

# Teething Problems: Implementing Early Childhood Education in Botswana Public Primary Schools

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## Abstract

This paper discusses problems encountered by programme agents in the implementation process of the Early Childhood Education programme in Botswana public primary schools. Early Childhood programme was implemented in Botswana public primary schools to develop learners at a tender age as well as giving learners an opportunity to attend preschool especially those whose parents could not afford high fees paid in private preschools. Qualitative approach with the use of multi-case studies was embraced because it suited the research design, hence, data were collected using interviews, open ended questionnaires, focus group discussions and field notes to investigate the problem under study. The results indicated that there is need for protective clothing, unsuitable infrastructure, dysfunctional outdoor equipment, teacher conflict, lack of parental involvement, School management disconnection from ECE programme, multitasking of Heads of Infant and delays in employing teachers of ECE amongst other things. The study concluded that a review, networking and collaboration on the ECE programme implementation is necessary between policy makers and agents of the programme to address some of the short term problems.

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**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Primary Schools, Problems, Teachers, Learners

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## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is a critical educational foundation stage that cannot be overlooked. Scholars believe that investing in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a cost-effective strategy that can mitigate childhood disadvantage, producing higher rates of economic return for the individual person, community, and country (Agbenyega, 2020). ECE leads to cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and moral developmental gains that carry over into later stages of development (Agbenyega, 2020). Despite the benefits of ECE, the biggest challenge in any institution, or organization or educational set up could be implementing the ECE programme because implementation is about change of certain practices, doing away with others and accepting others. However, change is hard and people can resist or ignore it. This study evaluated the implementation of the ECE programme in Botswana public primary schools. A change was introduced by Botswana Government to accommodate preprimary education in some public primary schools of Botswana (Republic of Botswana, 2013). It was for teachers, School Management and Education Officers to accept, nurture and promote this change in primary schools chosen to commence the ECE programme. However, if there are no guiding principles or processes from MOBE, road blocks may occur and intended results may fall short. Sole responsibility lies with MOBE to make teachers, who are the agents of the ECE programme to understand, nurture and agree with the processes of change. This paper acmes teething problems because while conducting research

on implementing the ECE programme in Botswana, problems were registered by agents. Probing the problems experienced by participants were one of the objectives of the study to check the path which teachers walked through in the implementation process and observed where there could be road blocks and if they experienced them what was done about them. The implementation of the ECE programme started in 2013 in public primary schools and has not been evaluated to see whether the programme is a success or not. Therefore, this paper focuses only on the problems that emerged during the evaluation exercise that both teachers and learners encountered in the implementation process.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The outcomes of the ECE programme have shown strong evidence of its effectiveness in public primary schools and underlined problems that came along with the implementation process. UNICEF (2020) noted that access to good quality care and education was necessary for young learners outside the home environment. Therefore, UNICEF promoted the spirit of young children attending ECE programme to develop their basic cognitive and language skills they needed to flourish in schools. Such programmes also fostered social competency and emotional development. An observation was made that too few children attended preschool education and therefore UNESCO encouraged countries to start ECE in their public schools for children who are disadvantaged to have an opportunity to attend preschool education (UNICEF, 2020). UNICEF saw ECE as an

investment and could be a powerful way to reduce the gaps that often put children with low social and economic status at a disadvantage (UNICEF, 2020). When children are registered into ECE programmes it could be a step forward in reducing poverty and exclusion in cases where parents cannot afford expensive preschools or reception classes for their children. UNICEF (2020) indicated that children who attended preschools aged between 36 to 59 months by region were as follows: West and Central Africa = 24%; Sub-Saharan Africa = 26%; Middle East and North Africa = 28%; Latin America and Caribbean = 63% while least developed countries scored only 17%. From this statistics, the percentage for Africa is generally low. There is an indication that ECE is still not given the attention it deserves; the problem is still salient. This is the reason why Botswana as a country decided to address this plea and implemented the ECE programme in some of its public primary schools.

The UNESCO has committed themselves to life changing goals and this has to start at the foundation of education, ECE (SDG Report, 2020). However, the global Covid-19 pandemic has so many children out of school at the same time, it has disrupted learning and upsetting lives especially vulnerable and marginalized groups (SDG Report, 2020). During the time of data collection, ECE learners in Botswana did not attend school for almost a year and it had gone into the second year.

Botswana's vision 2036 points out that marginalized populations will be empowered to positively contribute towards their countries development, this has to start at the foundation of education, by empowering young learners from ECE with knowledge and skills through their home languages and other languages of instruction (Republic of Botswana, 2019). Further, the document emphasizes that by 2036, Botswana's society will be knowledgeable with relevant quality education that is outcome based with an emphasis on technical and vocational skills as well as academic competencies (Republic of Botswana, 2019). Botswana society has to nurture learning from the grassroots, relevant quality education begins with ECE by using languages learners can use to acquire quality education, they can only gain academic competencies when they relate with the languages of instruction used and also minimize the problems in education at the initial stages of learning. In the mist of good intentions, problems could outweigh the positives, ECE might be slow in producing learners who are ready for formal schooling.

Therefore, stakeholders might have to carry the obligation to reduce risks and challenges while continuing to educate teachers in way that aspires

towards smooth implementation of the ECE programme.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study embraced the qualitative approach to evaluate the implementation of the ECE programme in Botswana public primary schools. The study was conducted in six districts of Botswana: Kgalagadi, Central, Gantsi, North West, North East and Chobe. The districts are linguistically diverse with high populations of ethnic minority groups. In each district, five to six primary schools with ECE programme were studied and therefore thirty-two primary schools that were ethnically and linguistically diverse were involved. The objectives were to: a) investigate the views of the ECE programme implementers about the implementation process in ethnically and linguistically diverse situations; b) find out which language/s of instruction were used at ECE learning in these diverse situations; c) examine the measures used to implement the ECE programme; d) explore the challenges both learners and teachers encountered in the teaching and learning process; e) and establish solutions to the challenges encountered. Although the objectives of the study were five, this paper focuses only on the problems experienced by agents of the programme in the implementation process.

The population of the study were categorized into three: a) teachers of ECE because they were the direct implementers of the ECE programme; b) teachers of Standard One because they received learners from ECE and; c) Heads of Infant because they are supervisors of the ECE programme and therefore in a position to share valuable information regarding implementation of ECE. Teachers of the ECE programme sampled were 51; teachers of Standard One sampled were 49 while Heads of infant were 30. Therefore, all participants were 130. Important to note is that Heads of Infant also taught Standard One or Two grades, hence, they had to play a dual role of being teachers and Heads of Infant. The sampling procedures used were convenient sampling for teachers of ECE, random sampling for teachers of Standard One and convenient sampling for Heads of Infant. Convenient sampling was appropriate for teachers of ECE because in some schools there were only one or two, therefore, all of them were requested to take part in the study. In each school, there is only one Head of Infant and therefore, it was in order to request them to participate in the study to answer for some of the practices followed.

Random sampling was used for teachers of Standard One because there could be four to five classes of Standard One in some primary schools and only two were requested to take part in the study. The sampled population were coded according Position in School, District, School Code and Number. For example, ECE

(Preschool teachers from District A, School A and teacher number 1 was labelled as such: PAA1; Teachers of Standard One were coded following the same procedure as such: SAA1; Heads of Infant were also coded as such: HAA1, HBA2 and so on. In this regard, coding assisted in protecting the participants as well as labelling the participants according to Districts and Schools.

Data were collected using various instruments such as open ended questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and field notes for triangulation. Each instrument had a role to play. For example, the open ended questionnaires allowed participants to open up and share their views and experiences about the ECE implementation process. These were followed by individual interviews to close the gaps from open ended questionnaires. A group meeting was organized for all the participants and the school management to share the views and experiences in the school set up to close the existing gaps and address short term problems emerging from ECE classrooms. The researcher also managed to inspect ECE classrooms, outdoor equipment, infrastructure, storerooms and sickbays to check their status in the absence of children due to Covid-19 protocols.

Data were read, reread and coded according to schools and regions. The first school was given the same code as that of the district. Therefore, the coding helped in identifying common themes, variations, similarities and differences in each district and across districts. The researcher, interpreted the data according to each key research question to observe how each question was answered. Also, the researcher used the SPSS software to analyse complex qualitative data and the software helped in identifying emerging themes that were further classified as major and minor. The key research questions were turned into major themes and analysed following a blend of the Atlas system. Patterns and trends were also observed from the themes and therefore similarities and differences were noted amongst the primary schools studied. Some information was tabulated for easy following especially the demography of participants as well as the challenges encountered in each region. It was from this analysis that problems discussed in this paper were identified, hence, the paper highlights the problems for them to be noticeable.

The triangulation of data collection instruments made the data to be reliable and valid. For example, the open ended questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussion orchestrated a similar story about the implementation process of the ECE programme. The instruments were also given to a research assistant and a professional mentor to analyze them and they also shared the same story about the ECE implementation process. This made the data to be

trustworthy because it was read and analyzed by different pairs of eyes and painted the same picture.

Ethical processes were followed. Permission was sought from the Office of Research and Development at the University of Botswana and also at the Ministry of Basic Education. Also, all gate keepers were informed and meetings were held with School Management and teachers as gatekeepers to identify possible participants for the study. After reaching mutual understanding, consent forms were signed by those willing to participate in the study. After collecting data, meetings were held with teachers of ECE, Standard One and School Management to verify results and also shared information that could be addressed on short term basis.

The study had limitations because it was conducted during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was supposed to involve parents, but they had to be left out to avoid physical contact. Also, the study was supposed to have classroom observations for ECE classes and Standard One. During the time of study, ECE learners had closed schools and the researcher could not observe learners from ECE and Standard One classes as they were learning as initially planned to avoid spreading the Covid-19 disease. Further, not all primary schools with ECE were involved to meet the duration of the two months of data collection.

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

The results of the study are presented in this section. Problems encountered by teachers of ECE, Standard One, Heads of Infant and learners during the implementation of the ECE programme in Botswana public primary schools are made salient in the paper. The question on problems experienced by programme implementers and learners was important for participants to identify problems and factors that influence learning and teaching of the ECE programme negatively so that alternative ways, determining best practices and new innovations could be sought. Any implementation of a new programme can experience problems and ECE in Botswana primary schools is no exception. In this regard, it was important to identify the root cause of problems and provide relevant and appropriate remedies in the end. Below are participants' responses.

In all the districts, all teachers of ECE reported that they needed protective clothing because they play the role of caregivers. Teachers argued that they played with young learners indoor and outdoor games and activities. Further, teachers reported that some children vomited due to over eating or eating food they did not like. Again, some learners relieved themselves in class while others injured themselves and under these circumstances teachers were the only ones who could assist learners by tidying them up. Basing on these experiences in their classrooms,

teachers of ECE lamented about protective clothing. This suggests an interplay between the programme planners and its implementers that could have been overlooked at programme formulation stage.

In half of the primary schools (16), teachers of ECE reported unsuitable infrastructure. For example, teachers reported classrooms that were not spacious and toilets used by learners that have not been designed for ECE learners. Teachers of ECE lamented that some toilets were placed upstairs where young learners find it difficult to climb the stairs, hence, relieved themselves before they could reach the toilets. On the same breath, teachers of ECE reported that some toilets were too big for young learners, they use toilets that were used by mature pupils in the school and this made their life difficult as they had to be assisted by teachers or helpers in the toilets. In some cases, young learners cried for their privacy. It is apparent from the above that evidence that continuous evaluation and decision making and finding alternatives could be limited to look into infrastructure to be used by young learners.

Further, all teachers of ECE and School Management lamented about outdoor equipment that was not available in schools, where it was available, it was not functional and misplaced in the school environment. This means that learners were unable to perform outdoor activities as required by the curriculum. It was evident during data collection that in some schools, there were no outdoor equipment while in some, outdoor equipment was available but not functional or have never been used by learners for one reason or another. On the same breath, teachers also lamented about some outdoor equipment that was placed in close proximity to the School Heads' offices and when learners were supposed to use it, they would make noise for the School Management who could be busy having meetings with visitors. This suggests shortcomings of the implementation process that caused heavy waste of resources that hindered teachers from promoting physical and mental development in learners which could improve their cognitive skills.

Some teachers of Standard One in all districts reported that teachers of ECE were not doing enough to develop learners academically. According to these teachers, some learners complete the ECE programme with inadequate motor and basic language skills, hence, causing conflict between the two groups. According to teachers of Standard One, some learners complete the ECE programme not knowing how to write, read or colour. Even some of their motor skills would not have been developed by the time they completed the ECE programme. Teachers of Standard One blamed the teachers of ECE for this inadequacy. The above highlights the importance of collaboration and networking amongst

the teachers of ECE and Standard One. Also, this could suggest the possibility of confusion of roles that could lead to conflicts that emanate from misguided beliefs and understanding about the ECE implementation process.

In all the districts studied, teachers of ECE and Standard One reported lack of parental involvement in their children's education in various ways. For example, teachers of ECE reported that parents do not register their children for the ECE programme because their children would still be too young to attend school especially in boarding schools. Further, the teachers reported that when parents are called to school to pick up their children when they are not well, they do not turn up. This could mean that parents do not have that sense of ownership to the ECE programme. This suggests that parents' endorsement of the ECE programme was inadequately done in other regions of the country, consequently making the implementation of the ECE programme problematic. Adequate consultancies with parents could have resulted in enhanced participation by parents.

In four districts, most teachers of ECE reported that there was some disconnection between School Management and teachers of ECE. According to teachers of ECE, their immediate supervisors who are Heads of Infant and School Heads have limited knowledge about ECE. Consequently, teachers of ECE were inadequately represented in School Management meetings. According to teachers of ECE, they felt isolated. In most cases other staff members seem not to understand what they were doing and undermined them. According to teachers of ECE, this affected their relationship with the rest of the teachers in their schools. This suggests that the decision makers failed to promote the sense of ownership of the ECE programme as expected on the school leadership, and this left them with limited knowledge on implementing the ECE programme. Also, the leadership behavior suggests a mismatch between the teachers of ECE and the school leadership and a mismatch of the theory and its implementation process.

Heads of Infant reported the problem of multitasking. The HODs lamented that they had too much to handle, they had classes to teach, they were class teachers, have to supervise ECE and at the same time doing administrative work. According to HODs, just because they were Heads of Infant, they were given Standard One and Two classes to teach and the lower classes, according to them teaching lower classes was demanding. In this regard, they sometimes failed to balance their teaching and other school responsibilities. This suggests an outcry of heavy workloads from Heads of Infant hindering their supervisory practices on the ECE programme. The

workload could also be a demotivatory factor on their delivery of services.

Another problem reported was delays in teacher employment. Heads of Infant and teachers of ECE reported delays in employing teachers. According to the duo, it takes time for MOBE to employ ECE teachers, therefore, some classes were taught by unqualified staff. Also, MOBE does not increase the number of ECE classes because there were no teachers. Meanwhile qualified teachers in ECE remain unemployed, some ECE teachers reported that their applications stayed long at MOBE without being attended to or given another period of employment as they were employed on temporary basis. Again, teachers reported that they were aware of other qualified teachers who were unemployed and were home and jobless. Also, reported by teachers is the frequent changes of temporary teachers, who were employed on short term basis. According to the teachers, when their employment contracts ended, they were not easily renewed or replaced timeously and therefore classes stayed without teacher aides. This suggests lack of embracement on the ECE programme, lack of communication between education officers and schools and also shows an impoverished way of formulating effective practices of employing ECE qualified teachers.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

In order to address some of the problems that emerged from the study, this section discusses implementation experiences by ECE programme implementers in Botswana public primary schools.

### **The Need for Protective Clothing**

The findings indicated that all teachers of ECE in one voice wanted a supply of protective clothing for various uses because they looked after young children and acted as caregivers. Examples voiced by teachers calls for availability of protective clothing. Dugdale (2019), Professor of Medicine, at University of Washington School of Medicine argued that in a demanding situation such as hospitals, protective clothing was necessary. The same scenario can be applied to ECE classrooms in Botswana. Protective clothing is any clothing specifically designed, treated or fabricated to protect personnel from hazards that were caused by extreme environmental conditions, or a dangerous work environment (Dugdale, 2019). Some protective clothing may be designed to protect workers from the working environment due to infection or pollution. Personal protective equipment is special equipment worn to create a barrier between workers and germs.

This barrier reduces the chance of touching, being exposed to and spreading germs (Dugdale, 2019). This can protect people and health care workers from infections. During the time of data

collection, teachers of ECE, were not sure of which protective clothing they needed. However, a workable three types of protective clothing were discussed with participants. First, hand protection should be availed. Selecting proper gloves is very important since it is their hands that are often used to handle infectious and hazardous materials. These are necessary where teachers of ECE could be in contact with blood or other bodily fluids from learners or any objects that may irritate or burn teachers' hands in the process of teaching and learning. In addition, traumatic injuries such as cuts, sprains and punctures may also occur while learners are playing, hence, the use of gloves. It is important to know that not all gloves are protective against all hazards and therefore the educational authorities must choose the correct hand protection for the job.

Secondly, teachers argued that they needed body protective clothing such as laboratory coats, gowns, aprons, suits and shoes. This will prevent the contamination of skin and clothing as they attend learners who have relieved themselves in class or when doing outdoor activities with learners or doing art work with them. Thirdly, teachers argued that they also needed track suits and takkies for playing outside with learners. Again, teachers needed respirators that are used to prevent the exposure to air contaminated with harmful dusts, fumes, gases, sprays or when learners have relieved themselves. Respirator materials include disposable respirators and air purifying respirators that may not require training prior to use. All the demands of types of protective clothing mentioned here were a result of what transpired from teachers of ECE classrooms. However, the use of protective clothing also calls for waste management procedures to dispose of waste from ECE classrooms. This aspect cannot be disregarded.

### **Unsuitable Infrastructure**

The findings indicated that teachers of ECE have challenges with unsuitable infrastructure. Teaching is considered a complicated process in which many factors contribute towards its success or its failure, infrastructure included. Mondal (2012) talks about the environmental factor, that the condition in which learning takes place affects the efficiency of learning. The environmental factor covers aspects that are related to the physical conditions needed to support the teaching and learning process equipment and the size of the classrooms. In all districts, teachers of ECE lamented that they do not have enough space to display learners' activities for parents and other visitors to see how learners were progressing. Further, teachers argued that they did not have enough space to play indoor activities with children, hence, small spaces in the classrooms limited them. The other factor was that each classroom accommodates a maximum of thirty learners and in

some cases learners exceeded thirty. This means that when it comes to classroom activities, learners could not freely perform them in the classroom.

The findings indicated that ECE learners' toilets were not designed for their age group. In schools that were facing this problem, teachers argued that in some cases they have to accompany children to the toilets because toilets were too big for them and therefore needed parental assistance. This issue needed to be revisited to provide toilets designed for young learners to promote autonomy and independence on ECE learners. According to the teachers some ECE learners complained that they needed their privacy.

### **Outdoor Equipment that is Dysfunctional**

The findings revealed that outdoor equipment in schools was dysfunctional and misplaced. Studies have demonstrated the positive impact that being active outdoors can have on the development of a child's motor skills, health and concentration (Tovey, 2008). Successful outdoor activities offer flexible opportunities where children engage in imaginative, creative play, develop their communication skills and build relationships with other children as well as their teachers. In this regard, dedicated time and space for children to play outdoors should be recognized as a need and a right as it is central to learners' well-being and development (OECD Directorate for Education, 2006). Further, outdoor education enables children to be introduced to their new environment and helps them give it value in their eyes. When children have an opportunity to be in close contact with nature at an early stage, they realize their personal role in taking care of it (Tovey, 2008).

Therefore, outdoor education has been expanded upon as part of the ECE pedagogy system that, as a whole, guarantees the implementation of sustainable education at ECE age (Härkönen, 2013). In spite of the fact that resources are critical in learning and implementing any programme, Akinrotimi & Olowe (2016) argue that in Nigerian preschools, especially those owned by the government, resources are limited or not found. As a result, the quality of resources can impact negatively on the curriculum. In conclusion, a rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe and yet challenging.

Government cannot spend money on equipment that is minimally utilized or unused. This means School Management should make noise about the equipment that is not functional. Important to note is that some schools did not have outdoor equipment at all and teachers of ECE were not discontented with such lack of developments.

### **Teacher Conflict over Slow Acquisition of Basic Language Skills**

The findings revealed high expectations of teachers of Standard One from ECE learners. Although ECE learning only acclimatizes learners with the school environment and teaches them the basics, teachers of Standard One expected learners from ECE to know how to write, how to read fluently, how to colour and knowing mathematical concepts. Also, the fact that the duration of the ECE programme is only one year, not much can be covered and mastered.

Teachers of Standard One believed that teachers of ECE were not exerting enough effort to teach ECE learners. There was an indication that there could be a deficit somewhere, where teachers of Standard One believed that learners were in ECE classes to while away time and not learn. This deficit calls for collaboration between the two levels to make sure that each level understands what the other one is doing. Teachers of Standard One argued that had these problems been taken care of at ECE level, there would be no need for them to spend another six weeks with Standard One learners in ECE activities at the beginning of the year as they regard it as a waste of time and energy. Although it is not clear why teachers of Standard One expect ECE learners to know 'everything,' teachers of ECE argued that they cannot do all the work for teachers of Standard One. At the third stage of policy formulation, Smith (1973) argues that purposes and responsibilities are clearly laid out to avoid confusion amongst implementers of the programme (Smith, 1973).

The responsibilities for teachers of ECE and Standard One could have been clearly laid out to avoid confusion of duties and responsibilities. Further, teachers at both levels could have been involved at the implementation stage and curriculum design to map out what is supposed to be taught, how, with what at ECE and Standard One. This is an indication of a weak implementation process where some stages were omitted. While teachers of Standard One had high expectations from ECE learners, they overlooked the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic stretched for almost three years and it affected school teaching and learning. This could mean that the little time learners spent in school was inadequate for learners to master everything.

### **Lack of Parental Involvement**

The findings indicated that parental involvement was minimal at ECE level. These complaints were a common cry in four out of six districts. Parental involvement was a big component of this relationship-building process between teachers and parents, and Alvarado in Panworld Education (2017) argues that it is important for teachers at this level to work closely with families. "When the partnership between teachers and the family is successful, we see

that echoing positively throughout the child's life is important (Panworld Education, March 22 Blog)." This partnership between teachers and parents should be strengthened. Parents have a crucial part to play to ensure early childhood development in their children. Involved parents can make a positive and lasting impact on their children's learning ability. Children who are properly stimulated from birth to age five by their parents tend to perform better than other children in the long run (Panworld Education, 2017). What this means is that these children are more likely to complete their schooling, perform better academically, and lead healthier and more productive lives as adults. On the ground, this stimulation takes the form of being read to, attending Preschool and having parents who are aware of the school curriculum.

A good example of a state that successfully incorporated parents into the education system brilliantly is Jordan. The state runs a Parental Involvement Initiative set out to introduce parents into kindergartens, making them aware of the primary school curriculum, acquainting them with the teaching methods used, and the philosophy explaining the routines followed (Panworld Education, 2017). The programme aims at enriching the classroom environment through tapping into the experiences and expertise of parents in facilitating children's learning (Panworld Education, 2017). A parent who understands what their child is working on at ECE level has a better sense of their child's competency and which areas they need to work on to improve. They can then facilitate this improvement.

In two districts that were studied, parental involvement was high, parents contributed money to buy working outdoor equipment for their children and there were monitoring its effectiveness. This was a sign of positivity on the part of parents.

Further, education technology can help parents to be more involved in their children's school curriculum. Tools such as Bingiel could be used by parents to be more included in their children's primary school curriculum. Bingiel uses stories, games, and personal learning paths to make the primary school curriculum more interesting for everyone involved while particularly increasing student engagement (Panworld Education, 2017). Bingiel increases parents' understanding of the educational process and cooperation with teachers. Even teachers and school administrators can make good use of this tool. There are plenty more of such applications available to parents.

Parents can be invited to the school to learn more about the teachers, staff and facilities at school. Parents could also share their talent or devote time to volunteering inside the classroom. They could even

be asked if there are any particular topics they believe are missing and needed to be incorporated in the school curriculum.

Policy and practice decision-makers need to pay particular attention to parents who are most at risk: they need to find ways to facilitate change in parents' behaviors, taking into consideration personal beliefs and social support to maximize effectiveness. Given the critically important role of ECE learning and primary school curriculums, policy-makers have an interest in making sure that young children's environments at homes and schools promote positive outcomes and their education is relevant and effective. This could create successful future citizens. (Panworld Education, 2017).

The findings demonstrate that some parents in rural and remote areas are illiterate and therefore have little knowledge on how they can contribute to their children's education. Implementation of ECE programme is a new phenomenon in public primary schools which parents need to know and understand how it works. There could be deep rooted traditions and cultures that teachers need to understand, there could be lack of trust for outsiders as well as social beliefs that impede interaction between teachers and parents. These need to be addressed in order for parents to be engaged in their children's education. Closer ties between home and school, between parents and educators, translate into improved attendance and higher academic achievement. In general, productive collaboration between schools and families have been associated with higher learner achievement, lower dropout rates (Keith, Keith, Troutman, Bickley, Trivette & Singh, 1993), a decline in behaviour problems (Comer, 1984), and academic initiative and persistence (Estrada, Arsenio, Hess & Holloway, 1987).

Moreover, it is believed that parent involvement is a potent factor that has the potential to lessen the gap in achievement between children from high and low-income families (Milne, 1989). In addition, researchers, practitioners and policy makers have noted the importance of parental involvement as a component of effective schools (Epstein, 1987). Schleicher (1992) concludes that strong parental involvement and parent collaboration are indispensable conditions for educational progress. Epstein (1987a: 120) argues that:

...the evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievement, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account.

The above quotation indicates that students gain in personal and academic development when their families emphasize schooling. Although some of the parents are working and educated, they only come to pick up their children's progress reports or when they are called to the school because their children are not well. It is worrisome to have parents who stay away from school activities and when they want to move to another place, they remove their children from school only to stay with them at home. Such parents were identified as problematic by teachers in this study. Teachers argued that such parents do not support their children academically at home.

A related issue to lack of parental involvement was that of parents' refusal to register their children for ECE classes because they believed they were too young to go to school. This was a contributory factor for having one ECE class to four or five Standard One classes. Parents waited until their children were ready for Standard One age and registered them straight into Standard One even if there was an opportunity for learners to go through the ECE programme. Therefore, this resulted in having too many children registering for Standard One classes and yet there was only one ECE class of sixteen learners. This issue reflects on how the implementation was done. Were the parents informed about the importance of ECE programme and informed on why they needed to register their children? Parents need to understand why ECE is necessary.

#### **School Management Disconnection of ECE Programme**

The findings revealed that while the School Management are the overseers of daily routines and operations of primary schools, some of them ignored the ECE learning and teaching in their schools. In this regard, some of the ECE teachers felt unwanted because they do not have strong support and recognition from the leadership. There could be several reasons to this problem. First, there was evidence that implementation of the ECE programme was not solidified through school leadership, they were not fully inducted about its implementation. Hudson, Hunter and Peckham (2019) argued that policies do not succeed or fail on their own merit, their progress is dependent on the leadership during the implementation process.

There should be a chronological order in which intentions of the ECE programme are expressed and when this is not done, no matter how good a policy has been crafted, it could fail. Also, continuous collaboration internally and externally is necessary to address short and long term challenges that could impede the implementation process. Both the School Management and ECE teachers need to collaborate about the newly implemented ECE programme to

address teething problems. Second, another problematic issue was the distance. Rural areas may be difficult to reach out such that they are left out due to lack of clear deliverables, milestones, lack of capacity, lack of monitoring and thus, the rural areas are ignored (Mashini, 2008). According to Akinrotimi & Olowe (2016) supervision of ECE is necessary as it can be used to correct errors, modify practices where necessary and motivate as well as encourage all involved in its implementation process (Awino, 2014). Usually, the changes that result from supervision of ECE programme can strengthen the implementation of such ECE programme. Supervision in ECE could lead to holistic development of children, it could enable efficient implementation of curriculum, it could check whether the objectives of the programmes have been achieved (Awino, 2014). Also, it could promote maintenance of basic standard. Further, it identifies problems and constraints, motivates, enriches and promote personal as well as professional growth to all those involved (Awino, 2014).

Therefore, when the policy was inappropriately implemented, it was in order that implementers could lack implementation skills, there could be some inconsistencies, School Management may see the ECE programme as another burden if they do not understand its importance or see it as someone else's problem (Weaver, 2010). It may be difficult for School Management to own the ECE programme if they were not inducted about it.

Parents too may regard the ECE programme as another problem which they do not want to be part of and leave it for schools to solve it. In this regard, there may be a policy implementation gap between MOBE and School Management, School Management and Teachers of ECE and School Management and Parents which is a result of a weak implementation process.

#### **Multi-tasking of Heads of Infant**

The findings specified that Heads of Infant are faced with multi-tasking their duties and as a result, this leads to failure to perform effectively their duties. These duties affected their teaching in various ways: they lose focus and therefore cannot adequately complete their tasks, they are stressed by their job and in some cases fail to meet deadlines because they are overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Medical doctors, Kubu (2021) and Macmillan (2016) pointed out in their studies that our brains can focus on one task at a time, therefore switching gears many times can lead to more mistakes and frustration. Further, multitasking could also lead to dividing our attention. It makes it harder for us to give our full attention to one thing and this can lead to poorer driving performance. The doctors argue that multitasking affects our ability to learn. The more we multitask,

the less we accomplish and lose our ability to focus enough to learn. Also, trying to do too much at once makes it harder for us to be mindful and this can bring a plethora of problems leading to depression, anxiety and other serious health conditions (Macmillan, 2016). It therefore, demands that the School Management together with the MOBE should collaborate about this multitasking and strategize on ways of improving the services and duties of Heads of Infant. What they are complaining about may not yield good results as regards the implementation process.

### **Delays in Employing ECE Teachers and Replacing Temporary Teachers**

The findings indicated that MOBE takes time to employ qualified teachers of ECE. While it was evident that there is shortage of teachers, the arrival of teachers in schools took more than a year or two. Again, teachers lamented that they were self-sponsored to be trained in ECE diploma and certificate programmes. Therefore, it is difficult for MOBE to know what their curriculum entailed because they were not involved.

Even though there was shortage of classes and teachers, there are teachers who have not yet been permanently employed, they were employed on temporary basis and when their contracts end, they are not easily replaced. This means that some classes take long without teacher aides and therefore, where necessary, teachers seek the assistance of Covid-19 team or TireloSechaba participants (National Service participants) who are not qualified to assist in teaching ECE programme.

According to the teachers, the employment of non-teaching staff undermines their profession. The problem of using unqualified staff was also noted in Nigeria by Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016). The authors argued that this lack of professional training for teachers was liable to worsen the problems of implementing ECE in Nigeria. This was because almost all the teachers in Nigerian pre-primary schools were not professionally qualified. A clear process of employing and hiring teachers of ECE could enrich and strengthen the outcomes of the programme.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY**

The problems discussed in this paper have implications for research. For example, it has not been established how learners from ECE and learners who registered directly into Standard One perform in the Primary School Leaving Examinations. Comparative research needs to be done to track the differences in their performance in public primary schools. Secondly, further research is needed to find out about communication between District Councils and Primary Schools, Education Officers and Primary

schools regarding the outdoor equipment, infrastructure and implementation of the ECE programme. A sound relationship, together with team work embedded in a consultative process are critical for successful implementation of the ECE programme. Third, the views of parents about the ECE programme is important to try and understand why they lag behind, remove the obstacles and promote their children's education as regards the ECE programme. Their involvement is necessary to avoid disappointing outcomes.

### **CONCLUSION**

The contribution made by this paper can reshape the implementation process through addressing some of the obstacles on short term basis. Teething problems discussed that affect teaching at ECE, teaching at Standard One and Heads of Infant practices could hamper the very goal and objectives of ECE learning in Botswana public primary schools. The problems reported set the tone for moving forward to enable and strengthen the ECE without plenty of excuses. A well-coordinated implementation process is necessary, hence, the Ministry of Basic Education has to come up with robust, effective interventional strategies to provide short term solutions to the problems highlighted at ECE level. It also points out to a strong relationship between teachers of ECE, Standard One and School Management as well as Education Officers to maintain a strong collaborative team. Problems of lack of effective communication and lack of parental involvement have been highlighted in previous research and therefore suggest engagement improvement of the inspectorate team and teachers to make quality checks while tracking problems that have been prevalent and addressing them with effective remedies.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

#### **Competing Interest**

The author does not have any competing or conflicting interest.

#### **Author's contribution**

The author contributed to all aspects of this study. She was the principal investigator.

#### **Ethical Consideration**

The research followed all ethical procedures because it dealt with humans. Therefore, all gate keepers were consulted and permit issued.

#### **Funding**

The study was funded by Office of Research and Development at the University of Botswana

#### **Disclaimer**

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author.

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