

Early Childhood Care and Education Programs in Botswana: Policy (2001) Implementation

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Abstract

In an effort to implement the recommendations of the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana, 1994) and to fulfill the aspirations of Vision 2016 (Republic of Botswana, 1997), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECC&E) Policy was released in 2001 in Botswana. After five years of operation it became imperative to review the status of the ECCE programs in terms of adherence to the stipulated policy requirements and maintenance of quality standards. Hence a study funded by the Office of Research and Development (ORD), University of Botswana (UB) was conducted in the southern part of Botswana which has the highest concentration of various types of ECCE programs. The study was conducted in two phases the first covering the heads and teachers of the ECCE centres while the second phase included the ECCE Policy Stake Holders (EPSH) of Botswana. The present paper concentrates on the second part covering the important EPSH who are responsible for the implementation of the policy. In doing the research, a structured interview schedule was used. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The findings showed that there is an increased participation in child care provision, education and registration of ECCE centres (Republic of Botswana, 2006-b); thus the existing centres do adhere to the ECCE policy requirements to a certain extent. However greater efforts are required to ensure an effective implementation of the 2001 ECCE policy and to raise the quality and proper delivery of ECCE programs in Botswana.

Keywords: *Botswana, ECCE, ECCE Policy, ECCE programmes, ECCE Policy, implementation, ECCE curriculum, ECCE Teacher Training*

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Introduction

ECCE refers to education and care in early years, which spans the human life from birth to age of eight years. During this period, they develop very fast and need Developmentally Appropriate Practices for an overall development. ECCE is understood to encompass a holistic view of the needs of the children as they grow old and mature (Obanya, 2005). Children need to grow in a safe and loving environment where they could fulfill their basic requirements of health, nutrition, sanitation and continue to master more and more complex levels of thinking, movement, feeling and interaction with others in the environment.

ECCE arrangements and programs as stated by Kohen, Lipps, and Hertzman (2006):

... provide more to children than just a place to be cared for while their parents are at work or studying. Several studies have shown that such programs may enhance children's cognitive and social skills." (p.1)

Access to ECCE programs makes children enter school more ready to learn as compared to those who don't (Magnusan and Waldfogel, 2005) and brings better performance in children in later years (Henderson, 1987). An early intervention can bridge the gap between the child's two worlds—the home and the school (Spodek, Saracho and Davis, 1991), and can provide academic and life-course achievement amongst all groups, both advantaged and disadvantaged children (Kohen et al., 2006). Researches show that participation in ECCE programs enable children to become social, and develop strong literacy skills and thinking abilities. A society can benefit from ECCE programs (Seefeldt and Galper, 1998) as it makes one aware of the value of literacy skills, reduces stress and anxiety for working parents as their children are in a safe learning environment.

The first goal of Education for All (EFA) is Early Childhood Care and Education which believes in (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2008):

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. (p.1)

In order to fulfill this, it is necessary to augment ECCE programs, and more

attention needs to be paid to the quality of those programs.

ECCE Programs: Quality and Accreditation

The subject of quality in ECCE has high priority amongst those concerned with welfare of young children. Early years workers, managers, inspectors, financiers, parents and researchers are all seeking to understand the meaning of quality. Quality is a challenge rather than a problem to be solved (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). While the positive effects of early child care programs have been found to extend across nations and types of programs, these effects are demonstrated if the programs are of high quality; that is, they have low child to adult ratios, the facilities and equipment provide, stimulating and age appropriate activities, and the programs are staffed by consistent caregivers with training in early childhood education (Kohen et al., 2006).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has worked to raise the quality of programs for all children from birth through age eight. A major part of NAEYC's efforts to improve early childhood education is through different systems of accreditation for programs that are committed to meeting national standards of quality. The criteria used to accredit are as follows (NAEYC, 1998):

- interactions among staff and children
- curriculum
- staff and parent interactions
- administration
- staff qualifications and development
- staffing patterns
- physical environment
- health and safety
- nutrition and food service
- program evaluation

To ensure such a quality in ECCE programs national level policy initiatives need to be made starting with a situation analysis followed by evolution of policy guide-

lines that would lead to the establishment of a national accreditation system.

Botswana's aspirations

An access to ECCE is one of the aspirations of the people of Botswana (Republic of Botswana, 1993). Over the past few decades, after independence, a number of Institutions have come up in Botswana, to cater for the children from 0 to school going age. But 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. It was felt that the government should take up the responsibility and provide preschool education. As a result, the RNPE recommended that the Pre-Primary Education Unit of the Ministry of Education (MOE) would be responsible for ECCE policy formulation, and its implementation. They should establish standards for facilities and the quality of the ECCE programs, along with supervision and monitoring of pre-primary education. To coordinate all ECCE related activities MOE established a Pre-school Development Committee (PDC) consisting of representatives from various Ministries and other interested parties (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

The National Vision statement of Botswana— Vision 2016 called for improvement in the quality of pre-school education (particularly the public facilities), through close monitoring of licensing; and by introducing pre-schools in all primary schools (Republic of Botswana, 1997). A comprehensive ECCE policy was developed in 2001 by MOE in close collaboration with key stakeholders such as Ministry of Local Government (MLG), Non Governmental Organisation (NGO)s and UNICEF. This effort was in line with the implementation of the RNPE recommendations and fulfillment of the Vision 2016 aspirations.

ECCE Policy

The main objectives of the 2001 ECCE policy were to establish the authority of

the pre-school unit of MOE to accredit ECCE centres in terms of quality. The policy aimed at encouraging the participation of women in social and economic activities. It intended to strengthen and support ECCE services by laying down regulatory standards required for establishment and operation of quality ECCE programs. It outlined a very broad coverage that would offer a three-tier system catering to children from 0-2.5 years (Baby-Care), 2.5-4 years (Day-Care/Nursery) and 4-6 years (Pre-primary). It granted a period of three years to adopt the policy fully and acquire the required standard, like hygienic condition, physical structures, environmental conditions, food and developmental materials. The roles and responsibilities of the different players in implementing the policy were defined as follows:

- ◆ MOE was given the primary responsibility of providing support in every possible way to all ECCE centres. Whereas, MLG shared the responsibility of registration, inspection and supervision of Baby-care, Day-care/Nursery and other educational care centres (Republic of Botswana, 2001).
- ◆ The MOE was made responsible for establishing a minimum curriculum framework for day-care and pre-primary services, and the PDC was made responsible for an early stimulation curriculum in baby-care services.
- ◆ For training of ECCE personnel, various Colleges of Education in the country were given charge to train teachers for pre-primary level whereas Lobatse Day Care Training Centre (LDTC) was given the responsibility of Baby-Care and Day-care/Nursery centres.

The Policy went through government consultative machinery (Republic of Botswana, 2003), and was adopted fully in 2004. Any service provider that met all the basic requirements was licensed to run the services.

Policy Review

Years after release of the ECCE policy document in 2001, a study was conducted in two phases in Gaborone, in the southern part of Botswana, to establish the current status of ECCE programs. The practitioners (school heads and the teachers) of 40 ECCE centres and important ECCE Policy Stake Holders (EPSH) of the Government

of Botswana participated in the study. The study was funded by the ORD, UB.

Phase I:

- ◆ The first phase of the study covered the status on the ground and the limitations as perceived by the practitioners. It showed that most of the service providers were private and more than 80% were catering to children from 2.5 year to 6 year olds; the baby care services (0-2.5 years) were almost non-existent.
- ◆ The study revealed that the ECCE centres did attempt to adhere to standards and regulations laid down in the 2001 policy document to a certain extent. Some of the ECCE procured licenses and achieved high standards in providing appropriate buildings and physical infrastructure that are essential for running an ECCE centre. It was also found that all the centres did not achieve high standards.
- ◆ The study showed that 80% centres maintained NAEYC recommended staff/child ratio and also had recruited Teaching Assistants (TA) that is mandatory for quality ECCE services.
- ◆ The study revealed that the centres did not succeed in achieving a similar standard in acquiring a standard curriculum, providing trained teachers and offering affordable fees structure. Sixty two percent of them made their own arrangements by using other alternatives like adopting curricula used by other countries, e.g., South Africa, Zimbabwe, Great Britain, etc.
- ◆ The study further revealed that almost half of the teaching population did not have any formal training on ECC&E. The study also showed that the fees structure of the ECCE centres was arbitrary, inconsistent and unaffordable by a common man (Bose, 2008).

Phase II (covered in detail in the current paper):

The researcher felt the need to study the other aspect as perceived by the EPSH as it is necessary to study all dimensions, i.e., the perceptions of the practitioners as well as those of the planners, policy makers and policy implementers to get the com-

plete picture. This would not only give their perspectives regarding the current status of ECCE centres, but would also give an insight into the issues and problems that accompany the actual, effective implementation of the policy.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to assess the views of the EPSH on the issues concerning the current status of ECCE programs, and the implementation of ECCE policy. In order to do that the following objectives were identified:

- (a) To assess the compliance with the registration and licensing policy
- (b) To inspect the physical infrastructure of the centres
- (c) To find out the curriculum followed by the centres
- (d) To examine the training background of the teachers
- (e) To evaluate the implementation of the policy guidelines
- (f) To gauge the problems and challenges faced during the implementation of ECCE policy
- (g) To suggest a way forward

Methodology

A survey design was adopted for the study. The study used qualitative approach and a purposive sampling technique was used where the officers who were directly responsible for executing 2001 ECCE policy were carefully chosen. Attempt was made to select people from the MOE such as the chief planner and executer of policy. People from MLG (City Council, Gaborone) and other associated agencies like Day Care Association, and Social Welfare Department, who formed the PDC, were selected as they shared a joint responsibility of managing ECCE centres. In all four (4) officers, who were available and had an in-depth understanding of all the opportunities and challenges faced while implementing the policy, were selected. Interview schedule was developed and the four officers were interviewed at length in a separate

detailed session focusing on their areas of responsibilities. The interview schedule included questions pertaining to the standards and quality of ECCE programs, the policy implementation exercise, the challenges faced during the process of implementation, and the measures to be adopted to resolve the issues. The researcher recorded the conversation during the process of interview with the consent of the interviewees. The conversational transcripts were coded, analyzed qualitatively and presented in a descriptive form as well as verbatim wherever necessary.

Results and Discussions

The EPSH were asked to review the current status of ECCE programs of Botswana and give an account of the policy implementation. The analysis of the responses fell into three parts. The first part deals with the implementation of ECCE policy with respect to the compliance with the registration and licensing policy, the physical structures, the curriculum and the teacher training. The second part deals with the problems and challenges faced during the implementation of the policy. The third part deals with the way forward.

Implementation of ECCE Policy: EPSH had converging views on the findings related to the physical infrastructure and implementation of policy guidelines including registration and licensing policy.

The Government of Botswana's National Development Plan Mid Term Review stated that "All the Councils in the country were introduced to the ECCE Policy guidelines to ensure implementation and monitoring" (Republic of Botswana, 2006a, p. 99). All members of EPSH supported this by saying that:

Yes, we try to monitor and implement the rules and regulations that are stipulated in the ECCE policy of 2001.

For an effective policy implementation, it is necessary to have sound registration practices and licensing policy. All members of EPSH reported that the appropriate authorities adopted selective measures for issuing licenses. They felt that some of the ECCE centres compromised in providing physical infrastructure; operated in residential premises or in unsafe places with no enclosures at all; and could not even

provide the minimum recommended space of one square meter per child; used adult sized heavy furniture, adult size toilets, and even used pit latrines outside the main structure.

The centres that operated without licenses were given temporary licenses for three months to improve upon their standards and then allowed to apply afresh and those who failed were closed down. At times various stakeholders E.g. politicians interfered with the task of issuing licenses and objected closure of disqualified service providers. And many service providers, mostly NGOs, abused ECCE centres by fabricating day-care centres to provide services to HIV/AIDS victims or orphans for business purposes.

However, steps were taken to curb such irregularities. In short all was not well in the area of the actual licensing being carried out. They were in agreement that genuine service providers were granted licenses because:

They comply to a large extent with the policy, and are adequately qualified and cooperative whereas others resist to any kind of advice, as that might affect their business.

On the findings related to the curriculum and teacher training, the members of EPSH from MOE and all other members of EPSH and PDC had differing perceptions perhaps both reasonable in their respective contexts. For each finding the views of both sides have been presented indicating the arguments presented by each subgroup.

According to the EPSH from outside the MOE the stipulated standards laid down by the 2001 policy document were not being strictly followed. They said that:

Almost everything needs improvement for quality ECCE programs.

They objected to the teachers being untrained and not using a standard, prescribed curriculum. According to them the main focus should be on production of adequate number of well qualified and highly motivated local teaching staff and a sound curriculum framework to fall back on for guidance in quality teaching/learning process. They stated that:

ECCE policy demands teachers to be qualified, and yet the MOE does not provide teachers with ECCE qualifications. The untrained teachers are unable to deliver quality services and provide children with less nutritious food like soft porridge and

'fona' (citric powder drink) on a daily basis.

There is only one day-care training centre in Lobatse (LDTC) which does not meet the demands of qualified Early Childhood Education teachers. Local day care centre teachers lack skills and experience, whereas expatriate teachers mostly hold diploma in primary education, which is often inappropriate in an ECCE centre.

EPSH recommended that the formal and distance learning educational institutions need to take up the responsibility of generating locally trained teachers; and privately operated ECCE training centres must be developed without any delay.

It was interesting to note that the EPSH and PDC members outside MOE, who shared a joint responsibility of managing ECCE centres and executing the policy, were not satisfied with MOE's performance. They indicated that MOE should have had a greater commitment.

After so many years of release of policy document, it is very difficult to accept that the curriculum is still not in the market!

Yet the ECCE centres multiplied in number, and children attended such centres because the perpetrators who do not have any background of ECCE advertise their day care centres business, and parents send their wards to them ignorantly.

The chief planner and executer of the policy, the MOE, on the other hand reported that activities needed for effective implementation of the policy were being carried out. A blue print of the curriculum for pre-primary sector (4 to 6 years only and not for 0-2.5 years, and 2.5-4 years) had been developed and a task force had been set up to pilot the blue print by the 2008. The member further stated that the National curriculum would certainly be introduced by the 2009 (Republic of Botswana, 2006b); and the responsibility of training pre-primary teachers has been assigned to Colleges of Education, giving room to LDTC for preparing day-care and baby-care service providers.

In all these deliberations the question of some of the ECCE centres procuring licenses without meeting the stipulated requirements of the ECCE policy as found in Phase I of the study still remained unanswered. The findings revealed that efforts seem to be made in the right direction, and yet the EPSH, who are the main planners and executers of the policy, were also not satisfied with the status of the ECCE pro-

grams. Thus the researcher felt the need to go deeper to find out whether there had been any constraints that came in the way of an effective implementation of the policy to have a thorough understanding of the outcome that is not very positive. This lead to the findings related to the problems, and challenges faced during process of policy implementation.

Problems and Challenges of Policy implementation: all the members of EPSH reported that the implementation of policy guidelines had not been very smooth. They had to cross a number of hurdles to carry out regular monitoring and inspection. The problems they faced were as follows:

Lack of human resources was the major hindrance in proper implementation of the policy. Although the government had established a preschool unit, in the MOE, to provide an enabling environment to the ECC&E, there was a scarcity of officials, and added manpower was necessary. One Principal Education Officer in the Preschool unit with no regional educational officers left the officer with very little time and means to monitor and evaluate effectively.

Monitoring policy that a) required joint responsibility e.g. inspection by council officers and the health inspectors (Environmental Health) for granting and renewal of licenses, b) delegated power to EPSH other than MOE or MLG for inspection faltered. Due to work load, shortage of staff and lack of motivation the scheduled inspection often went into the back burner. This allowed some service providers to continue to operate without a renewed license.

Management of ECCE was raised as an issue. The schemes of service of MOE and that of the MLG in the administration of the day care programs needed clarification. A re-structuring of the roles and responsibilities that were laid down in the policy document for both MOE and MLG personnel was felt necessary.

Allocation of plots for ECCE centres was indicated as a major issue. A number of day care centres operated from residential houses because of scarcity of plots. A limited number of plots were allocated by the Department of Lands for civic and community use, and the process was time consuming. On the other hand the alteration of residential land to civic land was a tedious process. In addition, Gaborone, unlike rural areas, is divided into zones, and not all zones are permissible to convert land use

from residential to civic. Allocation of more plots and an easier, alternative measure of plot allotment would be necessary.

Importation of Trained Teachers from international market due to shortage of teachers was perceived as a problem due to a long, tedious process. As a result a lot of centres operated without any trained teachers. At times expatriate teachers, who did not possess any relevant teaching qualifications, were recruited without a thorough scrutiny to avoid the delay!

Lack of financial resources had been a major problem. Some centres operated by NGOs, churches and VDC's, did not adhere to regulations because of monetary constraints and could not provide the required furniture, the salary of a qualified teacher, whilst others who were supposed to convert residences to ECCE centres by restructuring the houses by fitting child size toilets, basins, kitchen and storage space, also failed to do so.

Priority of ECCE related activities were questioned. Many activities regarding development of resource materials; establishment of teacher training programs, review exercise of LDTC were left unattended due to low priority.

Thus the problems and challenges are multiple and complex, just like the challenges of any activity that is an appendage and not a main stream activity. This leads the researcher to the last point of suggesting a way forward.

A Way Forward: It is necessary to resolve these problems and offer a vigilant inspection and monitoring exercise, by reinforcing the pre-school unit of the MOE. Modified policies for monitoring exercise, management, allocation of plots, importation of trained teachers, and provision of financial resources to ECCE centres are to be adopted. The policy should attract international talent by reducing hurdles and delays in the recruitment processes, since there is a shortage of this skill in the local market. The roles and responsibilities of various policy executing officers need to be defined in clear terms for less ambiguity. Since most of the service providers come from private sector in Botswana, a regular monitoring and inspection would lead to an achievement of the standards laid down in the policy document.

And lastly, there is a need to prioritize ECCE in Botswana. The EPSH suggested that Mainstreaming of ECCE program by providing universal access to ECCE would

perhaps provide a key to all problems! As the respondents said:

Without that ECCE will never get the attention that it deserves.

They felt that the Government should seek support from some international organizations to facilitate universal access to ECC&E, which will certainly enable all the service providers, whether in government primary schools, a private or a church-based centre, to adhere to the standards stipulated in the policy document. Mainstreaming the project would automatically prioritize all the necessary activities that Government requires to carry out for an effective implementation of the ECCE policy. According to the Botswana and UNESCO report (Republic of Botswana, 2007):

An access to ECCE needs serious advocacy in Botswana as very few people are accessing the programs. This sector of education is predominantly private owned, hence is too costly for many Batswana. This calls for a speeding up of a mainstreaming program for ECCE and perhaps UNESCO should consider providing seed money to jump start the project (p. 25).

Conclusion

The study revealed that there is an increased participation in child care provision, education and registration of ECCE centres (Republic of Botswana, 2006b); however a lot more needs to be achieved for an effective implementation of the 2001 ECCE policy to raise the quality of the programs. The Physical Infrastructure in many is below standard, some are up to the mark. The broader issues related to resource generations like the curriculum development, the launching of fresh teacher training programs, and reviewing of the existing teacher training programs need immediate attention. The absence of locally trained teachers and a long, delayed procedure of recruiting a teacher from the international market could only guarantee a centre operating without any trained teachers; in the absence of a prescribed National curriculum one could only expect discrepancies in teaching/learning process; and without introducing more ECCE training programs for teachers and without carrying out a review exercise of the existing training centre, promised way back in 2001, one would

only fail to adopt the stipulated standards that are laid down in the policy document.

The abundance of ECCE centres in Botswana is more than welcome as an access to ECCE is limited to 7% of the total population (Republic of Botswana, 2004). Nevertheless, mushrooming of ECCE centres, without the stipulated standards would only ensure wider coverage but no quality. There needs to be a common understanding of all the curriculum development and teacher training needs among all the stakeholders of ECC&E. Cohesive measures to strengthen both aspects need to be taken. The problems and challenges are complex as ECCE is merely another activity and not a mainstream activity of those designated to face this responsibility. The government needs to mainstream ECCE and channelize the required resources to provide a broader coverage, to establish ECCE professionals, to strengthen and support ECCE services.

To conclude, it can be stated as '*Without mainstreaming ECCE in Botswana very little will happen*'.

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