

Full Length Research

Gaps and remedies of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs of Botswana

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Five years after the release of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in Botswana in 2001, it was felt necessary to review the current status of the ECCE programmes with special reference to achievement of standards of quality of education with reference to the recommendations in the ECCE policy. This effort has been supported by the Office of Research and Development (ORD), University of Botswana for conducting a review of ECCE programmes of Botswana. The study included the heads of the ECCE centres of Gaborone, Botswana. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings showed that the ECCE service providers are trying to adhere to the ECCE Policy document; however a major groundwork needs to be done to provide more trained teachers and a standard, prescribed curriculum. This would enable one to maintain the standard recommended by the ECCE policy document and raise the quality of ECCE programmes in Gaborone, Botswana.

Key words: ECCE, ECCE policy, Botswana, standards and regulations.

INTRODUCTION

The world conference, "Education For All", held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 resolved that pre-primary education should be an important element of basic education and countries should set targets in this area of education. In 1991, a National Conference on Education for All was held in Gaborone which endorsed the view that was set by the world conference. It further stated that pre-primary education is a component part of basic education and that extending access to this level of education will respond to the aspirations of Botswana (Republic of Botswana, 1993).

Pre-primary Education is a multi-dimensional concept. Over the past few decades, since independence, a number of Institutions have come up in Botswana, to cater for the children from 0 to school going age. Some of these are run by private individuals; some are community based, whereas others are people from companies and volunteers who provide supporting care and education services under different names such as day care centres, pre-schools, play-schools, kindergartens, reception schools, crèches and nurseries, etc. Some institutions run for half-day whereas others run full day, in the after-noon also. Those which are attached to English-medium primary schools prepared children for entering into Standard one for one year by giving pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-number skills, whereas others empha-

sized some other skills (Bose, 2005). No standards were set which could guarantee the availability of a uniform, quality care and education services. This indicated that there is a need to provide an appropriate institutional framework to meet the basic learning needs of children and government should take up the responsibility and provide Preschool education.

In 1994, the RNPE (Revised National Policy on Education) (Republic of Botswana, 1994) recommended that the Pre-Primary Education Unit of the MOE (Ministry of Education) would be responsible for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy formulation and should establish standards for facilities and the quality of the ECCE programmes and should supervise and monitor pre-primary education. It also recommended that MOE should establish and chair a Pre-school Development Committee with representatives from Ministries of Health, Local Government, Lands and Housing, Labour and Home Affairs and other interested parties to co-ordinate all ECCE Programmes and would make them responsible for ECCE Policy Implementation. As a result MOE was assigned the task of providing an enabling environment through pre-school grants to NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBO) as well as co-ordinating and providing professional support for the programme, in addition to the responsibility of develop-

ing a standard curriculum for the ECCE together with teachers' guides and other support materials which should guide the operation of all pre-primary Education (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

Subsequently, Vision 2016 (Republic of Botswana, 1997) came up with a challenge to improve the quality of Education in general and specifically emphasized on an improvement in the quality of Pre-school education (particularly the public facilities), through closer monitoring of licensing, or by introducing pre-schools in all primary schools.

In an effort to implement the RNPE recommendations and fulfill the Vision2016 aspirations, the MOE commissioned a consultancy in 1999 to pave the way for ECCE policy and its implementation (Republic of Botswana, 2001). This was followed by an intensive needs assessment and review of related documents by MOE in 1999 which found out that the National Day Care Centre Policy of 1980 was the principal policy document which did not include any ECCE standards and regulations, nor prescribe any standard curriculum. The existing Teacher Training programme fell short of meeting current ECCE demands. This review also showed a shortage of trained teachers, and absence of any Baby Care services for 0-2½ year olds and provisions for children with special needs. This raised an issue about Policy and programmes that are required for a successful implementation of RNPE recommendations and also for adoption of a monitoring mechanism (Republic of Botswana, 2001).

As a follow up, a comprehensive ECCE policy by MOE for early childhood care and education was developed to provide a holistic approach to the developmental needs of a child. Key stakeholders such as Ministry of Local Government, NGOs and UNICEF's collaboration was sought to develop the Policy to address implementation strategies for the pre-primary programmes. The Policy went through government consultative machinery as Government of Botswana is committed to improve access to pre-school education (Republic of Botswana, 2003).

Today five years have passed since the release of the policy and it became imperative to review the present status of ECCE programmes and also to examine whether any necessary standards for a quality education is maintained or not. Therefore a study funded by the Office of Research and Development (ORD), University of Botswana, was conducted in Gaborone, the southern part of Botswana, to establish the current scenario of ECCE programmes of Gaborone, Botswana.

Objectives: The objectives of the study were three-fold:

- To find out the types of ECCE programmes available.
- To examine the Standards and Regulations adopted by the ECCE programmes.
- To investigate the development and adoption of ECCE curriculum and Learning framework

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Due to the highest concentration of varied types of ECCE programs in Gaborone and the cost-effectiveness; and proximity the researchers selected Gaborone and its surroundings for the research study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample by keeping in mind a fair representation of various types of ECCE programmes available in the specified area. At first the entire population of 82 ECCE programmes were categorised under various types of ECCE programmes. Then, at random, 50% of the ECCE centres from each category were selected which comprised of 40 ECCE centres. Finally 40 Heads from each of the ECCE centre were picked up as the sample. A structured questionnaire was used to retrieve relevant information from the sample. The instrument consisted of both closed and open-ended items. Before using the instrument it was pilot tested to test its validity and reliability. The data collected, was cleaned, coded, entered and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic data

The study portrayed an interesting picture. Out of the total number of Heads of the centres, 95% were females. Only 17 (42.5%) subjects were falling between 20 years to 39 years of age, and the rest were ranging from 40 years to 60 years and above and the highest concentration was in the age range of 40 to 50 year olds. As high as 38 (95%) of the heads were qualified and almost 15 (37.5%) of them were degree holders, the rest were either holding a certificate or a diploma. This large number of females as heads of ECCE programmes is a common scenario the world over, as a few males are found in the field of early childhood care and education. The fact that the child care facilities are still populated by females, there is a challenge that more males should be attracted in to ECCE services, and to act as role models for some children who have none even at home. Also, there is a need to engage younger people in greater number for running an ECCE centre who are seemingly active and energetic and not people like the present study who are perhaps old and tired.

Available ECCE programs

Almost half of the total population, that is, 19 (47.5%) was run privately. The remaining half Comprised of mainly the NGOs, Pre- Primary and Faith Based centres, whereas centres like VDC and Union/Council, community based, and Orphan Care or Institutional types hardly represented the chosen sample. This is a typical scenario and found in other countries too. A study echoes with the findings of the current study and shows that although there is a prevalence of a variety of early childhood program settings, majority of them are profit organizations (29%); and the others like independent non-profit ones, religious one

Ones, public schools and the Head Starts centres ranged from 25 to 8% only (Saluja et al., 2002). This is unfortunate, because if child care is run mainly by private people which usually is very expensive, then this might leave out vulnerable children and children from poor families whose parents cannot afford to pay fees in private programmes.

The existing ECCE programmes were mainly offering Day-care and Pre-primary services and only 9 (22.5%) catered to children ranging from 0 - 2.5yrs. This shows how scarce baby care services are, in Botswana! This echo with what Aidoo (2005) who had to say:

There is an urgent need to focus attention on prenatal and 0 – 3 year old children in ECD policies and programmes. According to one estimate, more than 95% of young children in Africa do not have access to early stimulation programmes.

By now an early stimulation for the 0 - 2½ yrs of age group should have been the major thrust of any ECCE programs of Botswana as this is the most critical period for brain development of a child. The lack of emphasis on 0 - 2½ yrs age category in the 1981 Policy might be the driving force behind this. However, it is encouraging to see that the ECCE policy that was released in 2001 emphasized the introduction of 0 - 2½ year's age category and the Pre-school Development Committee was given the responsibility to develop an early stimulation curriculum in baby-care services.

The present study showed the same trend as that of the United States where operational structure was heavily inclined to full-day which has 8 long hours of operation as compared to half day (Saluja et al. 2002). About 22 (55%) of the present sample were running ECCE centres for the full day, and only 7 (17.5%) were running it for half- day. Interestingly around 11 (27.5%) were running both full day and half-day depending on the demands made by the clients.

Standards and regulations

The major indicators for determining Standards of any ECCE Services would be its Registration policy and licensing procedure, Admissions criteria, Employment and Welfare policies, Physical Structures, Transport and Safety provisions, Health and Sanitation standards, provision of Meals, Curriculum adopted, and many others. The present study also looked into those criteria to determine the current standards of the existing ECCE programmes and presents them as follows:-

Registration and licensing

The present study indicated that registration and procurement of license of an ECCE centre, along with its renewal has never been a problem in Gaborone. Around 39 (97.5%) of ECCE centres were registered and had procured license to run their centres and renewed it on a

yearly basis. Not only that, all of them (100%) had got their centres inspected, 19 (47.5%) got it inspected yearly and others got it inspected either every term or about 2 to 4 times a year. Which means the important tool for monitoring and evaluating Standards in ECCE was utilized for regulation and maintenance of standards as stipulated by the policy document (2001) in order to make a centre run with more conviction and appropriateness.

Admissions, fees structure and records

All ECCE centres followed admission procedure meticulously by requesting for information like Age, Gender, Religion, Parent's contact information, Medical History etc. However, in today's era of HIV/AIDs, one expects centres to be offering care to Orphaned Vulnerable children (OVC). On the contrary only 10 (25%) catered for OVCs. Surprisingly, centres that are either Faith Based, or Institutional or Pre-primary did not offer services to OVCs at all. Perhaps faith based organizations need to be challenged on this particular issue as faith based centres like churches often claim to offer services to the disadvantaged.

The fees structure of the ECCE centres raised a concern as it was highly inconsistent and unaffordable by a common man. Seven centres (17.5%) charged more than P2000/ per term, and thirty two, mostly private schools, (80%) charged more than P1000/ per term as fees. Many took additional charges ranging from P100/ to P500/ per term for various reasons like transport, developmental fee, educational trips, outings Christmas, food, computers, registration, uniform and extra curricular activities. This arbitrary fees structure definitely needs to be addressed for a universal ECCE.

Individual record keeping is an indicator of quality education and around 38 (95%) of ECCE centres maintained the children's records consistently which could be handy during the monitoring exercise.

Child and staff ratio

A class size ratio is one of the structural features of early childhood education. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends a child ratio that ranges from 8 children per staff for children of 3 year olds, and 10 children per staff member for children 4 year olds (Bredenkamp and Copple, 1997). Class sizes in Early Childhood programs in developed countries like USA are reportedly complaint with the NAEYC class size recommendation. A study conducted in the United States of America indicated that the average classroom has 16.4 children with 2 paid staff, with a child-staff ratio 9 to 1; religious settings had the smallest class size while Head start had the largest. The public school had the most favourable child to staff ratio (8:1) while profit programs had 10:1 (Saluja et al., 2002). Although developing countries, like Botswana, cannot afford the NAEYC re-

Table 1. Trained teachers.

Number of Teachers per centre	Centres with trained teachers					Number of	
	Trained Teachers / centre						
	1	2	3	4	5		
							0
							1
2	2	4					2
4		2	2	2			
5		1	1		2		
6				1			1
7		1		1			
8				3			
12							1
15		1					
Total	5	15	4	7			7
	No. of centres with trained teachers = 33 (82.5%)						No. of centres with no trained teachers = 7 (17.5%)

recommendations of small child/staff ratio the results were quite satisfactory as far as staff/child ratio was concerned. In addition 32 (80%) centres had Teaching Assistants (TA) that is mandatory for quality ECCE services (Saluja et al., 2002).

Training of teachers

Early childhood education needs a lot of support (Kwon YI, 2002) Children at the ECCE centres are vulnerable and need proper care and education for an appropriate stimulation and learning. A formal professional advancement is pertinent for the development of EC teachers for providing quality care and education. Higher quality programs employ teachers who are more qualified than lower quality programs. In other words, high qualification of staff is associated with high quality of EC service delivery as it is found by Saluja et al. (2002) that the teachers in high quality settings have more specialized training in early childhood education and child development and they are more informed about developmentally appropriate practices and teaching strategies for use with young children.

But on the contrary some studies show that for most early childhood care and education programs, teachers have not attained a bachelor's degree, and the majority of the states do not have teachers in ECE centers who undergo any pre-service training much less have a BA in early childhood. Thus the quality of most ECE programs, therefore, is disqualified as being mediocre (Ackerman, 2005). The findings of the current study, also confirmed that almost half of the population was without any formal training on early childhood education and yet they were being recruited as teachers! Out of the entire population

of 174 teachers in 40 ECCE centres, only 85 were (48%) teachers were trained. Not only that, about seven centres (17.5%) had recruited a lot of teachers, but none of them were trained on ECCE (Table-1). This raises a concern and needs immediate attention. Some tangible measures should be adopted to improve professional qualifications of ECCE teachers and reverse the situation completely.

Interestingly it was found, as in most of the studies elsewhere, that teachers in private institutions were more qualified, as compared to those in other settings (Saluja et al., 2002).

Lack of adequate training centres, academic insecurity language barriers and inability to pay for course work are faced by early care and education teachers in improving their qualification and capacity, so as to help create a knowledgeable and qualified workforce. Currently there is only one training centre in Botswana which produces only 30 teachers per year for the whole country (Republic of Botswana, 2001). This falls short of satisfying the demand for teachers. Studies on Australian early childhood centers on traditional perspectives of professional development through a re-conceptualization of early childhood growth proposed alternative perspectives, which could recognize staff as empowered learners capable of building working knowledge through engagement in different aspects of EC practice over time. This engagement referred to activities such as workshop and conference presentations, participant observation and data gathering at shared planning meeting, which could allow staff members with minimal qualifications, but with insight and commitment necessary for a professional growth, to share with others and promote a move from being "non professional" to being "professional" (Fleet and Patterson, 2001).

Table 2. Structures.

Items	No. of EECE Centres	Percent
Special Constructed Building	31	77.5%
Administrative Office	36	90%
Child Size Furniture	40	100%
Child Size Toilets and Basins	37	92.5%
Outdoor Play area and Equipments	39	97.5%
Kitchen/Storage Space	39	97.5%
Sickbay	35	87.5%
Transport	18	45%

Infrastructure

Botswana's healthy economy empowered most of the owners of the ECCE centres to provide necessary physical structures and maintain a quality. The present study revealed that more than 75% of centres had a specially constructed building, an administrative office, sickbay, child sized toilets and basins and all of them provided child-size furniture. Except for one VDC school, all had Outdoor Play area with Slides, swings, seesaw, sand bay, scooters, balls, bicycles, jungle gym, play house, swings, water tables, hoola hoops, and climbing frames. Except for one faith-based centre, all had a kitchen and storage space and 32 (80%) centres provided meals regularly. While one cannot guarantee the nutritional value of the meals served, it is however encouraging observing that majority of children are at least being fed. However, 22 (55%) centres did not have their own transports and children had to make their own arrangements (Table 2).

The buildings, furniture, outdoor and indoor equipments, kitchen and storage space, availability of sickbay are the indicators of the standard and quality of ECCE centres, and the sampled ECCE centres did attempt to adhere to the standards and regulations laid down in the 2001 Policy document (Republic of Botswana, 2001) to a certain extent.

Development and adoption of ECCE curriculum

Lack of adequate training centres, academic insecurity. For an effective ECCE, the introduction of a developmentally appropriate curriculum that caters to the child's individuality, pace of learning, age and cultural background for an overall development of a young child is mandatory. Certainly there is a need to follow a prescribed standard curriculum that would facilitate the optimal development of a young child. In the developed countries like England, Norway and Sweden, government prescribed curriculum is used by pre-schools to ensure quality and cultural appropriateness (Alvestad and Samuelson, 1999). MOE, of Botswana was also bestowed with such a responsibility (Republic of Botswana, 2001).

However, the findings of the study revealed that ECCE centres did not follow any standard, prescribed curriculum. In fact due to the unavailability of a prescribed and standard ECCE curriculum, as high as 25 (62.5%) centres used alternatives like adopting a either a South African Curriculum or a combination of curriculum prescribed by other countries.

Nearly 15 (37.5%) used self-made curriculum, based on various themes or followed curriculum adopted by Montessori Method. However, an encouraging picture was observed as all the centres had planned activities and provided indoor materials like painting, clay, pictures, scissors, chart book and alphabets, building blocks, puzzles, toys, story books, toy chairs and tables, lego, momo cards, plaster seal, etc. that are part and parcel of Developmentally Appropriate Practices. In addition the children were sent for outdoors games as well.

However, this absence of a prescribed curriculum needs to be addressed urgently. We have already experienced that almost 50% of the teachers are not trained in ECCE! How do we then ensure that the activities that are scheduled by those teachers are developmentally appropriate for children? How do we then cater to the individual needs and provide culturally sound information to the young children of Botswana?

How do we then expect a quality education that can leave a mark at the most impressionable age of children?

Conclusion

To conclude, it could be said that, the ECCE centres do attempt to adhere to the standards and regulations laid down in the 2001 Policy document (Republic of Botswana, 2001) to a certain extent. The standards achieved in Buildings and Physical Infrastructure show that the Inspection and other monitoring methods in this area are working very well. It is however necessary to achieve similar standards in the area of teacher training and provision of a standard curriculum along with essential documents like teachers' guides and other support materials. For an effective implementation of ECCE policy, there is certainly a need for a broader outlook and involvement of the nation as a whole. Individual owners

of ECCE centres cannot make the impact fully.

Recommendations

Another study should be conducted more extensively, on a wider scale, to capture the data from other parts of Botswana, as this study is restricted to Gaborone which is an urban city and the capital of the country, and perhaps was privileged to provide resources like physical infrastructure and in turn ensure the quality to a certain extent. It is necessary to find out whether the other parts of the country conform to the current study's findings or not.

The number of existing child care facilities is still low in Botswana and efforts need to be made to provide a three-tier programme structure that support Baby-care (0-2½), Day care/Nursery (2½-4) and Pre- primary (4-6) programmes. Since most of the available programmes here are run privately which usually charge high fees (Otaala et al., 1989), there is a challenge in front of us to provide more community based and other forms of child care that are affordable, that can accommodate children from low income families who are vulnerable and more deserving in order to provide a basic human right of healthy development. This would be most desirable as vulnerable children and HIV/AIDS orphans need care, stimulation and psychosocial support in order to develop to their full potential to become productive members of their communities (Aidoo, 2005).

An initiative needs to be taken to generate more trained teachers as almost half of the teachers in ECCE centres of Botswana are untrained. Establishment of more institutions for providing more ECCE trained teachers could perhaps be the highest priority, under the present circumstances.

It should be borne in mind that in the field of ECCE, there are professionals and other community members or parents who work with young children (Isenberg and Jalongo, 2003). To achieve equity and to increase access, which is very low as only 7% of the 3 - 6 population have access to preschool education (Republic of Botswana, 2001), both professionals and trained non professionals need to be engaged to work with young children with care taken to ensure that children receive quality services. Hence more in-service training for the ECCE workers also needs to be organized at all possible levels.

There is definite need to expedite the development of a prescribed, standard curriculum to guide and assist in proper content delivery, methods and process of evaluation, and maintain a consistent standard of a quality ECCE programme. Without which, the quality and standard of current ECCE programmes would suffer.

The current status of ECCE programmes of Gaborone, Botswana is far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In order to achieve the (MDG) Botswana needs to build a lot of support and engage all

the sectors related to early childhood with ensured responsibility that would address the rights and needs of young children; should engage relevant government agencies to provide needed funding to work together; should make the key stakeholders – of education; the parents and the teachers aware of the benefits of ECCE through dissemination of research findings in order to encourage greater national commitment to young children; and should draw examples from national experience that highlight promising practices in the areas of governance, quality and financing of ECCE (Id21 education, 2007).

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