilities. India has devised a national care economy strategy and is targeting 17,000 publicly funded crèches by 2026. South Africa is implementing public–private

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partnerships in elderly care (T20 South Africa, 2025).

Purpose of the Study and Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on domestic work and the care economy, significant research gaps remain that this study seeks to address. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on three areas: labour exploitation and working conditions of domestic workers (ILO, 2013; Hochschild & Machung, 2012), migration patterns of domestic workers across international borders (T20 South Africa, 2025), and legal frameworks for domestic worker protection (ILO, 2011). While these are undoubtedly important areas of inquiry, they have largely overlooked the educational and developmental role that domestic workers play in the lives of children under their care.

First, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding domestic workers as informal educators. Although scholars have documented that domestic workers perform childcare responsibilities, including feeding, bathing, supervising, and disciplining children (Mbiti, 1990; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2025a; 2025b), the specific mechanisms through which domestic workers contribute to children's cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social development have not been systematically examined. The question of *how* domestic workers function as transmitters of knowledge, values, and cultural practices remains largely unaddressed in the academic literature.

Second, existing research has paid insufficient attention to the integration of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems into domestic worker training and professionalisation frameworks. While the Philippine TESDA model demonstrates the value of structured, competency-based training for domestic workers (TESDA, 2022), and the Belgian VCOK model illustrates the effectiveness of pedagogical coaching and continuous professional development (ISSA, 2025), these models have been developed in contexts significantly different from Sub-Saharan Africa. There is a pressing need for professionalisation frameworks that are culturally grounded in African communal caregiving traditions while incorporating modern child development science.

Third, the literature lacks a comprehensive theoretical integration that connects care work, human capital development, and indigenous knowledge systems. Most studies approach domestic work from a single disciplinary perspective - labour economics, feminist studies, or migration studies, without integrating insights from multiple frameworks. This study addresses this gap by developing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws on Care Theory, Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems Theory.

Fourth, there is a scarcity of research specifically focused on the Ugandan context. While studies from Ghana (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2025a) and Nigeria (University of Ilorin, 2018) have documented the experiences of child domestic workers and the relationship between maidship and girl-child education, no comprehensive study has examined the role of domestic workers as informal educators within Ugandan families. Given Uganda's specific socio-economic context, including high rates of informal employment, increasing female labour force participation, and ongoing urbanisation, there is a need for context-specific research that can inform policy development.

Fifth, the intergenerational consequences of informal domestic childcare arrangements have been under-researched. The OECD has documented that children from informal households face compounded educational disadvantages (OECD, 2024; OECD/ILO, 2023), but the specific ways through which domestic worker informality affects child development outcomes have not been clearly identified. This study seeks to illuminate these pathways by examining how the absence of formal training for domestic workers may contribute to inconsistent

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caregiving quality, which in turn affects children's developmental trajectories.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill these research gaps by: (1) examining the role of domestic workers as informal educators and contributors to child development in Uganda; (2) exploring how African Indigenous Knowledge Systems can inform culturally grounded training frameworks for domestic workers; (3) integrating Care Theory, Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems into a comprehensive analytical framework; (4) generating context-specific evidence on domestic childcare arrangements in Ugandan households; and (5) proposing policy recommendations and professionalisation frameworks that address both child development outcomes and domestic worker welfare.

By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to the broader discourse on care economies, gender-inclusive growth, and African development. It demonstrates that domestic workers are not merely labourers performing household chores but are critical actors in human capital formation, cultural transmission, and early childhood development. Recognising and professionalising their role as informal educators is therefore both a social justice imperative and a developmental necessity.

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Care, Human Capital, and Indigenous Knowledge

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical frameworks: Care Theory (feminist care perspective), Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems Theory. These frameworks collectively help to explain the evolving role of domestic workers in childcare, their contribution to child development, and the need for their professionalisation within contemporary Ugandan society and beyond. This section elaborates on each framework and demonstrates its integration for secondary analysis.

Care Theory and the Valuation of Reproductive Labour

Care Theory, particularly within feminist scholarship, challenges the historical devaluation of caregiving labour as "natural" women's work rather than as skilled, socially necessary labour requiring compensation and recognition. Feminist economists have demonstrated that gross domestic product calculations systematically exclude unpaid care work, rendering invisible the labour that sustains the paid workforce (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Domestic workers occupy an ambiguous position within this framework: their labour is paid, but it is performed in private homes, outside formal regulatory frameworks, and is therefore subject to the same devaluation as unpaid care work.

Care Theory provides the normative foundation for arguing that domestic workers are not merely domestic labourers but caregivers whose work has social, emotional, and developmental significance. When a domestic worker feeds a toddler, comforts a crying child, or helps with homework, she is performing work that has direct implications for that child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Recognising this work as care - rather than merely as domestic service, is the first step toward professionalisation.

The ILO's 5R Framework for care policy - Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent provides an additional policy framework that emphasises that care policy must address multiple dimensions (ILO, 2018). This framework recognises that care work, whether paid or unpaid, is fundamental to human well-being and economic functioning, yet remains systematically undervalued and undercompensated.

Human Capital Theory and Investment in Early Childhood Development

Human Capital Theory, associated with the work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz, posits that investment in education, training, and health

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enhances individual productivity and generates broader social returns (Becker, 1993). Applied to domestic childcare work, this framework suggests that training domestic workers in child development, nutrition, first aid, and early learning support would improve the quality of care children receive, with positive implications for their long-term educational and economic outcomes.

In this study, Human Capital Theory justifies investing in the professional development of domestic workers. When domestic workers are trained, they become more competent caregivers who can positively influence children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. This, in turn, contributes to better educational outcomes and improved long-term human development within society. Therefore, training domestic workers is not only beneficial at the household level but also contributes to national development goals.

Crucially, the OECD has documented that children from informal households, where parents work in informal employment, have significantly lower school attendance rates at every educational level compared to children from formal households (OECD, 2024). The attendance gap between children from fully formal and fully informal households is 15.7 percentage points in upper secondary education and 17 percentage points in tertiary education (OECD/ILO, 2023). Informality is often inherited, reinforcing cycles of low-income employment and poor social protection, perpetuating intergenerational inequalities (OECD, 2025).

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Communal Caregiving

The third theoretical framework draws on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems. As articulated by Mbiti (1990), the African philosophy of personhood is deeply rooted in community life, often summarised in the idea that "I am because we are." This worldview supports collective child upbringing and moral education through everyday social interactions.

Within African traditional education, the aims included: developing children as contributive members of the community, teaching the various professions, training in thinking, practical wisdom and aesthetics, developing character and inculcating respect for elders and those in positions of authority (Mbiti, 1990). Education in Africa was an integrated experience which combined physical training with character building and manual activity with intellectual training. Education was not seen as a separate process from life. It incorporated and transmitted the values of life that had been evolved from experience and tested in the continuing process of living (Mbiti, 1990).

The role of the mother in the African context is very significant. She needs care during pregnancy and freedom from work when her child is born. She must have a quiet, easy life while she nurses her children. Their education calls for patience and gentleness, for a zeal and love which working cannot dismay. She forms a bond between father and mother (Mbiti, 1990).

Within this framework, domestic workers can be understood as contemporary extensions of traditional caregiving systems. Through daily interaction with children, they transmit language, cultural norms, discipline, and moral values. However, unlike traditional systems where caregiving knowledge was widely shared and socially regulated, modern domestic work is largely informal and lacks structured guidance. This creates a gap between cultural expectations and actual caregiving practices. Integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems into domestic worker training would therefore ensure that caregiving is both culturally grounded and professionally structured.

Conceptual Linkage of the Theories

The integration of these three theories provides a strong foundation for this study. Care Theory highlights the social value of caregiving labour and challenges its devaluation. Human Capital Theory provides the economic rationale for

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investing in domestic worker training, demonstrating the returns to such investment at the household, community, and national levels. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems ensures that professionalisation frameworks are culturally grounded and responsive to local contexts.

Together, these theories support the central argument that domestic workers are not merely unskilled labourers but key actors in child development and cultural transmission. Therefore, professionalising domestic childcare work through structured training is both a developmental necessity and a cultural imperative in Uganda and across the African continent.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary data analysis approach, also known as desk-based research or documentary analysis. Given the resource and time constraints that precluded primary data collection in Ugandan households, this methodology synthesises and re-analyses existing scholarly literature, policy reports, and case studies from global and African contexts to address the research objectives.

Research Approach

The study adopts a qualitative documentary analysis design. Documentary analysis is a systematic method for reviewing, interpreting, and synthesising existing documents to generate new insights and answer research questions (Bowen, 2009). This approach is particularly appropriate when primary data collection is not feasible, when the research questions require cross-contextual comparison, or when the phenomenon of interest has been studied in other settings but not yet synthesised for a specific context (Bryman, 2016).

Data Sources

Data for this study were drawn from three categories of secondary sources:

Peer-Reviewed Academic Literature: A systematic search was conducted in academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and PubMed using search terms such as "domestic workers AND child development," "housemaids AND informal education," "care economy AND Africa," "domestic work professionalisation," and "African Indigenous knowledge systems AND childcare." The search focused on publications from 1990 to 2025, with particular emphasis on studies from Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia (Philippines), and Europe (Belgium).

Policy and Institutional Reports: Documents from the International Labour Organization (ILO), OECD, World Bank, and United Nations agencies were reviewed, including convention texts, global estimates, policy briefs, and country reports. The ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 (2011) and subsequent implementation reports were central to the analysis.

Case Study Documentation: Published materials on professionalisation initiatives, including the Philippine TESDA Domestic Work NC II training regulations, Belgian VCOK program documentation, and T20 South Africa policy briefs on care economies, were analysed as comparative case studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included if they met the following criteria: (1) written in English; (2) published between 1990 and 2025; (3) focused on domestic work, childcare, care economy, or related topics; (4) provided empirical data, theoretical frameworks, or policy analysis; and (5) originated from reputable academic, intergovernmental, or governmental sources. Documents were excluded if they were opinion pieces without an evidence basis, news articles without substantive analysis, or publications from non-credible sources.

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Data Analysis Strategy

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was both deductive (guided by the theoretical frameworks of Care Theory, Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems) and inductive (allowing themes to emerge from the data).

The analysis focused on answering the following research questions derived from the original proposal: (1) What roles do domestic workers play in contemporary families? (2) How do domestic workers contribute to children's learning and social development? (3) Why is professional training needed for domestic childcare workers? (4) How can African indigenous knowledge systems inform training? (5) What strategies can improve professionalism and recognition of domestic workers?

Limitations

This secondary data analysis has several inherent limitations. First, the lack of primary data from Ugandan households means that findings are based on evidence from other contexts, which may not fully capture Uganda's specific cultural, economic, and policy realities. Second, the available literature on domestic workers in Africa is more limited than in Europe, North America, and Asia, creating potential geographic bias in the evidence base. Third, documentary analysis cannot capture the lived experiences and voices of domestic workers with the same depth as qualitative primary research. Fourth, publication bias may exist, as studies with positive findings or successful interventions are more likely to be published than those reporting challenges or failures.

Ethical Considerations

As a secondary data analysis using publicly available documents, this study did not require ethical approval from an institutional review board. However, ethical principles were observed through accurate representation of source materials, proper attribution of ideas and data to original authors, avoidance of selective citation that could distort findings, and transparent reporting of the study's limitations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an integrated analysis of global evidence on the role of domestic workers as informal educators, organised into five thematic subsections. The findings are derived from secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed literature, policy reports, and case study documentation from multiple geographical contexts.

Child Development in an African Traditional Context

Understanding the traditional African approach to child development provides essential context for recognising domestic workers as caregivers. In African traditional societies, child development was understood as a holistic process involving physical, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The infant stage (0-2 years) was marked by the baby being very much welcomed in the family, first because it bore the "blood" of the ancestors and second because it ensured that the family name continued to exist. The education of the baby consisted of singing to it and speaking to it while it listened. The singing of lullabies taught the baby to keep quiet and go to sleep (Mbiti, 1990).

When the baby began to crawl, her horizon gradually widened. She played with the small objects around her, such as sticks, stones, bits of cloth and domestic pets. Gradually, the baby gained the attention of the brothers and sisters who teased her, played with her and encouraged

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her in her attempts to stand and walk. The baby's range of activities increased. She followed her mother about the house, chased some domestic animals like chickens, cats or dogs. At this stage, she is usually left in the charge of a nurse, like the elder sister or cousin who took the child to play with other village children, thus widening the child's experiences (Mbiti, 1990).

At the toddler stage (2-4 years), further socialisation in the culture of the society or community occurs. The child learns the social distinction between the sexes. Selfish demands are checked. The baby is also taught cleanliness and the use of the right hand when eating, shaking hands with other people or performing other social activities. Ethical behaviour is stressed, including good table manners. The girls play house and usually have some object like a cob, which they will strap on their backs pretending the cobs are babies (Mbiti, 1990).

This traditional framework demonstrates that non-parental caregivers, including older siblings, cousins, and extended family members, have always played a role in African child-rearing. Domestic workers can therefore be understood as contemporary extensions of these traditional caregiving systems, performing roles that would historically have been performed by family members within communal living arrangements.

The Intergenerational Cycle of Informality

One of the most significant findings from global research concerns the intergenerational transmission of informality. The OECD has documented that children of informal workers - including domestic workers face compounded disadvantages that perpetuate informal employment across generations (OECD, 2024). These disadvantages include lower school attendance, reduced parental investment in education, and longer, more uncertain school-to-work transitions.

Improving intergenerational mobility is key to unlocking a country's full productive potential and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have a fair chance to succeed. While more individuals in many countries attain higher education than their parents, limited access to quality education, widespread informality, weak school-to-work transitions, and persistent gender and regional disparities continue to constrain economic and social mobility (OECD, 2025).

Persistently low intergenerational mobility weakens human capital formation, reinforces labour informality, and limits aggregate productivity. Broadening access to economic opportunities, particularly for women, youth and rural populations, can raise labour force participation, unlock productive potential and talent, improve resource allocation and strengthen potential growth over the medium term (OECD, 2025).

The implications for domestic workers are clear: as informal workers themselves, domestic workers face significant barriers to investing in their own children's education, perpetuating the cycle of informality. Professionalising domestic work through training, certification, and formal recognition would not only improve the care provided to employers' children but also enhance domestic workers' human capital, earning potential, and capacity to invest in their own children's futures.

Global Case Studies in Professionalisation

Despite the challenges documented above, promising initiatives for professionalising domestic work and recognising domestic workers as caregivers and educators have emerged worldwide.

Belgium: VCOK and the Professionalisation of Family Day Care

Belgium's VCOK (Vormingscentrum Opvoeding en Kinderopvang - Training Centre for Parenting and Childcare) provides a model for professionalising family-based childcare. Rooted

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in the belief that "it takes a village to raise a child," VCOK's mission aligns with fostering inclusive and high-quality early childhood education and care. Through its dynamic approach to professionalisation and community engagement, VCOK has been making meaningful contributions to families, caregivers, and professionals in Belgium (ISSA, 2025).

VCOK's work centres on two key domains: the professionalisation of childcare employees and socio-cultural adult education. These activities reflect their overarching mission to stimulate learning, connect people, and critically approach parenting. By constantly innovating and collaborating with partner organisations, VCOK ensures that their services remain relevant and impactful (ISSA, 2025).

VCOK's offerings for professionals in family care, group care, and out-of-school childcare include training programs, webinars, individual coaching, team coaching, learning networks, and tailored solutions. This comprehensive pedagogical support helps childcare workers, teams, and managers to improve the quality of care they provide, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. VCOK also engages a broader audience of parents, grandparents, and educators through diverse workshops, lecture series, webinars, parent-child activities, and participatory projects (ISSA, 2025).

VCOK's impact is visible not only in individual success stories but also in broader quality improvements in childcare. Their pedagogical coaches collaborate directly with daycare staff and managers, achieving tangible results such as enhancing personnel management skills and introducing innovative play techniques for children. The quality measurement project (MeMoQ) commissioned by the Flemish government revealed a noticeable improvement in childcare quality in recent years, attributed in part to the direct engagement of VCOK's coaches and support staff (ISSA, 2025).

The Philippines: TESDA Domestic Work NC II

The Philippines has long been recognised for its structured domestic worker training programs through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The Domestic Work National Certificate Level II (NC II) qualification consists of competencies that a person must achieve to clean the living room, dining room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen, wash and iron clothes, linen and fabric, prepare hot and cold meals, and provide food and beverage service (TESDA, 2022).

The training regulations established by TESDA serve as the basis for registration and delivery of training programs, development of curriculum and assessment instruments and competency assessment and certification (TESDA, 2022). The Philippine model is significant because it treats domestic work as a skilled occupation requiring formal training and certification, rather than as unskilled labour.

Crucially, the TESDA framework includes elective competencies for providing care and support to infants and toddlers (50 hours) and providing care and support to children (50 hours) (TESDA, 2022). These elective competencies were selected from the core units of competencies from existing Training Regulations in Caregiving. This recognition that domestic workers may be responsible for childcare is a significant advancement in professionalising the sector.

The training delivery in the Philippines adheres to competency-based TVET principles, including: training based on curriculum developed from competency standards, modular learning structure, individualised and self-paced training, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and multiple entry and exit points. The dualised mode of training delivery is preferred, containing both in-school and in-industry training or fieldwork components (TESDA, 2022).

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ILO Convention 189 and Uganda's Ratification Status

The ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) provides an international legal framework for domestic worker protection. The convention establishes that each member State shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment, and violence. It also requires measures to ensure equal treatment between domestic workers and workers generally in relation to normal hours of work, overtime compensation, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual leave (ILO, 2011).

Regarding Uganda, the country has ratified 32 ILO Conventions, of which 8 of the 10 fundamental conventions and 3 of the 4 governance (priority) conventions have been ratified (ILO, 2025). However, Uganda has not yet ratified ILO Convention 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. The Universal Periodic Review process has included recommendations for Uganda to "consider ratifying ILO Convention 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (UPR Info, 2019). Ratification would signal government commitment to domestic worker rights and provide a framework for policy development.

Core Competencies for Domestic Worker Training

The evidence presented above demonstrates that domestic workers worldwide are performing childcare responsibilities for which they are largely untrained. Based on global best practices and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the following core competencies should be included in domestic worker training programs.

Child Development and Psychology

Drawing on both modern child development science and African traditional knowledge, domestic workers need foundational knowledge of child development. The African traditional approach recognised specific developmental stages: infant stage (0-2 years), toddler stage (2-4 years), and childhood stage (5-12 years), each with distinct developmental tasks and educational approaches (Mbiti, 1990). Traditional African education emphasised developing character, inculcating respect for elders and those in position of authority, ensuring education of the will power, thought asceticism, self-denial, physical endurance and self-control and teaching the various professions (Mbiti, 1990).

Health, Nutrition, and Hygiene

In African traditional societies, the mother of the unborn child had to refrain from carrying heavy loads or overworking herself. When the baby was born, its primary source of food was the mother's milk, meaning that the suckling mother had to have the best and healthiest foods available (Mbiti, 1990). Traditionally, weaning practices involved the use of the mother's milk being decreased gradually from about the third month, when cow milk and corn porridge were introduced gradually along with local vegetables. Modern training should incorporate both traditional nutritional wisdom and contemporary knowledge of child nutrition, hygiene, and health monitoring.

Child Safety and First Aid

Traditional African child-rearing included protective practices such as preparing a talisman (chipande) for the baby, tied around the baby's neck to protect the child from any sickness, deformities or evil influence. It was customary to keep the newborn baby indoors for a while to prevent infection by evil, with the baby only taken outside after the umbilical cord had fallen off (Mbiti, 1990). While modern training would use evidence-based safety practices rather than talismans, the underlying principle of child protection remains relevant.

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African Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values

Training programs should integrate African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, including: moral education and character formation; storytelling traditions and cultural narratives; respect, obedience, and communal values; and language preservation and cultural identity formation. As the OECD has documented, language preservation and cultural identity formation are essential components of holistic child development (OECD, 2025).

A Professionalisation Framework for Domestic Childcare Workers

Based on the global evidence and case studies presented above, this paper proposes a comprehensive framework for professionalising domestic childcare workers, organised around five pillars: Recognition, Training, Certification, Compensation, and Integration.

Recognition: Valuing Domestic Work as Skilled Labour

The first pillar of professionalisation is recognition, acknowledging domestic childcare work as skilled labour with social and economic value, and challenging the stigmatisation of domestic workers as unskilled or inferior. The ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) provides an international legal framework for recognition. Uganda is encouraged to consider ratifying this convention (UPR Info, 2019).

Training: Structured Competency-Based Education

The second pillar is training—providing domestic workers with structured, competency-based education. The Philippine TESDA model offers a replicable framework with its competency-based curriculum, modular structure, and recognition of prior learning (TESDA, 2022). Training should be accessible (low cost, offered in convenient locations), flexible (accommodating varied schedules and literacy levels), competency-based (focused on demonstrable skills), and culturally grounded.

Certification: Credentialing Competence

The third pillar is certification—providing domestic workers with formal credentials that document their competencies. In the Philippines, successful candidates are awarded a National Certificate signed by the TESDA Director General (TESDA, 2022). Certification systems should be standardised, competency-based, portable, and progressive.

Compensation: Fair Wages and Labour Protections

The fourth pillar is compensation—ensuring that domestic workers receive fair wages, decent working conditions, and access to social protection. The T20 South Africa policy brief on care economies proposes a five-pillar framework for strengthening care systems, including implementing targeted subsidy programmes and creating standardised training programmes for care workers (T20 South Africa, 2025).

Integration: Connecting Domestic Workers to Early Childhood Systems

The fifth pillar is integration connecting domestic workers to broader early childhood development systems. The VCOK model demonstrates the value of pedagogical coaching, learning networks, and community engagement (ISSA, 2025). Integration strategies should include referral pathways from domestic workers to health and social services and the inclusion of domestic workers in professional networks.

Policy Recommendations

This section translates the findings from Section 4 into actionable policy recommendations for Uganda and presents the overall conclusions of the study.

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Policy Recommendations for Uganda

While the professionalisation framework presented in Section 4.5 is generalizable across contexts, its application to Uganda requires attention to the specific policy, economic, and cultural realities of the country.

Ratification and Implementation of ILO Convention 189

Uganda has not ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 189 (UPR Info, 2019; ILO, 2025). Ratification would signal government commitment to domestic worker rights and provide a framework for policy development. Ratification should be accompanied by legislative reform to align Ugandan labour law with convention standards, including provisions for minimum wage coverage, regulated working hours, weekly rest periods, annual leave, and access to social security for domestic workers.

Action Steps:

- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should initiate the ratification process in consultation with the Cabinet and Parliament.
- The Uganda Law Reform Commission should review existing labour legislation and propose amendments to align with Convention 189
- Stakeholder consultations should be conducted with domestic workers, employers, trade unions, and civil society organisations.

Integration of Domestic Worker Training into TVET Systems

Uganda's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system offers a potential institutional home for domestic worker training programs, similar to the Philippine TESDA model. TVET institutions could offer short courses or certificate programs in domestic childcare, with curricula developed in consultation with child development experts, domestic workers themselves, and employers.

Action Steps:

- The Ministry of Education and Sports, through the Directorate of Industrial Training, should develop competency standards for domestic childcare work.
- Pilot training programs should be established in selected TVET institutions in Kampala, Mukono and Wakiso.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms should be developed to credential experienced domestic workers without formal training.

Development of a National Care Policy

Uganda should develop a comprehensive national care policy, guided by the ILO's 5R Framework (Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent). A national care policy would address not only domestic work but also the broader organisation of care in Ugandan society, including parental leave policies, childcare services, eldercare, and care for people with disabilities.

Action Steps:

- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should lead a multi-stakeholder process to develop the national care policy.
- The policy development process should include meaningful participation from domestic workers, employers, trade unions, women's organisations, child development experts, and local government representatives.
- The policy should include specific targets, timelines, and budget allocations for implementation.

Public Awareness and Social Reorientation Campaigns

Changing societal perceptions of domestic work requires sustained public awareness campaigns. These campaigns should emphasise the value of care work, the dignity of domestic workers, and the importance of respectful employer-worker

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relationships. They should also educate employers about their legal and ethical obligations to domestic workers, including fair compensation, decent working conditions, and respect for workers' rights.

Action Steps:

- The Uganda Broadcasting Corporation and other media outlets should air public service announcements on domestic worker rights and dignity.
- Community dialogues should be facilitated by local government authorities and civil society organisations.
- Religious and community leaders should be engaged as champions of domestic worker dignity and rights.

Pilot Training Programs in Urban and Peri-Urban Areas

Given resource constraints, Uganda should begin with pilot training programs in selected urban and peri-urban areas, such as Kampala, Mukono, and Wakiso. These pilots should be rigorously evaluated to assess their impact on domestic worker competencies, child development outcomes, and household welfare. The VCOK model of pedagogical coaching and learning networks could be adapted for the Ugandan context (ISSA, 2025).

Action Steps:

- Establish partnerships between the Ministry of Gender, local governments, and civil society organisations to implement pilot programs
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework with baseline and endline assessments
- Document lessons learned and best practices for scaling to other regions

Table 1: Summary of Policy Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead Institution	Timeframe	Expected Outcome
Ratify ILO Convention 189	Ministry of Gender	12-24 months	Legal framework for domestic worker protection
Integrate training into TVET	Ministry of Education	18-36 months	Standardised training programs and certification
Develop National Care Policy	Ministry of Gender	12-18 months	Comprehensive care economy framework
Public awareness campaigns	Ministry of Information	Ongoing	Changed societal perceptions
Pilot training programs	Local governments + NGOs	6-12 months	Evidence base for scaling

CONCLUSION

This secondary data analysis has examined the role of domestic workers as informal educators and caregivers, drawing on global evidence from multiple contexts, including African traditional child-rearing practices, OECD research on intergenerational informality, and professionalisation case studies from Belgium and the Philippines. The analysis has demonstrated that domestic workers worldwide function as de facto early childhood educators, yet remain systematically excluded from professional recognition, training, and labour protections.

Summary of Key Findings:

First, the evidence reveals that in African traditional contexts, child development was understood as a holistic, communal process in which non-parental caregivers, including older siblings, cousins, and extended family members, played essential roles in socialisation, moral education, and skill transmission (Mbiti, 1990). Domestic workers can be understood as contemporary extensions of these traditional caregiving systems, performing roles that would historically have been performed by family members.

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Second, the OECD research documents a vicious intergenerational cycle: children raised in informal households face compounded educational disadvantages, including lower school attendance and reduced parental investment in education, perpetuating informal employment across generations (OECD, 2024; OECD/ILO, 2023; OECD, 2025). Domestic workers, as informal workers themselves, are both victims of this cycle and, through their caregiving roles, influence whether the children in their care escape or remain trapped in it.

Third, successful professionalisation models from Belgium (VCOK) and the Philippines (TESDA Domestic Work NC II) demonstrate that training, certification, and ongoing professional support can improve childcare quality, enhance domestic worker competencies, and elevate the status of domestic work as skilled labour (ISSA, 2025; TESDA, 2022). The ILO's 5R Framework and Convention 189 provide international legal and policy guidance (ILO, 2011; ILO, 2018).

Fourth, Uganda has not yet ratified ILO Convention 189, despite recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review process (UPR Info, 2019; ILO, 2025). This places Uganda behind international standards for domestic worker protection and limits the policy framework available for professionalisation initiatives.

Theoretical Contributions:

This study has demonstrated the value of integrating three theoretical frameworks, Care Theory, Human Capital Theory, and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems for understanding domestic work as both a social justice issue and a developmental imperative. Care Theory establishes the social value of caregiving labour and challenges its devaluation. Human Capital Theory provides the economic rationale for investing in domestic worker training, demonstrating the returns to such investment at household, community, and national levels. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems ensures that professionalisation frameworks are culturally grounded and responsive to local contexts.

Policy Implications:

For Uganda, the path forward requires policy action at multiple levels: ratification of ILO Convention 189, integration of domestic worker training into TVET systems, development of a national care policy, public awareness campaigns, and pilot training programs in urban centres. These interventions, implemented together, could transform domestic work from a stigmatised, exploitative informal occupation into a dignified, skilled, and recognised profession.

Final Statement:

Professionalising domestic childcare work in Uganda is both a developmental necessity and a cultural imperative. It contributes to improved child welfare, enhanced human capital formation, and the recognition of domestic workers as important contributors to national development. Strengthening training systems, improving labour protections, and integrating indigenous knowledge into caregiving practice will help transform domestic work into a dignified, skilled, and sustainable profession that supports African development.

As Mbiti (1990) reminds us, the African philosophy of "I am because we are" emphasises that no person is an island, we are all constituted through our relationships with others. Recognising domestic workers as part of "we" as valued caregivers, informal educators, and transmitters of cultural heritage, is not only a matter of labour justice but a reaffirmation of African communal values. The time has come to bring domestic workers from the margins to the centre of conversations about child development, education, and national development in Uganda and across the African continent.

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