

COLLOQUIUM

Early Childhood Development Policy Advances in Uganda

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ABSTRACT Knowledge of the history and development of early childhood development in Uganda is paramount if we are to know how far we have come and where we are going. This article explores the introduction of early childhood development in Ugandan policy and government interventions from 1960 to 2011. Data was obtained from a review of available early childhood development policy documents, conference papers and tutorial handouts, and interviews with early childhood development professionals who were involved in the developments. The results indicate trends of events that have not been given full attention by young professionals, policy makers and academics in the field of early childhood development in Uganda.

Introduction

Research into early childhood development (ECD) indicates that it is one of the most important stages in the life of a person (Young, 2000). This is because investment in ECD yields extraordinary returns that far exceed the returns on most investments, either private or public (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). Also, investment in ECD is investment in human capital (Heckman & Masterov, 2004), which breeds overall economic success for families, communities and the nation (Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005).

Whereas it is important for us now to advocate for more investment in ECD at different levels, we shall miss the point and focus if we lose sight of what has been done, what has not been done and areas that need to be improved. ECD in Uganda ranges from private kindergartens and other day-care centres to classrooms of older primary-school-age children and more informal home-based activities (Okuni, 2003). There are also a wide range of caregiver, teacher and parenting programmes that are managed by individuals who have little 'Western' ECD formal training, but base their activities on indigenous knowledge. For those involved in the process, they are systematically interweaving indigenous and Western ECD to get a hybrid that is unique to both perspectives. This is because indigenous child-rearing practices and beliefs are important for ECD (Evans & Myers, 1994). Also, it has been noted that ECD interventions in Africa are more successful when built on local knowledge (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). Therefore, unless we look behind and critically take stock of what has been done, and where we are now, we shall not be able to determine where we are going.

Background

A great deal has been written about the development of ECD in Uganda. Most of what has been written has revolved around its introduction by European colonialists and, later, how private individuals took it up. This article will focus briefly on this history and then move on to explore the policy development of early childhood programmes in Uganda from 1960 to 2011.

In Uganda, nursery education as early childhood programmes were then known, was brought in by the British colonialists. The beginning of nursery education in Uganda can be traced back to the 1930s when it was initiated by the European colonial administrators and by Goans (Indians). These groups of people felt that such programmes were important in order to prepare children for formal education (Malinga, 2000). Nursery schools were private and established exclusively for the use of private communities. The main objective of European nursery schools was to prepare European children for school when they went back to Europe (Obua-Otoa, 1996).

The nursery school curriculum, methods and scholastic materials for learners were foreign, with very little reference to the Ugandan situation. Later, when some indigenous Ugandans became more interested and involved in nursery school education, they opened up their own nursery schools to cater for indigenous children in urban centres. These schools were of poor quality compared to those of the Europeans (Malinga, 2000).

Government Involvement in ECD in Uganda

The colonial government of Uganda (independence was achieved in 1962) was slow in responding to the challenges of nursery education. However, after much lobbying by private persons and nursery school proprietors for government assistance in terms of training, the government identified a number of Grade II teachers and sponsored them to go for training in infant methods in the United Kingdom in 1960. Since the government did not have nursery schools, it deployed the nursery school teachers trained in infant methods in the lower primary classes of government primary schools. These teachers were referred to as infant teachers in the government schools rather than nursery school teachers. It was from the efforts of these infant teachers that Grade II colleges began to offer specialised courses in infant methods in 1962 (Mujunga, 1987). Some Grade III colleges also later, after learning from infant methods specialisation, started to specialise in physical education, music, infant methods, and art and crafts (Obua-Otoa, 1996).

Although the government of Uganda had an interest in nursery education and supported it from the early 1960s, it never controlled or regulated nursery education that was being operated by private individuals. Direct government control of nursery education started in 1973 when the government of Uganda enacted a statute which conferred upon the National Curriculum Development Centre the mandate for developing curriculum and support materials for all levels of education, including preschool (nursery schools) (Malinga, 2000). After this effort, there was little in terms of government involvement in nursery education because of the civil war that plagued the country in the period from 1972 to 1979 (Mushemeza, 2005).

The new government that took over power in 1980 shifted the responsibility for nursery education, which was now referred to as pre-primary education, from the then Ministry of Culture and Social Services to the Ministry of Education and Sports. In that same year, the Ministry of Education and Sports recognised pre-primary years as a period extending up to the age of eight. It also recommended the age of entry for pre-primary school to be three years (Malinga, 2000).

Uganda was plunged into another civil war from 1980 to 1986, making any further policy development impossible (Mushemeza, 2005). Due to this crisis, pre-primary education suffered from undesirable trends regarding the content and quality of the curriculum, teaching methods, facilities, age of entry, quality of teachers, school charges and widespread violation of pedagogical and sociological principles of child development (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005). Each sector, such as education, health, nutrition, labour, gender and local government, had different policies on children, and there was no integrated policy or body to coordinate pre-primary education activities in the country (Muheirwe, 2003). However, from 1989 to 1990, there was a lot of international advocacy for ECD (Pence, 2004). This turn of events made people begin to take more interest in pre-primary education and to look for schools where their children would get a better foundation (Obua-Otoa, 1996). Parents in urban and more affluent areas started moving

their children from the traditional nursery schools to modern ones. With this change of heart, more nursery schools were established in urban areas. Rural areas lagged behind, however (Mujunga, 1987).

As more nursery and infant schools were established, there was a great shortage of trained teachers for that level. The government responded to this demand by introducing a diploma course in pre-primary teacher education, which was referred to as early childhood education (ECE), in colleges in 1982. This was later advanced with the introduction of an ECE degree programme in Makerere University in 1987 in order to train tutors who would manage training in colleges (Obua-Otoa, 1996). These were sporadic interventions, however; they were not backed by policy development (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007b).

More serious policy interventions for pre-primary education came in 1987. The government appointed the Kajubi Commission to review the status of education in Uganda. The commission recommended, among other things, that the government of Uganda should ensure that all pre-primary schools were registered and were regularly inspected and supervised (Kajubi, 1987). The government was also to provide curricular guidelines to be followed by pre-primary schools. The commission also recommended that the government should provide facilities for the training of pre-primary teachers and ensure that teachers at the pre-primary level had necessary training. It also recommended that pre-primary education should continue to be run by private bodies and the fees charged be regulated by the government (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1992). The commission's recommendations, which were included in the government White Paper on education, paved the way for pre-primary education to be included in education sector planning (Eilor, 2004). The White Paper also provided a basis for policy and curriculum reviews for pre-primary education (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1992).

After the 1990 Jomtien conference, the Ugandan conference delegation propelled ECE activities further into action. Through their efforts, a draft ECE syllabus for nursery (pre-primary) schools was developed, training of ECE personnel in colleges was boosted, a push for the establishment of a National Council for Children commenced and further developments of ECD policies were undertaken (Early Childhood Development Taskforce, 1997).

Further recognition of children came with the promulgation of the new *Constitution of the Republic of Uganda* (Republic of Uganda, 1995). This constitution guaranteed the rights of children to basic education (Article 34), provided by the state and parents of the child. This pronouncement laid the foundations for other policy and legal frameworks that have been used since that time to support reforms which address child-related issues. The constitution also paved the way for the enactment of the children's statute and the establishment of the National Council for Children body in 1996. The National Council for Children was charged with the responsibility of planning and coordinating all child-related activities across different sectors that had something to do with children (National Council for Children, 1999).

Still in line with the constitution, the government decided, as part of fulfilling President Museveni's campaign pledge, to approve the Universal Primary Education policy in 1997 and implemented it in the same year. The Universal Primary Education policy provides for the government to cover the tuition fees for all children of school age, irrespective of gender, tribe or ability, from primary one to primary seven. The policy also commits the government to provide instructional materials and build classrooms, teachers' houses and other school-related infrastructure to enable the smooth provision of education to all children in primary school (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2000a). Implementing this policy raised the enrolment of children in primary schools from 2.5 million to over 7.2 million in 1997 (Mushemeza, 2005).

By 1997, a wave of decentralisation was being felt by all sectors in Uganda. This was made possible by the enactment of the Local Government Act. In the case of the education sector, the Act transferred pre-primary, primary and secondary education services to local governments. Provision of these social services, including pre-primary education, was to be undertaken by local governments in consultation with the central government under the Ministry of Local Government (Ministry of Local Government, 1997).

Along with the Local Government Act in 1997, the Children's Act was passed in 2000. This enactment made it possible to reform and consolidate laws relating to children (Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, 2008). The Act made provision for the care, protection and maintenance of children; local authority support for children; the establishment of a family and child court; children

charged with offences; and other connected purposes (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2000). In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Sports came up with a handbook introducing alternatives to corporal punishment, which had become a serious issue in schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2009). Different actors and child protection workers now use the Act as a point of reference when providing services to children in Uganda.

Implementing these policies and laws, however, became challenging as they came with a cost. Resources became scarcer, especially with the introduction of free universal primary education for children in 1997. Finding and allocating limited resources needed a collective effort from different stakeholders. In this regard, in 1998, the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP) was developed from a sector-wide approach to address education constraints while focusing on poverty levels (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2003). The ESIP served as a framework for the implementation of a sector-wide approach to education development, as well as a shift from project support to general or earmarked budget support (Eilor, 2004). As a result of this new development, the Medium Term Budget Framework started to be prepared by the Education Sector Working Group, which comprised representatives from the central government, education subsector, Education Funding Agencies Group, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders. It is this group that invests finances in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework in accordance with ESIP priorities and recommendations of the Education Sector Reviews, and in consonance with the budgetary ceilings as defined by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2003).

With different innovations in ECD in Africa, and in Uganda in particular, taking shape, Uganda was privileged in 1999 to host the first international ECD conference in Kampala. The ECD conference was conceived as an opportunity to share the richness and innovation of ECD experiences across Africa. The conference attracted ECD professionals from approximately 20 different countries to discuss ways of moving ECD forward through innovations in early childhood care and development in Africa (Pence, 2004, 2008).

A division for pre-primary education was created in the Pre-primary and Primary Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2000 in accordance with an ESIP review (Eilor, 2004). The creation of this division helped to separate ECD from primary education by having a specific desk that solely focused on ECD issues (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2006). One of the first tasks of the new Pre-primary Division, under the leadership of Mrs Resty Muziribi, was to initiate additional advocacy for ECD. This advocacy got the attention of many people in the country, who later became more interested in pre-primary education, allowing many pre-primary schools to spring up. These schools were, however, set up privately by people with little training in pre-primary education. Some of the schools were established in unhygienic premises and lacked proper management (Muheirwe, 2003). In response to this situation, the government developed the *Early Childhood Development Centre Management Committee Regulations* in 2000. The regulations detail the roles of stakeholders in the management of different ECD centres and how resources are to be mobilised for the centres (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2000b).

With more enthusiasm for reforms in the country gaining momentum, a national conference was held in Kampala in 2005. This conference was called to review national progress in different sectors so as to build one holistic vision. The result was 'Uganda Vision 2025', which, among other things, focused on providing specialised education and training for disadvantaged, vulnerable and gifted children. ECD was identified in this category as a pillar for poverty eradication by including it as one of the goals of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Since then, the investment process in different sectors has changed in such a way that the Vision 2025 strategy sets the broad national ambitions, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan outlines the necessary policy actions and contributes budget allocations in the medium term (Eilor, 2004), and the Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy identifies relevant monitoring indicators and targets. Guided by the strategic priorities identified in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework sets out the government's medium-term budgetary allocations within a fiscal framework which is compatible with macroeconomic stability and private-sector-led growth (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2003).

All these new investment strategies were not enough to cover all education issues, especially ECD teacher education. In 2006, a teacher education reform policy road map was developed to guide reforms in all the teacher education sectors in the country. The first goal was to provide

comprehensive ECD for all children in Uganda through well-trained ECD teachers. The reforms reintroduced ECD teacher training in primary teacher colleges, it having been suspended in the 1970s (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007c). This reform necessitated a review of the whole primary teacher curriculum, a move that saw ECD being made a compulsory subject in teacher colleges in the first year of the two-year course.

With these reforms going on, the Pre-primary Division focused its attention towards the development of an ECD policy. The division had come up with an issues paper in 2001 which highlighted the situation of pre-primary education and recommended the development of an ECD policy within the education sector. The CHILD (Community Health Initiative for Long term Development) project, which was funded by the World Bank, provided funds for consultants to draft the policy. A wide consultation of ECD stakeholders was carried out across the country, culminating in 2007 when the draft policy for the education sector was finally approved. This process took all this time due, partly, to the lack of funds needed for more consultation with other government sectors in order to get agreement on the responsibility for the establishment and funding of ECD. The approved ECD policy preferred to refer to pre-primary education as 'early childhood development', due to its broad, multi-sectoral nature. The new ECD policy calls for the adoption of an expanded vision and a policy framework in which ownership, execution and management are shared by all stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007a). The ECD policy makes it clear that the initiation and implementation of ECD programmes in Uganda shall remain the responsibility of the private sector. The major role of the government will be for policy guidelines, curriculum assessment, advocacy, community mobilisation, monitoring, evaluation and research for quality assurance (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005).

When the education reforms were being implemented, some stakeholders were reluctant to oblige, due to the lack of an enabling law. This was, however, later solved with the enactment of the Uganda Education Act (2008). In this Act, the government pronounced in Section 4(1) that the provision of education and training to the child shall be a joint responsibility of the state, the parent or guardian and other stakeholders. In Section 10(2) (a), it is stated that pre-primary education is to be run by private agencies or persons to provide education to children aged from two to five years, and financed by parents or guardians (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). The government took up the responsibility of providing the curriculum, guidelines on minimum standards for school buildings, equipment and relevant facilities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007a, 2008).

The Education Act and subsequent reforms also made it possible for an ECD teachers desk to be established in the Teacher and Instructor Education and Training Department within the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2008. This desk was charged with, among other things, the responsibility of streamlining the training of ECD teachers and caregivers, and the licensing and registration of both ECD teachers and ECD teacher training institutions (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008).

Likewise, in line with the reforms in the education sector, the Directorate of Education Standards, the quality and standards arm of the Ministry of Education and Sports, launched the *Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards Indicators for Education Institutions* in March 2010. This document was a revised version of an earlier document that had been developed in 2001 but was poorly implemented by institutions. The guidelines are an education quality tool that is to guide institutions offering education services at all levels in creating a conducive learning environment. The tool emphasises that all education institutions have to put in place measures and mechanisms that are essential for the prevention, alleviation or total elimination of impedances to the achievement of quality education in Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010a).

In the case of ECD centres that were being established at the village level by persons or communities with little training in ECD, most programmes were below standard (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007b). The *Basic Requirements* document was more generalised and could not be easily applied to them. Instead, the ministry decided to develop and launch the *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centres* in July 2010. The guidelines aim at providing procedures, standards and regulations in order to build a coordinated system that involves different stakeholders at local, district and national levels for the benefit of ECD centres (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010b).

After the establishment of the ECD institutional guidelines, the ministry turned its attention towards improving the quality of ECD services. This enhanced quality was to be achieved through

the training of ECD teachers and caregivers. Throughout this period of time, private colleges were training ECD teachers using different curriculum and assessment guidelines. This training raised concerns about the quality of the teachers being produced (Muheirwe, 2003). In 2007, the process of the development and use of a comprehensive training framework was begun and it was finalised in 2011. The framework provides guidance on the establishment, management and administration of ECD teacher training institutions, and the scope of programmes for different categories of ECD caregivers. It also prescribes entry requirements for different ECD teacher training programmes, staffing requirements and assessment criteria in order to ensure the quality of the trainees. Furthermore, the framework provides for the recognition, licensing and registration of those ECD teachers who are already trained but have previously not been recognised following an assessment of their qualifications (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010c).

Even with all these laws and policies in place, different departments have continued to implement separate ECD activities without consulting other related departments in other sectors. This has led to the duplication of some projects and activities. In an attempt to control this, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development initiated the process of developing a comprehensive ECD policy framework. It is envisaged that this framework will streamline ECD service provision by different sectors in the country. The major ECD sector providers that are to be incorporated in the framework are education, health, nutrition, protection and social welfare. Great strides have been taken by the government towards improving the quality of ECD in Uganda, as shown by the summary of events in the Appendix.

Conclusion

ECD in Uganda has had an uneven development experience, with many delays but also spurts of activity. Greater and more consistent government involvement is now apparent, with efforts to provide direction in many areas. Public investment in ECD is still low, however, with most programmes being privately initiated or funded. A key next step is the development of an enabling cross-sectional policy framework and increased public investment to improve ECD service provision.

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APPENDIX.

Summary of Government Involvement in ECD in Uganda from 1960 to 2011

1960	Teachers sponsored to train in the United Kingdom in infant methods
1962	Grade II colleges start training infant teachers, specialising in infant methods
1973	Government mandates National Curriculum Development Centre to design ECD curriculum
1980	Preschools shifted from the Ministry of Culture and Social Services to the Ministry of Education and Sports
1980	ECD recognised to begin at birth to eight years
1987	Education Policy Review Commission (Kajubi Commission) set up to review education issues in Uganda
1990	ECD task force set up
1992	Government White Paper on education produced
1995	New constitution promulgated
1996	National Council for Children Statute enacted
1996	Children's Statute enacted
1997	Universal Primary Education policy launched
1997	Local Government Act enacted
1998	Education Strategic Investment Plan emerged
1999	ECD international conference held in Kampala
2000	Pre-primary Division created in the Ministry of Education and Sports
2000	<i>Early Childhood Development Centre Management Committee Regulations</i> developed
2000	<i>The Children's Act (Chapter 59)</i> enacted
2001	Drafting of ECD policy commenced
2005	'Uganda Vision 2025' developed
2006	Teacher education reform policy road map developed
2007	ECD policy approved
2008	Uganda Education Act enacted
2008	ECD teachers desk created in the Ministry of Education and Sports
2010	<i>Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards Indicators for Education Institutions</i> launched
2010	<i>Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centres</i> launched
2011	ECD caregivers' training framework approved
2011	Comprehensive ECD policy framework being developed

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