

Challenges in the provision of early childhood care and education services in rural areas of Botswana

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ABSTRACT

Quality Early Childhood Care and Education programs are beneficial to children in numerous ways. Consequently, from time immemorial, various stakeholders not only in Botswana, but the world over, has embarked on various efforts to try to provide such services. However, several challenges in the provision of Early Childhood Care and Education services prevail in various countries. This paper explores such issues in the context of Botswana. It also maps the way forward in relation to addressing the challenges. Desktop research using existing sources such as newspapers, University archives, and published citations was used to gather relevant information for this paper.

Keywords: Early childhood care and education, children, challenges, Botswana.

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INTRODUCTION

Research findings have shown that good quality ECCE programmes provide a wide range of benefits for children, families, and communities. For instance, they facilitate children's social, emotional, nutritional, and health development (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2007). In addition, families are provided with the security of knowing that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment. Parents, especially women, are released from childminding so that they can engage in income-generating activities. For communities, long-lasting benefits such as prevention of child labour, increased intergenerational social mobility, higher female labour market participation, and gender equality are realised.

Despite the fact that ECCE programs have several benefits, the provision of good quality ECCE services has not been fully achieved in some countries. Such programmes are mostly in urban areas, and usually organised on a private basis and thus benefiting children from higher-income families. For example, in China, 95% of children in urban areas attend preschool while only 50 % in rural areas do so. In Azerbaijan, the kindergarten attendance rate for 5–6-year-old children in cities is 35 and 12% in rural areas. On a similar note, in

Togo, access to early childhood services in rural areas is only approximately 8 and 60% in cities (Education International, 2010). On a similar note, Children in Tajikistan, Iraq and Yemen are four times more likely to attend ECCE programmes if they live in urban areas as opposed to rural areas (Manji et al., 2015). The participation rate in ECCE services in urban areas of Kenya is around 75%, while in rural areas it is 25% (Ibid).

The urban-rural gap in pre-primary enrolment is widened by the fact that many countries have yet to expand the public provision of pre-primary education and therefore the field of childcare services is left to private providers and individual families (Bennett, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). Private providers gravitate towards marketable and profitable areas and are unlikely to locate in sparsely populated and remote areas (UNESCO, 2015). This is especially true in developing countries where ECCE is still very limited and unequal. In 2010, 57% of young children in developing countries had no access to pre-primary care and education services and, of these, 83% were in sub-Saharan Africa (The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development [CGECCD], 2013).

It has been argued that children from disadvantaged groups stand to gain the most from good quality ECCE services (UNESCO, 2015). However, they are 10 times less likely to participate in ECCE programmes than their counterparts from more affluent areas (UNESCO, 2008; CGECCD, 2013). According to UNESCO (2015), living in rural areas and /or being poor in countries such as Kenya, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Togo, decreases a child's chance of participating in early learning programmes.

In 2014, 22% of preschool-age children in Botswana were enrolled in ECCE services (Kayawe, 2014). Denying a vast majority of children the right to ECCE programmes is a violation of their rights. Education as a human right has been constitutionally recognised since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 3 of the UNCRC emphasises that the primary concern in all actions dealing with any child should be his or her best interest. Young children as rights bearers are entitled to have access to basic services such as education and health (Penn, 2008). ECCE lays a solid foundation for the development of a child's personality, talents, and mental and physical ability.

Education and care play a paramount role in the development of a child and having access to ECCE services is a right. The rights-based approach advocates that every child, including the most marginalised, should have the opportunity to access ECCE (Mwaipopo, 2016). The right to education is an empowerment right that helps to lift economically and socially marginalised people (adults and children) out of poverty by providing them with the ability to participate fully in their communities. The approach views ECCE intervention, not as something that is done to young children in the hope of (re)shaping their future, but as a collaborative venture with them (Penn, 2008). It emphasises participatory processes at various levels with children, parents, and the wider community (Penn, 2008). The rights-based approach (RBA) moves beyond simply giving access rights to young children but seeks to target the underlying roots of barriers to education.

Excluding rural children from such services denies them the opportunity to reap the benefits of the system. They are left behind in the development of cognitive skills, language ability, numeracy, psychological and physical health, and social behaviour (Maudeni, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Issues that are analysed in this paper are largely derived from secondary data. The documentary review provides background information on the topic. Web research that involves the use of the internet to search for relevant studies through the use of search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo was utilised. The web

search was useful in gaining access to the most current information since studies normally take months (or years) before being published and can be outdated by the time they are accessed. Furthermore, the web search helped to acquire documents on the World Wide Web (WWW) and the use of grey literature such as unpublished work and personal web papers relevant to the study. The database involved the use of scholarly journals, professional articles, abstracts, and reviews from the University of Botswana library online database.

CHALLENGES THAT AFFECT THE PROVISION OF ECCE SERVICES IN REMOTE AND RURAL AREAS OF BOTSWANA

This section discusses the challenges of ECCE provision in rural areas of Botswana. Where appropriate, existing literature from other countries will be used for comparison purposes to show that while some challenges are peculiar to Botswana, others are not. Some of the challenges affecting the provision of ECCE programs are low access to ECCE services, insufficient funding, shortage of trained teachers, high staff turnover, the relative absence of males in the ECCE sector, lack of public awareness and home support and language barriers.

Low access to ECCE services

UNESCO (2015) indicated that ECCE services in Botswana are still largely concentrated in urban areas and accessible to children from affluent families, inevitably isolating the poor in the rural areas.

Children in remote areas of Botswana have limited or no access to ECCE programmes due to the general geographic, socio-economic, and cultural conditions of these areas. Rural areas continue to be affected by a high incidence of poverty as most economic activities and government spending is in urban areas (Moepeng and Tisdell, 2006). Development programmes in rural areas tend to be major budget targets during periods of economic downturns (Moepeng and Tisdell, 2006). Hence access to ECCE is still far below the Education for All (EFA) targets as indicated below (UNESCO, 2015).

Another challenge is that some populations in the country are not officially recognised as Remote Area Dwellers (RAD). RAD refers to people or communities which are not recognised as villages as they fall outside the scope and coverage of social service provision (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, n.d.). They are characterised by a lack of economic well-being and as being poverty stricken with little or no access to educational resources. Due to the remoteness of these areas, they miss out on Non-

Governmental Organizations (NGO) initiatives to set up ECCE centres. Kayawe (2014) argued that ECCE programmes in Botswana remain exclusive to the affluent and children in urban areas. Children's access to ECCE has slightly improved in the past few years because the Government of Botswana introduced 115 reception classes in primary schools, with priority being given to schools in such areas (UNESCO, 2015). However, by 2020 the program had not been rolled out to all primary schools in the country. Until 2014, the government did not play a direct role in the provision of ECCE programmes (Maudeni, 2013). Its role was largely to facilitate policy development and implementation. The responsibility of ECCE provision, by and large, has been left to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector (Republic of Botswana, 2001). Consequently, such facilities have remained concentrated in urban areas largely as a preserve of rich and middle-class families and inevitably isolating the poor in the rural areas (UNESCO, 2000).

Inadequate access to ECCE programmes for children in rural and remote areas is not peculiar to Botswana, it has been noted in many countries around the globe. There are some exceptions such as France, Belgium, and Italy where ECCE services are accessible to all children regardless of their economic background (Kamerma 2000; Neuman 2005). These countries provide free and heavily subsidised ECCE programmes (Kamerma, 2000). In contrast, in countries such as Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, young children are considered the responsibility of parents and private self-funding is prominent. In China funding for ECCE is limited and comprises around 1.28% (Zhao and Hu, 2008) of the education budget, the bulk providing sufficient public resources for ECCE facilities in urban rather than rural areas.

Many other countries, struggle to improve access in rural areas where it is logistically complicated and expensive to provide such services (Neuman, 2005). Rural areas are sparsely populated and often have limited access to developmentally salient resources, like health care, libraries, and childcare. Furthermore, over the last few decades, many talented young people have migrated to urban and suburban areas for higher quality jobs making it more difficult for rural parents to provide children with an enriching ECCE experience (Miller and Votruba-Drzal, 2013).

Rural environments also pose challenges for children receiving educational services. The long distances between school and home deter parents from allowing their children to participate in such services (Nganga, 2009; Weiss and Correa, 1996). In Botswana, Tshireletso (2001) noted that Basarwa children are disadvantaged in school because the geographical environment provides a little educational experience to what they learn in school. The situation has not changed as indicated by the 2015 Human Rights Report that

Basarwa continues to be geographically isolated and has limited access to education.

Funding constraints

The second factor that hinders the provision of quality ECCE programmes especially in rural areas of Botswana is the shortage of funds. Unlike in many developed countries where Governments fund ECCE, this is not the case in Botswana. The vast majority of ECCE funding is from parents' fees (Bose, 2008). As mentioned, elsewhere in this paper, it was only in 2014, when the Government of Botswana started to provide funding for reception classes for children aged above 5 years. Consequently, a majority of children below 5 years who come from poor families are unable to access quality ECCE. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, which consumes a large percentage of resources of many countries, it is unlikely that the Government of Botswana can expand the funding of ECCE to children below 5 years.

Funding constraints are not peculiar to Botswana, but they prevail in some developing countries such as South Africa. Since pre-primary education is neither free nor compulsory (Dillard, 2009; Nganga, 2009), in a place where people are poor, they are unlikely to access any service for which they must pay (Penn, 2008). Most families in rural areas cannot afford high fees for such programmes and as such, the home remains an alternative venue for ECCE provision (UNESCO, 2000). Centres operated by Village Development Committees (VDCs) and NGOs are grossly underfinanced since the sector has limited funding (Bar-On, 2004), thus failing to adhere to the stipulated regulations and standards in the ECCE policy (Bose, 2008; Maudeni 2013). The situation is not unique to Botswana as the current Education for All (EFA) report shows that pre-primary education has a low share of education budgets around the world (at a median of only 4.9%) with sub-Saharan Africa spending an average of 0.3% on the sector (UNESCO, 2015).

Nutritional challenges

Good nutrition in a child's early years lays an important foundation for future health and well-being (Moalosi, 2012). Consequently, ECCE centres are important gatekeepers in providing children with nutritious meals (Moalosi, 2012). The ECCE policy of Botswana (2001) states that centres that operate up to 5½ hours a day should offer at least a snack or formula and centres that operate for more than 5½ hours a day should give children at least one cooked meal. Furthermore, the policy stipulates that children should be provided with nutritious meals according to their needs and in the

quantity they require.

According to Bar-On (2004), many Village Development Committees and some NGO centres provide little food and are not according to children's needs. This is mainly due to insufficient funds. A study carried out in Towing, an urban village (adjacent to the capital city of Botswana), revealed that most ECCE centres provide insufficient meals without the recommended nutrients such as iron, calcium, carbohydrates, and protein. The situation is worse in remote areas where children in some ECCE centres are not provided with any food or the food provided is poorly prepared. Poor nutrition affects children's cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development which impacts their readiness for school and their success in school and lifetime learning (Jukes, 2007).

Gender disparity in the provision of ECCE services

By and large, in Botswana, like in many other countries, women are over-represented in ECCE centres (both as workers and owners). There is a scarcity of men in such centres. It has been argued that having a gender mix among the workforce in the provision of ECCE services has positive effects on children's development (Urban, 2009). A balance of both men and women in ECCE supports greater flexibility in the gender role expectations of young children (Piburn, 2010). There is, internationally, a scarcity of men in the ECCE sector. In Europe, men working in ECCE varies across countries, from being non-existent in Hungary and Spain to slightly more in the Netherlands (Urban, 2009). In the United States, only 2% of the ECCE workforce is male (Flynn, 2014) whilst in Trinidad and Tobago male teachers are almost non-existent in preschools. Research findings by Bose (2008, 2010) and Mwamwenda (2014) in Botswana echo similar findings that a majority of ECCE centres are female-headed with a teacher population of 98% female and only 2% male.

Research studies have shown that several factors have contributed to the relatively low numbers of male teachers in ECCE. One of them is societal perceptions that the provision of ECCE is a woman's job. Low wages associated with the teaching profession in general (Farquhar, 2006; Larisa, 2012; Flynn, 2014) further exacerbate the situation. Men tend to be the primary income earners in their families and low salaries make it difficult for them to seek employment in the early childhood sector (Farquhar, 2006). Wilkins and Gamble (2012) noted that it may not be the salary structure that deters men from entering the ECCE profession but rather their fear of child abuse accusations. For example, consoling a young girl child with hugs by a male teacher may be wrongly interpreted. Abdul-Majjed and Seenath (2015) stated that there is a limit to the type of care that male ECCE teachers can provide to

young girls and they are normally faced with the challenge of gaining the trust of community members before being accepted in this position. Farquhar (2006) argue that there is no evidence to support the fact that male childcare teachers are all potential child abusers or that female teachers are less likely to be abusive than their male counterparts. Woltring (2012) suggests that there is a need for thoroughly screening both males and females in the recruitment and selection process for ECCE jobs and suggests applications should be made by letter and by word of mouth. She further recommends that male teachers should not work alone with children to avoid being an easy target for false accusations.

Shortage of trained and qualified teachers and low compensation

Trained teachers are key in providing good quality ECCE services. Trained and qualified teachers are ideally informed about child development and appropriate practices and teaching strategies for use with young children (Bose, 2008).

Poorly trained teachers lack knowledge of appropriate practices and teaching strategies and thus are unable to deliver quality services. Lack of training in ECCE pedagogy often results in teacher-centred approaches that focus more on children's academic development than on other areas such as physical development. For example, in Zimbabwe lack of basic skills in ECCE syllabus interpretation has forced teachers to resort to formal teaching instead of the recommended child/play centred learning (Moyo et al., 2012). The human capital theory argues that to ensure that ECCE programmes translate into future higher tangible economic returns, there is a need to provide quality services and qualified and trained teachers are paramount to the quality process.

A qualified workforce is critical in increasing the quantity and quality of ECCE services. Research findings show that teachers with higher levels of education are more likely to implement appropriate practices in the delivery of ECCE services than teachers with lower levels of education. The strength of ECCE systems in many European countries is that persons working with children aged three to six hold relevant qualifications, a vast majority at the tertiary level (Urban, 2009). In Sweden, a large proportion of ECCE staff have university degrees in early childhood development and pedagogy or equivalent bachelor's degrees with specialised training in early childhood development (Sacks and Ruzzi, 2005). ECCE teachers in France have the same training, civil service status, and salaries as primary school teachers (Boocock, 1995; Sacks and Ruzzi, 2005).

In comparison, teachers in rural areas of China lack the relevant qualifications and have very limited formal

training in child development (Zhao and Hu, 2008; "Educational Challenge", n.d). Without professional qualifications teachers often cannot qualify for social welfare guarantees such as government pensions, medical insurance, and housing allowances (Zhao and Hu, 2008; Hu and Roberts, 2013). Consequently, this sector of the education system is very unattractive for teachers.

A study by Shrestha et al. (2009) showed that government ECCE centres in Nepal were run by facilitators with the educational attainment of eighth grade or more which was not adequate to meet the children's physical, social, emotional, and mental needs. According to Moyo et al. (2012), ECCE teachers in Zimbabwe are unqualified and lack the basic skills in ECCE syllabus interpretation resorting to formal teaching. In Botswana, the study findings by Bose (2008), revealed that most early childhood teachers had no formal training in ECCE because there is a lack of relevant training centres for this cadre of teachers. Bose, (2008), also noted that Botswana has few centres that offer certificate programmes for infant and daycare service providers with a limited number of ECCE teachers trained by the University of Botswana.

Poor remuneration in the ECCE sector also plays a significant role in the quality of services offered to young children. In China, teachers in rural areas are normally poorly remunerated and lack the security associated with the receipt of monthly wages because most parents cannot afford to pay ECCE fees regularly (Hu and Roberts, 2013). According to Sooter (2013) job insecurity and low wages are associated with teaching in ECCE institutions in Nigeria. In Zimbabwe, remuneration for teachers has been in the form of allowances from the government ('Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Zimbabwe'). These allowances are very low and thus ECCE programmes attract only paraprofessionals who are underqualified for these programmes (Moyo et al., 2012; 'Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Zimbabwe')

In developing countries, the problem of low wages is exacerbated by the fact that rural areas are isolated and have limited options for public services. For example, in the absence of public transportation in rural areas, teachers are forced to provide their transportation. A majority of rural schools in sub-Saharan Africa have inadequate learning resources, lack water and electricity, have unhygienic toilet facilities, and provide poor quality staff housing. Such teaching environments compounded by poor compensation, drive teachers away from the profession, subjecting young children to a multitude of inexperienced caregivers (Jalongo et al., 2004). Furthermore, in countries such as Ghana and Sudan, ECCE educators suffer from public prejudice about the essence, relevance, status, and levels of teachers involved in the profession. Society views them as childminders and not educators.

High staff turnover

Another challenge that adversely affects the provision of good quality ECCE in Botswana is high staff turnover. While staff turnover is cited in many countries as a factor in various ECCE centres, it has been an acute problem in remote and rural areas of Botswana. Some areas in the country are extremely remote, hence some teachers who are hired in such areas tend to have negative attitudes which affect their job performance and that of the children they are meant to educate. It often becomes very difficult to recruit qualified teachers for posts in such areas resulting in high staff turnover which affects children's learning outcomes.

The second factor that accounts for the high staff turnover is that some teachers tend to leave private and NGO run preschools to seek employment in the Government-funded reception programmes that have been mentioned elsewhere in this paper. This is so because Government salaries are much higher than those in the private and NGO sectors. The high staff turnover not only has adverse effects on the reputation of a school, but it also disrupts the bond that children had with teachers.

Lack of public awareness and home support

Parental involvement refers to parents' use and investment of resources in their children and may include activities such as discussions about school and help with homework (Trivedi et al., 2012). According to the authors, Botswana is perceived as an oral society that promotes talking rather than reading. The above authors further assert that most Botswana children grow up in homes that have no reading materials and where little writing occurs. Parents are children's first educators and play a crucial role in their children's perceptions of and approach to learning. Research findings indicate that parental involvement has a considerable impact on a child's early and future academic achievement (Wiles, 2007; Burton, 2013). There is a clear need in Botswana to sensitise parents on the importance of ECCE and their involvement in their children's education.

Parental involvement for children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds can be a key protective factor that enables children to be mentally and emotionally resilient in the face of challenges (Waanders, Mendez and Downer, 2007). Unfortunately, the importance of ECCE has not caught the full attention of many societies due to the lack of awareness among parents, staff, and school management about the importance of parental involvement in ECCE services (Weiss and Correa, 1996).

Miller and Votruba-Drzal (2013) stated that children's early achievements are influenced by, firstly, cognitive

stimulation in the home through the provision of books and toys and the teaching of numbers. Secondly, parenting quality characterised by high levels of warmth, consistency, and responsiveness from parents towards their children is important. Lastly, parents' beliefs and expectations regarding child-rearing and education are highly significant. European countries have made an effort in their childcare policies to encourage parental involvement in ECCE (Cochran, 2011). In Sweden, there are agreements in workplaces that allow parents to attend preschool during the first few weeks of their child's enrolment (Cochran, 2011). Furthermore, similarly in Italy, parents are allowed a seat on preschool governing boards. The Head Start programme, which is one of the largest ECCE programmes in the United States includes the involvement of parents through a wide range of activities such as parenting skills, family literacy, home visits, parent leadership opportunities, and health care services with the aim that, as parents are involved in these activities, they are more likely be positively involved in their children's learning (Quadri, 2012).

In contrast, Abdulai (2014) argued that, in Ghana, the lack of parental involvement is a result of a lack of public education on the relevance of ECCE in the education system. Tashobya (2012) argued that lack of parental involvement in Uganda is because most of the educated, especially in rural areas, do not have any ECCE training and therefore deem it irrelevant for their children since they were able to successfully study at primary, secondary, and University levels without it. In most African countries children from low-income families are raised in environments where parental involvement in their education is either minimal or absent (Ngwaru, 2014). Research findings in Zimbabwe and Kenya indicated that parents were preoccupied with poverty and socioeconomic activities and thus lacked the understanding of their importance in their children's education (Ngwaru, 2014).

Language barriers

The two official languages in Botswana are English and Setswana and they are the only media of instruction in the education system. In VDC centres, Setswana is the official language; however, in some centres, English is also used. Bar-On (2004) noted that, in villages where ECCE programmes were conducted in a language other than the children's home language, parents refused to send their children to school.

Molosiwa (2009) argued that the current education system in Botswana is not inclusive of all cultural and ethnic minority groups. The education curriculum, including the current ECCE policy, does not make provision for linguistic minorities. Many teachers from mainstream Setswana speaking groups refrain from serving in ethnic minority areas because of language

and cultural barriers (Molosiwa, 2009). The teachers serving in such areas carry cultural and personal attitudes which do not support child learning (Tshireletso, 2001).

The cultural and ethnic barrier is indicative of negative relations between teachers and learners or teachers and parents of young children. Children are unable to express themselves and teachers are unable to communicate with children. As a result, young children suffer adversely when taught in a language other than their mother tongue (Oussoren, 2001). They are negatively affected in primary schools as they are the ones with the highest failure and dropout rates (Molosiwa, 2009). Furthermore, parents, especially in remote areas, do not send their children to school because of the insensitivity of the school culture and curriculum (Bar-On, 2004).

Participation in ECCE programmes enhances children's language development as they engage in conversation with peers and teachers through play, song, and reading. The use of children's home language or mother tongue is important as it provides continuity of learning between home and school. In addition, it facilitates parents and caretakers to be part of the children's learning. The lack of a national language and multicultural policy in Botswana means that minority ethnic children who are in dire need of ECCE are excluded from such programmes.

Lack of proper infrastructure

Infrastructure includes both physical (premises, outdoor spaces) and non-physical (planning, administration, training, monitoring, evaluation, and data collection). Government funding helps to ensure that ECCE programmes stay within specific limits and do not fall below an agreed standard of quality. In developing countries, ECCE centres based in rural areas often have poor infrastructure which lacks appropriate facilities and equipment (Education International, 2010). Many ECCE facilities function without basic infrastructure such as running water, access to electricity and suitable sanitation (Swadener, 2000; Gardiner, 2008). The lack of proper infrastructure and appropriate structures like buildings and play centres, forces parents who would like to see their children in school (especially in the rural areas) to struggle to put up staffroom blocks, classrooms, and toilets (Tashobya, 2012). Poor infrastructure at ECCE facilities presents significant health and safety risks to young children attending these facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has noted among other things that only 22% of children eligible for preschools education accessed

such programs in Botswana in 2014. This is a slight increase from the 17% that was noted in 2007 (UNICEF, 2007; Kayawe, 2014). This figure is too low compared to the Education for All (EFA) target of 80% enrolment. Responsibility for ECCE provision has, by and large, been taken by the private sector, NGOs, and communities. Since children are the future of the nation, there is a need to prioritise ECCE in Botswana. The recent 115 pilot reception classes introduced in primary schools around the country demonstrate the government's willingness to improve the accessibility of ECCE programmes especially for marginalised children in rural and remote areas. However, this excludes children who are below 5 years.

To address some of the challenges mentioned above, the following are recommended:

Government

Based on the fact that only a few children in the country have access to ECCE programs, a major way to expand children's access to these services is for the Government, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development to assume leadership in the provision of ECCE services in the country. This move will go a long way to ensure that the Education for All target of 80% enrolment is achieved. However, it should be noted that it is a long term goal that may take time to implement,

Increasing accessibility to ECCE services does not necessarily guarantee quality; therefore, the Government must intensify monitoring and evaluation efforts to ensure that all ECCE centres in the country adhere to the UNESCO standards of ECCE programs as well as the UN standards of child nutrition. Research findings have indicated that quality ECCE programmes help to reduce grade repetition and increase school completion and achievement. The government should refocus its strategy on addressing the education crisis in the country and confronting issues at grassroots levels, such as early childhood, through a serious commitment to pre-primary education.

Teachers

One of the challenges highlighted in the paper is the shortage of trained teachers. It is comforting to note that in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of institutions that offer training in ECCE, therefore, it is hoped that the initiative will address the shortage of qualified teachers in preschools. Institutions such as Baisago University; the University of Botswana and the Gaborone University College of Law and Professional Studies offer programs that range from certificate to Masters Degree. The duration of these

programs ranges from one to four years.

Language of instruction

As indicated elsewhere in this paper, the use of the mother tongue plays a significant role in the development of the child's identity, self-esteem, and involvement in cultural practices. One of the greatest constraints in Botswana with regard to mother-tongue instruction in ECCE is the lack of policy to support such languages and a shortage of teachers fluent in these languages, especially for minority groups such as the San, the Kalanga, and the Mbukushu Wagner (2006) stated that San children who speak Khoisan, are disadvantaged very early in schools because they are forced to learn difficult languages such as English and Setswana. Heckman (2000) argued that early learning failure or disadvantage breeds later failure. Molosiwa (2009) noted that teachers' preparation to address the linguistic needs of ethnic minority students in Botswana is inadequate. One of the practical methods of overcoming language and cultural barriers as utilised by the Bokamoso preschool programme is to train teachers from local communities who are familiar with mother tongue languages and the social environments of the children. On a broader level, the following are some of the ways in which the education system in Botswana becomes more inclusive of all cultural groups (Wagner, 2006; Molosiwa, 2009):

- Multicultural education in the form of language courses should be infused into teacher education programmes.
- Prospective teachers should be afforded cultural training to gain a better understanding of different cultural groups.
- Government should hire permanent translators and parents as teacher aides to address language barriers in preschools as it already does in some primary schools ('Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Botswana').
- There should be a revision of the language policy (as it currently recognises only Setswana and English as official languages of instruction) to create a multicultural and multilingual education system.

Addressing gender disparities in ECCE

One of the challenges in the provision of ECCE in Botswana that has been highlighted in the paper is gender disparity. Measures must be taken to increase the percentage of male teachers from 2% to at least 30 if not 50%. This will go a long way in exposing children from an early age to male teachers – a phenomenon that will have a positive impact on the lives of children, especially that more than 50% of children in the country

are raised by single mothers.

Parents

Research findings indicate that parents are children's first educators and enhance children's future academic learning (Burton, 2013). Mannathoko and Mangope (2013) noted that the 1993 report on education stated that one of the reasons that Botswana's private schools surpass government schools is active parent participation. Trivedi et al. (2012) argued that Botswana is perceived as an oral society that promotes talking in preference to reading and therefore most Botswana children grow up in homes that have no reading materials and where little writing takes place. The Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP) stated that there is a need to educate parents and communities on the necessity for and importance of ECCE through seminars, training programmes, campaigns, and similar initiatives. Based on Joyce Epstein's framework the following are the different ways parental involvement can be encouraged and strengthened in the country (Davis, 2000; Epstein and Salinas, 2004):

Parenting: Assist families with parenting skills and helping them to establish home environments to support children's growth and learning. Positive parental skills can be imparted through workshops and training. Home visits can provide parents with the opportunity to share concerns on domestic situations which might affect their children's learning. This can also create a collaborative relationship with other government ministries such as health or social services to ensure that families and children receive all the help needed to guarantee future successful learning.

Volunteering: Recruit and organise parents as volunteers to assist children at school especially during school events or career days. This will assist in creating an opportunity for parents to be positive role models in their children's lives and also mobilising communities to be involved. Parents who are actively involved are also more likely to encourage other parents to become involved in their children's education.

Decision making: Giving parents' opportunities to participate in school decisions and governance through organisations such as PTAs (Parent-Teacher Association). Parents are more supportive of school efforts and initiatives when included in the decision-making process.

Collaboration with the community: There is a need for identifying and integrating community resources to strengthen school programmes and children's learning and development. The Bokamoso preschool is a good

example of this initiative where parents are encouraged to share their traditional and cultural practices with the children and educational materials used to emanate from the community (Nguluka, 2010; Johnson et al., 2013). Furthermore, the programme would be led by trained local teachers creating a positive collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community.

In conclusion, the paper has highlighted numerous challenges associated with the provision of ECCE in rural areas of Botswana. It has also shed light on how some of the challenges could be addressed. It is important to note that most of the challenges discussed are caused by the poor people's economy (see Banerjee and Duflo, 2011 for insights on challenges associated with poor economies). Therefore, addressing such challenges may not be completed in a short period of time.

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