

# Contemporary Early Childhood Care and Education Programs: A key to National Development

**Enock Asiimwe**

Ph.D. Candidate, Lecturer, Department of Education,  
Gaborone University College of Law and Professional Studies, Gaborone, Botswana  
Email: asiimwe.enock2@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Globally, there is an increase in access to education at all levels. On the contrary, the quality, completion and transition rates are on decline and Botswana is not exceptional. These trends are closely associated with poor quality of early childhood care and education programs available to the children. Early childhood care and education a critical aspect in averting the problem has long been neglected by the communities and the government as unnecessary cost. Government's decision to play an indirect role in early childhood care and education may be partly attributed to the fact that although Botswana is one of the numerous countries that ratified the two major treaties/conventions on children's rights, both treaties are silent on the state parties' responsibility to provide early childhood care and education. In other words the treaties do not explicitly make reference to the children's right to preschool education. This poses a challenge on the quality of children entering primary school, and subsequently undermines their performance at all levels of education, and in the world of work. Thus, communities and government as the key stake holders need to collaboratively invest in modern early childhood care and education programs in preparation for the quality early childhood development and education. The purpose of this paper is three fold; first, it gives history of the development of early childhood care and education in Botswana. Second, it discusses the current early childhood care and education programs, support and collaboration between communities and the government. Third, it highlights how early childhood care and education programs greatly influence not only quality education but also the relevance, affordability, and sustainability of early childhood care and education leading to national development.

**Key Words:** Early Childhood Care and Education, ECCE Programs, National development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) is a process whereby young children grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and morally. The process begins at the conception and extends to eight years. There are numerous benefits to ECCE even though in Botswana only 17% of Children are able to access ECCE (UNICEF, 2007). This is as a result of the fact that private and civil society sectors are the sole owners of responsibilities towards ECCE programs other than the government. It must be acknowledged that as ECCE grows from homes to the centers, at that point it becomes a public entity that will require proper health and safety checks which can better be done by the government other than private sector which can only be interested on making profits. It is against this background that there should always be some sort of equity for parents and children in poor communities' ECCE centers (OECD, 2001) & 2006).

Studies on ECCE elsewhere have shown that ECCE programs have positive effects on the development of children when the quality of services in ECCE centers is high (Burchinal et. al 2010; OECD, 2001 & 2006; Sammons et. al., 2002; Shonkoff and Philips, 2000), though this is costly and pushes the ECCE providers to raise fees to compensate the high standards invested. If ECCE providers resort into cheaper services, they compromise the quality and this has been associated with language, social and development problems in children (OECD, 2001 and 2006). Further to this, research has established that early learning in good environment with quality standards has positive impact in the foundation stages of early childhood and that it increases child's productivity in the next stage of life (Cunha et. al., 2005).

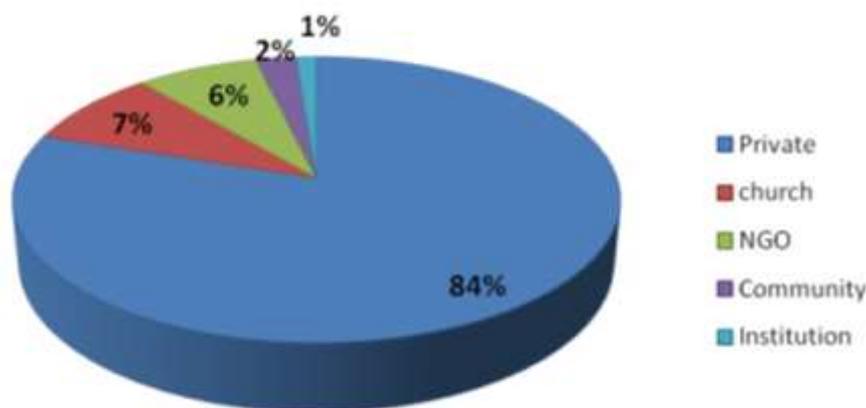
The purpose of this paper is in three fold; first, it gives history of the development of early childhood care and education in Botswana. Second, it discusses the current early childhood care and education programs, support and collaboration between communities and the government. Third, it highlights how early childhood care and education programs greatly influence not only quality education but also the relevance, affordability, and sustainability of early childhood care and education leading to national development.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

ECCE in Botswana started around 1960s when women had to gather children within their communities for custodial care and stimulation of the children's development. Such initiative was being done at no cost at all. Later on,

churches, the Red Cross Society and private individuals complemented to the commendable work which Botswana women were doing (UNESCO, 2000). Then the first Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was established soon after Botswana's independence for foreign nationals who were working in Botswana (Bar-On, 2004; CfBT, 2008). In the year 1980, the National Day Care Centre Policy (NDCCP) was initiated and that UNICEF and Botswana government supported the move which resulted into an increase number of women taking part in ECEC. Finally the economic boom of Botswana attracted spouting of ECEC in Botswana (Revised National Policy for Education, 1994; ECCE, 2001 & Vision 2016 Performance report, 2009).

In essence, preschool education in Botswana has always been and still remains a privilege to children of the elite as the required fees are immensely varied and exorbitant for an ordinary man (Bose, 2008). Recent studies by Bose (2008, 2010), observed an acute shortage of qualified and trained personnel particularly in public centers and this problem was exacerbated by the absence of a prescribed curriculum. However a lot of changes have occurred since then and the sector has witnessed phenomenal growth. For example according to the Gaborone Day Care Directory (2011) records, Gaborone alone had 81 registered early childhood care and education programs with ownership spread across different divides (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1: Type of Centers by ownership (Source: Gaborone Day Care Directory 2011)**

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The early childhood care and education in Botswana is open to both locals and expatriates. There are basically no minimum requirements for owners as anyone can own an ECCE program without relevant qualification so long as they employ personnel with right qualification (ECCE 2001). Formally there has been no standard curriculum nor set guidelines for monitoring teaching and learning in ECCE programmes, therefore children development and learning has solely been in the hands of each respective program. Currently the country has a complex mix of types of early childhood care and education provision conducted by diverse range of providers operating in a confusing and increasing complex administrative environment. This shows how early childhood programs are unevenly distributed with fragmented and wide differences in both quantity and quality while the examples of best practice and quality can be seen across program divide. Education of young children at this level still remains a crazy-quilt despite attempts to achieve the synthesis through policies at national and local levels (Botswana 1994, 2001). Other efforts to change the current status quo especially in teaching and learning of children at this stage have been made but have not been fruitful as yet. For instance, a curriculum for children 3-5 years was developed and has been piloted since 2008 to date. Another positive step was taken by government in partnership with UNICEF to develop yet another curriculum for children from 0-3 years in 2010. Both curricular have not yet taken a deep root despite reputable attempts made which brought much hope to the field and practice.

### 4. METHODOLOGY:

The paper has been developed from a case study of one tertiary institution in Botswana where data was collected through Focal Group Discussions with ECE students, In-depth interviews with teaching staff in the ECE Department, Sampled ECCE Centers in Gaborone and Document analysis of conference papers, articles and reports on ECCE. The responses have been thematically arranged and described from ECCE students and ECCE Centre Managers' perspectives, discussed and backed up with information from in -depth interviews and document analysis.

The paper explains the state of current early childhood care and education programs, support and collaboration between communities and the government; and highlights how early childhood care and education programs greatly influence not only quality education but also the relevance, affordability, and sustainability of early childhood care and education leading to national development.

The ECE students, lecturers and ECCE Centre Managers' responses have been the basis for compiling findings because they are the main stakeholders, they are informed and their participation increases commitment of people to

ensure the implementation of the decision. Chandan (2005), contend that the implantation of the decision is more effective if the people who are going to implement the decision either participated in the making the decision themselves or had their representative in it.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS:

### 5.1 Current ECCE Programs, Support and Collaboration between Communities and the Government

There is an increase of ECCE programs in Botswana in general which have different names that range from day care centers, nursery schools, pre-schools, reception schools and kindergarten classes. As the demand for ECCE increases, issues that need attention have become complex and multifaceted. Therefore, this necessitated the formulation of the ECCE policy of 2001. The policy attempts to: "Provide a holistic approach to developmental needs of a child, healthy growth and preparation for primary education."

There have been some developments addressing the state of ECCE and its quality in the country. New policies and revelations concerning ECCE have been stepped up by the government. All government primary schools are to have pre-schools attached to them. Government is sponsoring many students to do early childhood education training in public and private tertiary institutions to address the gap of untrained ECE teachers. Attempts are being made by the government to reduce the gap in the provision of ECCE programs between the rural and urban areas. Private entrepreneurs have been regulated to provide quality and uniform ECCE programs.

In December, 2014: Senior government officials, politicians, private sector, media, civil society and experts of early childhood development, gathered in Gaborone to dialogue on the importance of ensuring that each and every child is afforded the right conditions and environment to reach his or her full potential. The transformative conference convened by UNICEF and Ministry of Education and Skills Development explored models of Early Childhood Development (ECD) that best suit Botswana. Former Vice President of the Republic of Botswana, Dr. Ponatshego Kedikilwe called on delegates to ensure that Early Childhood Development is put at the center of the national agenda.

A concern was expressed that only 22% of Botswana children access early childhood programmes, adding that the situation is counterproductive because children who do not access ECCE miss out on benefits of the programmes. It was posited that early childhood learning fertilizes the ground to inspire future constructive learning. "Quality time spent with young children inspires their cognitive/intellectual, social, and psychological development. It was further observed that the expansion of ECCE in Botswana will go a long way in reducing the likelihood of children's exposure to inadequate child care arrangement that put their well-being at risk.

Stakeholders were implored to ensure that ECD is expanded to rural areas adding that ECD programs in remote and rural areas operate under disadvantaged environment which limit their ability to attract and retain qualified teachers hence the need to focus on quality. Speaking at the same event, UNICEF Representative applauded Botswana for its willingness to strengthen ECD. It was said that ECD is one of the most cost effective ways to improve long life, health, education and productivity. "Children who take part in early learning activities, have healthy child-caregiver bonds and those that attend quality preschool programs are more likely to stay in school over the long run, have better health and nutritional outcomes throughout their lifetimes and become productive members of society.

The UNICEF Representative reiterated that the success of any ECD program is greatly dependent on creating models, policies and implementation modalities that fit the varied context in which the support is provided.

The delegates were cautioned that these challenges create obstacles for children to attain their full potential in life. The conference was guided to focus on how ECD elements could be integrated across government ministries to ensure cumulative investment in early childhood development. It was reached that ECD programs should provide clear benefits particularly to the most vulnerable and hardest to reach children in Botswana.

### 5.2 Influence of ECCE Programs to National Development

The successes of high quality early childhood education is an essential aspect of economic and human capital development at an early level of education. Early childhood education programs significantly improve the cognitive and social/behavioral capacities of young children so that later in life they will be more productive citizens than they would otherwise have been. As more productive citizens, their direct economic contributions will be enhanced, and, just as important, they will place less financial burden on society, having less need for remedial educational services, better health outcomes, less need for welfare support, and a reduced engagement with the criminal justice system.

Proper ECCE lays a good foundation for physical, social, emotional, moral spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic development of the child, diseases that affect children before birth and up to the age of 8 years may retard many aspects of their development in later years, and children in early childhood tend to be more prone to illnesses and accidents than adults. We now know that a child's environment and experiences begin in the uterus and does not only affect brain development, but also physical and mental health, learning, and behavior for a lifetime. Scientists have shown definitively that brain development is experience-based and has long-lasting effects (Young & Mustard, 2009).

ECCE programs tap into critical and sensitive windows of opportunity and periods of brain development. To be competitive in the world marketplace, now and in the future, nations must develop, adopt, and support local, regional, and national policies that provide ECCE programs. Countries that have recognized the importance of investing in ECCE to improve the competence, health, and well-being of their populations include Cuba, the Scandinavian countries, and several Asian countries (such as Japan, Singapore, and South Korea).

### 5.3 Benefits of ECCE Programs to Different Categories of People

**The Child:** ECCE programs help to ensure that children receive health care and nutrition that enhances children's health and encourage young children to explore the environment. They also facilitate social interactions that promote children's mental development. Children attending ECCE programmes are less likely to drop out of school than those not participating in these programs. Research shows that attendance in ECCE programs matches with increased enrollment, children's readiness for school and retention in primary and secondary school, improved behavior, and better academic performance (Myers 1995).

**The Family:** ECCE programs involving parents can improve parent child relationships, "Free up" older siblings from care giving responsibilities to attend school, enable mothers to participate in the paid workforce and increase the family's income. If girls are retained in school longer, it delays early pregnancy for young girls. With children in school, mothers will be empowered thus improving family situations and reduced instances of domestic violence.

**The Community:** ECCE programs decrease gaps between the rich and poor, the privileged children and underprivileged in society. Children in ECCE are taught to behave well and be creative as job makers. This leads to reduced criminal behaviour while they are adults in their community. ECCE programmes empower parents to reduced morbidity and mortality among children. ECCE ensures fewer cases of malnutrition and stunting. Health programmes promotes improved personal hygiene and health care in the community. With increased parental awareness of the importance of early childhood development in influencing later life of a child, there will be fewer cases of child abuse and neglect in the community. ECCE programmes free parents from some stressful parenting roles thus improving physical and mental health of adults in the community.

**The Nation:** ECCE is an employment sector which caters for a number of professionals and an income generating sector that produces revenue for nations. ECCE produces healthy citizens who have a longer life span for productivity that benefits the nation. Funds that are usually used to cater for retraining or remedial activities will be saved by nations that embrace comprehensive ECCE programmes (Heckman 1999). Improving human development in the early years is the surest way out of poverty because it has a very high economic rate of return. ECCE is the first step in this process, as reflected in the priorities that emerged from the Dakar EFA meetings (UNESCO 2000).

## 6. CONCLUSION:

This article concludes that attendance in ECCE programs matches with increased enrollment, children's readiness for school and retention in primary and secondary school, improved behavior, and better academic performance (Myers 1995). The findings show that there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of early child centers but with fragmented structures. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to provide grants to centers that are owned and run by NGOs, Churches and local communities since such facilities operate under severe financial constraints which affect the quality they provide. The government should intensely monitor and supervise all existing ECCE structures to ensure that they meet standards that are outlined in the ECCE policy (2001) which responsibility lies with various stakeholders in charge. The study also revealed that improving human development in the early years is the surest way out of poverty because it has a very high economic rate of return. ECCE is the first step in this process, as reflected in the priorities that emerged from the Dakar EFA meetings (UNESCO 2000).

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to get the highest quality care and education for the children, the stakeholders should look for programs that:

- Employ teachers and administrators who are educated in child development and Early Childhood education.
- Employ teachers and administrators who are experienced in working with children under the age of six. Provide regular professional development opportunities for their staff members.
- Implement the practice of Continuity Care where teachers and children stay together for a number of years rather than children moving to a new classroom at each birthday. Maintain ratios and group sizes mandated by state licensing. Meeting national accreditation standards are even better.
- Implement a play based, child centered curriculum in a learning environment that is arranged into learning centers.

- It is crucial for the government to increase grants provided to centers that are owned and run by NGOs, Churches and local communities since such facilities operate under severe financial constraints which affect the quality they provide.
- The government should intensely monitor and supervise all existing ECCE structures to ensure that they meet standards that are outlined in the ECCE policy (2001) which responsibility lies with various stakeholders in charge.

## REFERENCES

1. Bar-On, A. (2004). Early childhood and education in Africa: The case of Botswana. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2(1), 67-84.
2. Bombay Community Trust. (2013). *Understanding our civic issues: Early childhood care and education*. <http://www.bcpt.org.in/webadmin/publications/pubimages/project-ece.pdf>.
3. Bose, K. (2008). Gaps and remedies of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs in Botswana. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 3, 77-82.
4. Bose, K. (2010). The issue of holistic development of young children in ECE centers in Botswana. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, 1(2), 433-449.
5. Botswana. (2009). *A needs assessment and costing exercise for achieving the millennium development goals in Botswana*. Gaborone: Vision 2016 Botswana Performance Report, 2009.
6. Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2001). Gaborone: Government Printer
7. Farrant, J. (2002). *Principles and practices of education*. London Group Ltd.
8. Gaborone Day Care Directory. (2011). *Records*. Gaborone, Botswana.
9. Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2001). Gaborone: Government Printer
10. Ministry of Education. (1977). *Education for Kagisano*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
11. Moatshe, B. (2004). *The impact of declining donor support on all sustainability of non-governmental organisations in Botswana: Insights from some NGO managers in Botswana*. Bachelor's Research Dissertation, University of Botswana, Botswana
12. Myers, R. (n.d.). *The twelve who survive: Strengthening programmes of early childhood development in the third world*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
13. Otaala, B., Kibria, G., & Mwamwenda, K. (1982). *Early childhood education in Botswana: A survey*. Gaborone: UNICEF.
14. Republic of Botswana. (2001). *Early childhood care and education policy*. Gaborone: Government Printers.
15. UNICEF. (2008). *Social protection in east and southern africa: A framework and strategy for UNICEF*. UNICEF.
16. UNICEF. (2011). *The situation analysis of children and their families in Botswana: Summary report. Findings and recommendations to policy makers*. Gaborone: UNICEF, Botswana Country Office.
17. Van Der Gaag, J., & Tan, J. (1998). *The benefits of early child development programs: An economic analysis*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
18. Young, M. (1996). *Early child development: Investing in the future. Directions in development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.