

Parents' Perspectives on the Need for Professional Development for Early Childhood Teachers in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated parents' perspectives regarding the necessity of a Professional Development programme for Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers in Botswana. A quantitative survey research design was used. The sample size was 452 parents from various districts in Botswana. A questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended items was used to collect data which captured the parents' views on a Professional Development programme for ECD teachers. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 17 and presented using tables, graphs, cross-tabulations, chi-square test and binomial test and descriptive. The findings of the study show that the parents suggested a Professional Development programme for the ECD teachers that inculcates child care and communication skills, creation of appropriate teaching/learning environment, classroom management, professionalism, curriculum development and evaluation. The study recommended that clear policy is needed regarding basic qualifications and competencies of ECD teachers. A professional development programme which embraces all the key skills needed by ECD teachers is also recommended.

Keywords: *Early childhood development, Professional development, Teaching skills and competencies, Parents' perspectives, Botswana*

1. INTRODUCTION

The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued (p279).

Back (2011) observes that parents are the first and primary source of social support for young children. Parents act as advocates for children and schools and the important role they played in their child's education should never be overlooked. It is, therefore, imperative that parents participate in the implementation of education. The Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) provides a viable avenue for parents to become actively involved in their children's present and future successes. Through the PTA, home-school relationships are nurtured. Such collaboration aids the provision of quality services and parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in decision-making in matters that affect their children. In addition, schools grow to respect parents' points of view and they integrate their ideas into the programmes. It is often said that teachers are "experts" in academic domains, and parents are "guardians" who take care of children's social and emotional growth. So if parents and teachers work together, the child is afforded better quality learning. Research has also shown that when parents are involved, teachers want to hook-in parents even more, as parents understand more about children's learning, the curriculum, and the pedagogical approach; and how they could contribute to learning at home (Hujalaa, Turjab, Gasparc, Veissond, & Waniganayakee, 2009; Michigan Department of Education, 2001; Mitchell, 2003; Poulou & Matsagouras, 2007; School Readiness, 1996).

1.1. Early Child Development in Africa

Interest in Early Child Development in Africa has steadily increased since the 1990's when a series of conferences on the subject were held in various countries in Africa. The first of a series of African International Conferences on ECD was held in Uganda, Kampala in 1999, and aimed at sharing "good practices" on ECD and to demonstrate that it is possible to respond to the needs and rights of the young child in the Sub-Saharan African region (The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA), 2008). This was followed by another conference in 2002 in Eritrea, Asmara that covered issues related to policy development, integrated ECD planning, effective community approaches and practices, disadvantaged children and indigenous knowledge and child upbringing. At the latter conference, participants adopted what became known as the Asmara Declaration of Early Child Development: Framework for Action. This Framework ushered in issues of human rights and the prime position of the child in all development efforts.

Not only does the future of Africa lie with the well-being of her children, but also proper early childhood care is one sure way of promoting human resource development, social transformation and prosperity in Africa (Mensah, 2005). It has further been argued that early childhood development is tied to the achievement of the ideals of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); where scientists and technicians recognise that the greater investment in early child development is essential if the goals of poverty reduction, universal primary education, preventing child disease, reduction of child mortality, malnutrition and gender equality were to be achieved.

African Governments through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) have expressed a strong desire to see children grow fully in changed circumstances and environments. Indeed, the NEPAD Framework Document highlights the importance of having an emancipated African child, who can compete favorably with other children in the 21st Century (NEPAD Document, October, 2001). NEPAD brings forth the African position on the ECD as the foundation of human development, human capital formation, economic growth and social progress. These combined sensitization efforts have helped to ensure that currently, nearly all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including Botswana, have either developed or are in the process of developing and implementing various forms of sectoral ECD activities and programmes. For example, South Africa has adopted the EDUCARE policy – a policy that has as its focal point the education, care and development of its children before they are enrolled in formal schooling at the age of six (Jordi, 1997). Similarly, the Government of Swaziland has come up with a strategy that includes the development of National ECD Curriculum Statements, which are drawn up by all ECD providers and stakeholders in the field, including primary school teachers. The curriculum ensures a holistic approach to teaching the child and has a medium- to long-term strategic goal of meeting ECD teacher training needs, and the development of a relevant national qualifications framework (Saide, 2008).

In Botswana, the Government has also come up with various policies that address issues related to ECD. First was the National Day Care Centre Policy of 1980. This policy had a few shortcomings as it did not specify any standards, regulations for ECCE, nor did it realise the necessity of a standard curriculum in ECCE. In addition, the policy did not address the issue of shortage of trained teachers and took no account of services that are necessary for 0- 2½ year olds (Baby Care) and special needs children. In 1994, the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) was formulated and it recognized the rapid growth in the number of institutions that made efforts to provide care and education to children who are below the school-going age of six years (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The policy drew attention to the fact that Early Childhood Education (ECE) remained under the control of private individuals and organizations, more than government, that are interested in providing day care programmes. Access was limited to about 7% of the population aged 3-6 years. The policy also noted that the curriculum used in the day care centers was not standardized and that the training of teachers was done outside the formal teacher training programmes (Republic of Botswana, 2001).

In 1999, to implement the RNPE recommendations, the Ministry of Education commissioned a consultancy to do a need assessment on ECD programmes in Botswana. The following major findings were revealed: firstly, the National Day Care Centre Policy of 1980 did not include Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) standards and regulations; secondly, it did not prescribe a standard curriculum; thirdly, there was a serious shortage of trained teachers, and fourthly, services for both the Baby Care (0-2½ year olds) and special needs programmes were lacking. This review thus paved the way for the formulation of the Early Childhood Education and Care Policy (ECC&E) of 2001 which would implement the recommendations and adopt a monitoring mechanism needed to redress ECD in Botswana. This policy articulated objectives that would create an opportunity for the establishment and development of professionals in the field of ECD in order to develop care and education services for children; promote opportunities for their holistic development and guarantee early stimulation whilst increasing opportunities for women to participate in social and economic activities. It also set minimum requirements for providing services and support that ensure early identification and referral of children with developmental impediments (Bose, 2008b). The policy also outlined a three tier system for children from 0 – 2½ year olds (Baby Care), 2½ - 4 year olds (Day Care/Nursery) and 4 – 6 year olds (Pre-primary). On completion, children are supposed to enrol for compulsory, formal schooling in primary schools which start at the age of six years.

It should be noted that almost 50% of ECD centres in Botswana are profit organizations that are run privately. The remaining half is comprised of Non Government Organisations, Faith Based centres, Village Development Council/Union/Council's centres, Community Based, Orphan Care or Institutional centres. About 20% of all centres cater for children aged between 0 - 2.5yrs. Studies show that almost 48% of the teachers in the ECD centres do not have formal training in ECD, and this makes it difficult to implement the standards which are stipulated in the ECC&E policy document. This challenge is further compounded by a laborious procedure of

recruiting ECE teachers from the international market (Bose, 2008a; Bose, 2008b).

Botswana has a few centres, primarily private, that offer certificate programmes for day-care and baby-care teachers and service providers. The University in 2009 of Botswana (UB) trains a limited number of school teachers who specialize in ECD, but it falls short of meeting the demand for trained teachers in the field (Bose, Trivedi, & Monau, 2011). In 2009, the Faculty of Education, UB, therefore, conducted a comprehensive study to assess the need for establishing PD programme(s) for ECD teachers. Part of that study was designed to find out the perceptions of the parents regarding the necessity of a PD programme for ECD teachers. Getting the perspective of parents was important since parents are the primary caregivers who spend more time with their children compared to any other caregiver, and yet they are not usually consulted when educational programmes are developed, implemented or reviewed. This is the part of the study that is reported in this paper.

An important part of this study was to find out the parents' perspectives regarding the need for Professional Development (PD) for ECD teachers in Botswana. According to the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC), PD programmes assure the provision of high-quality ECD programmes for young children with highly competent workforce that includes the centre/school-based ECD program administrators, teaching staff, family child care providers and others (NAEYC, 2011). PD provides initial preparation and learning experiences to improve knowledge, skills/behaviours, and attitudes/values of the ECD workforce. It is important especially in Botswana where the majority of teachers who work in ECD centres are untrained (Bose, 2008a). PD will give them the prerequisite skills and knowledge to enable them to work with the young children and their families.

2. OBJECTIVES

In order to capture parents' perspectives regarding PD for ECD teachers, it was essential to determine their perceptions regarding the responsibilities of various stakeholders in the provision of ECD programmes; the ECD programme and its curricular activities as well the specific skills and competencies an ECD teacher should possess to qualify to teach. The study was therefore designed to find out the perceptions of the parents regarding the responsibilities of the various stakeholders (teachers, parents and government) in providing effective ECD programmes the nature of curricular activities provided in ECD programmes in Botswana the essential skills and competencies required by ECD teachers and the need for PD programmes.

3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, a survey research design was used since it enabled data to be collected from a fairly large sample that was scattered throughout Botswana. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data because of its convenience. Questionnaires are more easily administered and less expensive when compared to other modes of collecting data. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and given to colleagues at work place to validate the content and relevance of the questionnaire items to the topic and target group. They also checked for general clarity of the questions and accuracy of the statements to measure what they were supposed to measure, that is construct validity. The instruments were then pilot tested among a group of 10 parents who had similar demographic characteristics to those of the intended sample, an exercise that resulted in rephrasing three of the questions in order to make them clearer. Subjecting the instrument to these procedures was essential as it resulted in concise items which made interpretation of findings accurate.

The questionnaire items contained both closed and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were made up of both dichotomous (e.g. Yes/No) and multiple response questions (that is, questions offering three or more choices and respondents are asked to check all that applies). Open ended questions required respondents to express freely their opinion about the question asked. For example, one of the questions required them to express their views about why they prefer to send their child/children to an early childhood development programme and not wait until the formal school going age of six years.

Section A of the questionnaires provided demographic information of the respondents, and included such items as the gender of the respondents, their age, qualifications, marital status, fees paid to ECD centre(s), etc. All the questions in this section required fixed responses. Items in Section B were guided by the research objectives and included questions which solicited parents' views about the reasons for sending their children to pre-schools, the type of curriculum taught, the essential skills and competencies which ECD teachers should possess, the need for professional development programmes for ECD teachers, and responsibilities/roles of the parents themselves and other stakeholders including the government. Five of the items were dichotomous (Yes/No), four questions contained at least three responses each and respondents were asked to tick all the applicable responses, and the last four were open-ended questions where the respondents could freely describe their views about the issues raised. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents for the study. A total of 452 questionnaires were distributed to parents throughout Botswana who were willing to participate and lived

within close proximity of the ECD centres. The questionnaires were self-administered, with the assistance of two research assistants who had been trained for the task. Parents of those children who were attending an ECD programme were given the questionnaires when they dropped or picked up their children from the day care centres. They were asked to drop the questionnaires at the centres when completed, and because of this strategy, there was a 98% response rate. It was not possible to include prospective and former parents as originally intended due to accessibility challenges. The researchers also ensured that different types of day care centres were represented in the sample i.e. private, NGOs, council, church based, etc. Parents completed the questionnaires at their own convenience, and the questionnaires were collected after one week. Quantitative data were cleaned, coded, entered and analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version 17. Responses to open-ended questions were categorized into themes and were reported descriptively.

4. LIMITATIONS

The original design of the study was planned to allow data to be collected from two sets of parents, those whose children were attending an ECD centre and prospective or former parents/clients. It proved very difficult to collect data from prospective and former clients of ECD centres because this required the researchers to gain entry into their homes. Most homes were inaccessible, or where entry was obtained, the parents were not home. Data were, therefore, collected from only those parents whose children were attending an ECD centre as they were more accessible. The results of the study cannot, therefore, be generalized to the entire population, but to only those parents whose children were enrolled at the centres.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are presented here as per the objectives. The quantitative data are presented by using tables, graphs, cross-tabulations, chi-square test and binomial test to compare the findings and verify the level of significance of the deviations. And qualitative data is presented in descriptive forms.

6. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The findings of this study show that 75% of the respondents were female and 25% were male (Figure 1). The respondents' age range showed that most parents (43.9%) were 31 to 40 years of age. There was a decrease in the number of respondents as the age advanced (Figure 2).

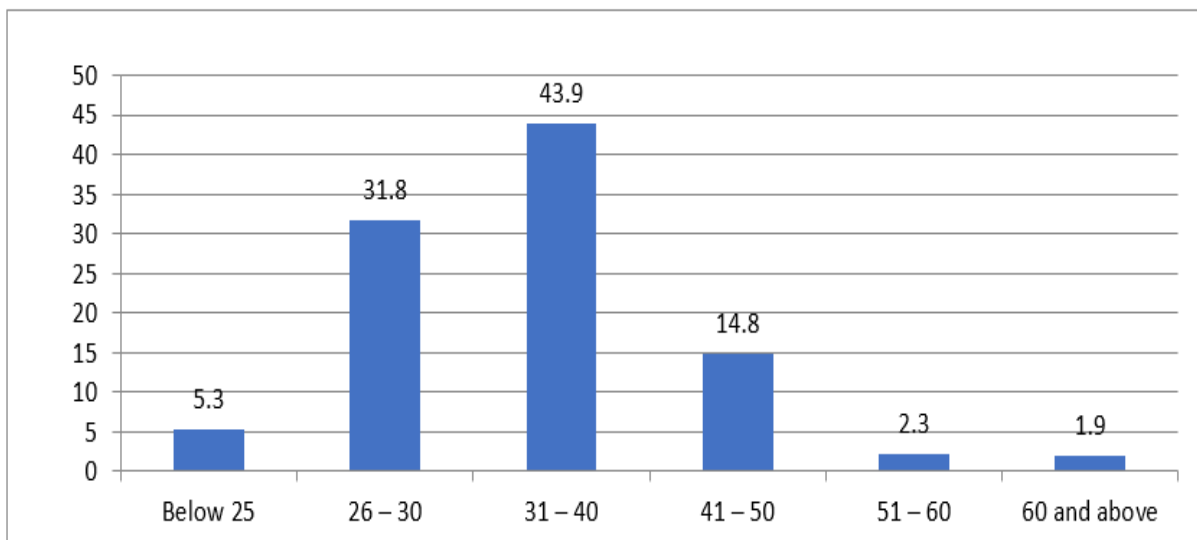


Figure 1. Gender of respondents

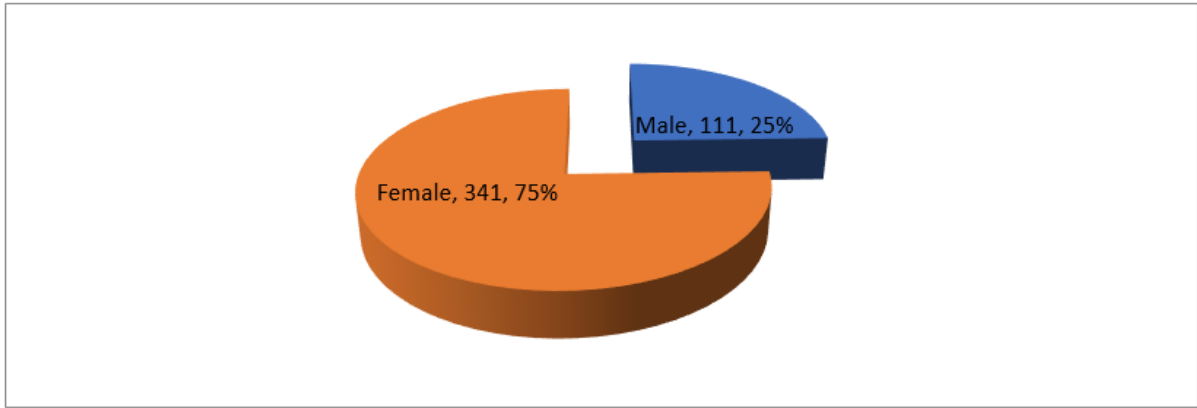


Figure 2. Age of respondents

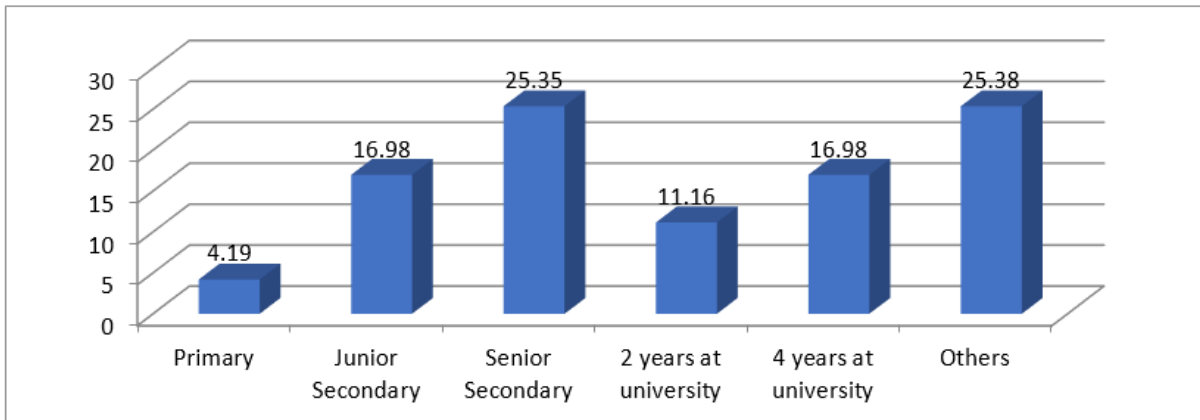


Figure 3. Educational level of Parents

The results also showed that 50% of the parents were single parents, 47% were married and half of the married parents lived with their spouses. The results displayed in Figure 3 show that approximately 25% of the parents completed senior secondary school, 28% attended 2 to 4 years of University education and 21% attended Primary or Junior Secondary. Almost three quarters (73%) of the parents were employed (Figure 4).

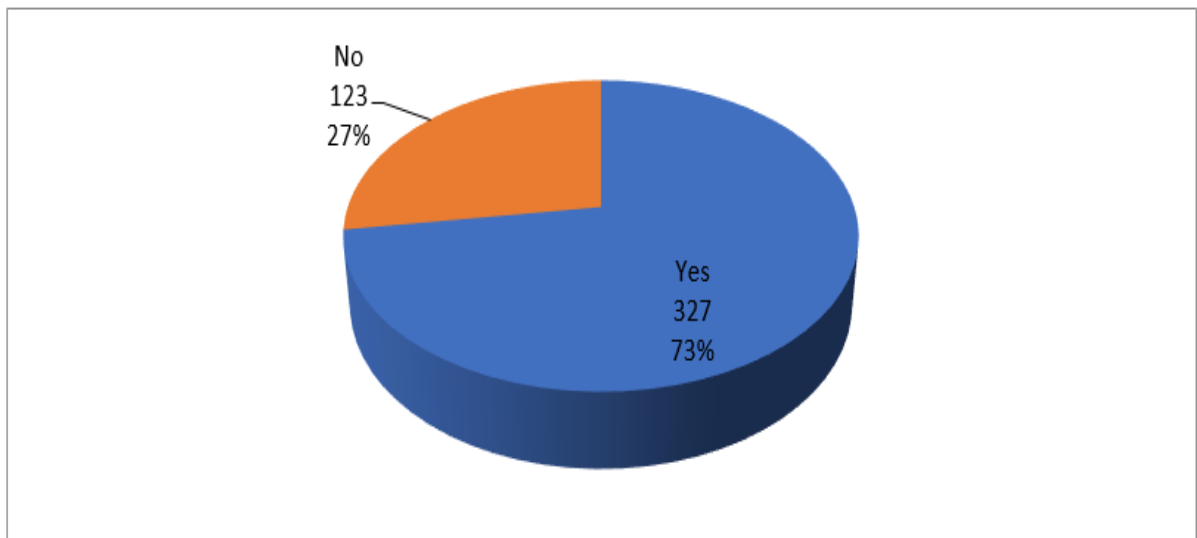


Figure 4. Employment status of respondents

When asked about the fees paid by the parents, it was found that 18.3% paid less than US\$75/-, 42.3 % paid US\$75/- to US\$150/- per term (around 3 months), 25.7% paid between US\$150/- US\$300/-, 8.2% paid between US\$300/- and US\$450/- and only 5.6% paid more \$450 per term.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROVIDING EFFECTIVE ECD PROGRAMMES

An open-ended question was asked about the responsibilities of the various stakeholders including teachers, parents, government and community in providing effective ECD programmes. The responses are summarised as follows:

The parents felt that in order to provide effective ECD programmes, the teachers should implement the stipulated ECD curriculum, teach the children reading, writing and arithmetic, along with issues like HIV/AIDS, good behaviour, and communication skills. They also felt that teachers should understand child development issues/concepts, be patient and passionate, be loving and caring, and should interact and work with parents as a team. The parents also said that the teachers should provide a conducive environment, act as facilitators and mentors, discipline the children, provide early stimulation, and ensure children's safety at school. In addition to that they wanted teachers to show a high level of professionalism, acquire training and manage classrooms effectively.

The parents were further asked about their own responsibilities towards providing effective ECD programmes. They reported that parents should work hand-in-hand with teachers and help the children to read, write, learn and do home work. Additional responsibilities included paying school fees, attending PTA meetings regularly; establishing continuous communication with the school management on issues affecting their children, buying school uniforms, providing infrastructure, organising fund raising activities and gaining knowledge about child development, among others.

Table 1

Reasons for Sending Children to an ECD Programme

Reasons	Percent (%)
Prepare for Formal Schooling	64.64
Grow up in a learning environment	30.30
Acquiring Basic Knowledge	30.30
Care while parents are at work	30.30
Disciplined Behaviour	17.17
Social Development	10.10
Skills development and Capacity Building	8.08
Cognitive Development	7.07
Emotional Development	7.07
Overall Development	7.07
Development of confidence to face challenges in life	6.06
Physical/Motor Development	5.05
Language Development	3.03

When asked about Government's responsibility, they reported that the Government should develop ECD curriculum, provide Government-aided ECD centres, fund fully or partially ECD programmes, as well as supervise, monitor and inspect them. They also emphasized that the Government should initiate policies and regulations that promote compulsory education at infancy levels and provide a universal access to ECD programmes, including the poor, orphaned, and disadvantaged children. In addition, government should provide a favourable teaching/learning environment including facilities like classrooms and toilets, resource materials such as books and computers, transport, recreational facilities with play grounds, medical aid to children and an attractive salary to teachers. They emphasized that it was the government's responsibility to establish training centres that offer professional guidance and training to ECD teachers. Organizing workshops, seminars, short in-service courses were also considered as crucial for the government to implement.

The parents also felt that business organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), parastatals, private companies and churches should complement Government efforts and fund various activities in ECD programmes.

8. ECD PROGRAMME AND ITS CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

To get the information for this objective, the parents were asked a number of questions including the reasons for sending their children to an ECD programme instead of waiting until their children reach the school-going age of six years; the subjects taught to their children; the level of satisfaction with their children's school-work

including issues of home-work and Parents Teachers Associations.

The reasons why parents send their children to an ECD centre are presented in Table 1. Some of the parents gave more than one reason. Almost half (64.64%) of the parents, expressed that they send their children to an EC centre in preparation for formal schooling, and stressed on developing fluency in the English language and 30.3% wanted their children to grow up in a learning/educational environment, or to take advantage of the child care provided whilst the parents are at work. Less popular reasons were about discipline (17.17%).

To further verify the reasons advanced, the parents were asked to tick from a list of provided responses the subjects they thought their children were taught at school. The results are presented in Table 2 and they show that between 74% - 88% of parents reported skills related to learning numbers and the alphabet, writing, speaking, and reading. These were followed by learning music (66%), Social Studies (43%), Nature Studies (35%) and HIV/AIDS issues (19%).

The parents were then asked about their level of satisfaction with their children's work in schools on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being for very unsatisfied and 5 for Excellent. The analysis in Table 3 shows that there was a mean rating of 3.9459. The expected mean rating was 3, thus, there was a mean difference of .9459 which was significant at the .05 level indicating that the parents were highly satisfied with their children's work in school. Further analysis was done to find out whether the parents' educational qualifications had any influence on the level of satisfaction with their children's work or not. The analysis in Table 4 shows that the level of satisfaction of parents with their child's work did not depend on the parents' educational level. Parents with a university qualification responded the same way as those with primary school qualifications, since $P (.689) > .05$. Thus, there was no significant difference in the rating of parent's satisfaction regarding their child's work.

Table 2
Subjects Taught in Schools

Subjects Taught	Percent (%)
Learning numbers	88
Learning the alphabet	87
Writing	84
Speaking	82
Reading	74
Music	66
Social studies	43
Nature studies	35
HIV/AIDS	19

Table 3

Satisfaction with Their Children's' Work in Schools

Measure	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Satisfaction	425	3.9459	.87383	.04239

Significance Level of Satisfaction With Their Children's' Work in Schools

Test Value = 3

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
					<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Satisfaction with child's work	22.315	424	.000	.94588	.8626	1.0292

Note: Confidence Interval

Table 4

Parent's Level of Education and Their Personal Satisfaction with Child's Work

Level of education	Rating personal satisfaction with child's work				
	Excellent	Very satisfied	Satisfactor y	Unsatisfied	Total
Primary	5	6	6	0	17
Junior sec	20	26	17	3	66
Completed senior	29	30	42	4	105
Completed two years in University	16	12	13	1	42
4 years in university	21	24	22	1	68
Others	37	32	36	0	105
Total	128	130	136	9	403

Level Of Education and Rating of Personal Satisfaction with Child's Work

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.871 ^a	15	.689
Likelihood Ratio	14.025	15	.524
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.073	1	.300
N of Valid Cases	403		

Note: a. 6 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .38.

Parents were also asked whether their children brought any homework, and 56.4% confirmed that they did and 89% said that they helped their children with home work in reading and writing alphabets, counting numbers, drawing, colouring, and any other task that the children brought home. To probe further, the parents were asked about Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in their children's schools. Eighty-one percent (81%) attended and reported that they discussed issues like school fees and uniform (18.7%), school feeding (17.7%), safety (16.8%), children's health (16.6%), children's performance (15.4%) and transport issues (14.7%).

9. ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES REQUIRED BY ECD TEACHERS AND THE NEED FOR PD PROGRAMME

To gain information regarding this objective, the parents were asked three questions: (i) to identify from a given list, all the skills and competencies they would expect ECD teachers to possess, (ii) whether they think primary school teachers were competent to teach in ECD programmes, and (iii) whether it is necessary to develop a PD programme for the ECD teachers.

The findings in Table 5 show that the most important skills were identified as child care skills (92%), communication (92%), provision of an appropriate environment (83%), classroom management (80%), curriculum planning and evaluation (71%) and professionalism (60%).

Table 5

Skills and Competencies Important for ECE Teachers

Important skills and Competencies	Percent (%)
Child Care	92
Communication	92
Provision of Appropriate Environment	83
Classroom Management	80
Curriculum Planning and Evaluation	71
Professionalism	68

When the parents were asked whether they considered primary school teachers to be competent to teach children in ECD centres or not, nearly two thirds (64%) thought that primary school teachers were competent to teach in ECD centres (Table 6).

Table 6

Primary School Teachers As Competent ECD Teachers

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Are primary school teachers competent to teach ECD programmes?	Group 1 No	150	.36	.50	.000 ^a
	Group 2 Yes	264	.64		
	Total	414	1.00		

Table 7

Need to offer special training to ECD teachers

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Is there a need to offer special training to ECD teachers?	Group 1 Yes	416	.97	.50	.000 ^a
	Group 2 No	13	.03		
	Total	429	1.00		

However, when, the parents were asked whether it was necessary to provide a special training programme for the ECD teachers, almost all the respondents (97%) reported positively (Table 7). This is contradictory to the fact that two thirds of them had earlier reported that primary teachers were competent to teach in the ECD centres.

10. DISCUSSION

There were three (3) objectives for to this study. Firstly, the study was intended to find out the perceptions of the parents regarding the responsibilities of various stakeholders in providing effective ECD programmes. Secondly, to assess the nature of curricular activities provided in ECD programmes in Botswana, and thirdly, to determine the essential skills and competencies required by ECD teachers and the need for PD programmes

The demographic data of this study showed that the majority of the parents who participated in the study were women, single, 26 years to 50 years of age, educated and employed. They paid amounts ranging from US\$75 to US\$300 per term (about three months) in fees. This means that it is only those employed parents who have a stable income who can afford to send their children to ECD centres. Since most of the centres are privately owned, and government does not have its own programmes, the majority of the children whose parents are unemployed are not exposed to early childhood learning. According to UNICEF (2006) only 16% of the young children studied attended a preschool programme. The children who do not are therefore disadvantaged when they start school since they will not have received the best start in their early years. Exposure to early education enables them to develop language and learning capacities, and lead a productive, rewarding life

Balancing work and family life is a challenge to parents especially single parents like those in this study. They therefore turn to day-care centres which take up some of the responsibilities of child care so that they can go to work.

The parents' views regarding the responsibilities of the teachers, parents and government in providing an effective ECD programme were captured as it was necessary to solicit their views regarding the operations of ECD programmes and the kind of PD programme they envisaged for ECD teachers. Investigating these aspects would enhance the quality of the programmes offered and thus lead to greater stakeholder satisfaction. The findings showed that parents were well informed and held strong views about the responsibilities of each of these stakeholders. The emphasis on parent-teacher collaboration and regular attendance of PTA meetings were highlighted. The fact that the parents raised additional responsibilities such as the provision of a conducive environment for early stimulation and inculcation of academic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic, discipline and safety, showed that the parents in this study were informed about critical issues that undergird ECD and which positively influence the functioning of the ECD centres.

One of the essential factors in the provision of ECD education is funding. The parents in this study were of the view that the government should fund the physical structures and other resource materials including teacher's salaries. This line of thinking matches what is currently happening in other sectors of the education system in Botswana where government is the primary funder of educational activities, so the parents thought that this should be extended to preschool education as well. The Government has also taken a leading role by providing a policy framework for ECD education. The parents also recognized their complementary role, together with NGO's, in supporting ECD education by paying fees.

It was necessary to find out the parents' expectations of an ECD programme in order to find out the reasons for sending their children to ECD programmes, the curriculum of those centres, the satisfaction level and the involvement of the parents. The main reason parents sent their children to ECD programmes was to primarily prepare them for formal schooling, acquisition of academic skills, and for provision of child-care whilst parents were at work. Supporting literature emphasizes the importance of nurturing social-emotional competencies and academic skills among the benefits of sending children to preschools (Kariuki, Chepchieng, Mbugua, & Ngumi, 2007).

The study also revealed that the curriculum in ECD centres gave priority to learning numbers, reading, writing and speaking. This finding agrees with that of the parents who reported that they sent their children to ECD centres for acquisition of the 3 Rs, i.e., reading writing and arithmetic and they were satisfied with the acquisition of these academic skills. However, music, social studies, nature studies and issues related to health and nutrition were not given adequate attention. Art activities that are typically taught in ECD centres in Botswana were also not mentioned; but these areas are essential for socio-emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child. The parents helped their children to do home-work and attended PTA meetings regularly. Their expectations matched very well with the practices that were carried out in the ECD centres where the focus was on development of the 3Rs at the expense of holistic development of their children. In its study, UNICEF (2006) observed that language and cognitive stimulation of the children in the home was rather neglected. ECD centres can, therefore, play an important role in facilitating their stimulation during the early years of the child's learning. The parents also need to be sensitised regarding overall development of children.

The need for a PD programme for ECD teachers was confirmed by the parents. They expressed that training centres for ECD teachers should be established throughout Botswana. There is a dearth of ECD teacher training centres in Botswana. The only training centre that ever existed had been closed down for refurbishing and general upgrading of the existing infrastructure, and to also make some curriculum improvements (Mmegi Online, 2009). Thus, the question on whether primary school teachers were competent to teach in ECD centre was necessary, as most of the teachers in ECD centres were primary school teachers, who were not really trained to work with the zero to six age group. Although the parents initially expressed that primary school teachers were competent, they believed that they would benefit from specialized training in the form of workshops, seminars, and short in-service courses and equip the teachers with skills and competencies that promote optimum development of the children.

The most cited skills by the parents were child care and communication skills. According to (De Gioia, 2009), these two skills are essential for cultural continuity of care giving practices. At the same time, teachers need to pay attention to the cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development of the children (Kariuki et al., 2007). As such, areas like music, creative art and movement need to be incorporated when designing a curriculum for ECD. Provision of an appropriate environment for teaching/learning, classroom management, curriculum planning and evaluation and professionalism were other curriculum considerations which the parents seemed to be aware of and which they expected ECD teachers to possess. A well planned PD programme should also clearly state the core competencies for ECD professionals in all settings, irrespective of geographical location, socio-economic status or political scenario (Nebraska, 2009).

11. CONCLUSION

This study investigated parents' perspectives regarding the necessity of a PD programme for Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers in Botswana. It found out that parents highlighted the complementary role of government, parents, teachers and other NGOs in providing a comprehensive and conducive ECD programme to ensure adequate funding and provision of resource materials. The parents saw the ECD programme as a vehicle to impart academic skills which are basic for entering into primary schools (standard one). The parents were satisfied with the ECD curriculum as they taught the 3 Rs- that is, reading, writing and arithmetic. However, the curriculum did not focus on the overall development of a young child by including areas like music, creative art and movement. The parents were found to be concerned about their children's performance and they attended PTA meetings regularly. The study confirmed that parents feel that there is a need to provide a special PD programme for the ECD teachers. Such a programme would upgrade the teachers with the needed knowledge, skills and core competencies to enhance their professionalism.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

PD programmes for ECD teachers in Botswana should be developed and implemented urgently. Such programmes should include essential skills and competencies which are vital for optimal child development. Policy is needed regarding basic qualifications and competences of ECD teachers, and to allow all children to access to ECD education.

Sensitisation programmes for parents should also be developed and implemented as parents play a crucial role in the development of their children.

Curriculum review of ECD programmes should be ongoing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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