



Quality Pre-primary Education in Uganda: How can universal access be achieved?

OVERVIEW

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), for which pre-primary education is a constituent part is widely recognized as a critical period in children's physical, mental and psycho-social development. This implies that all young children (aged 0-8 years) need to be nurtured in a safe and caring environment that allows them to become healthy, alert, secure and able to learn.

One of the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports (MoESTS), is to ensure universal and equitable access to quality basic education for all children through Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD) for children up to 8 years. Pre-primary is considered to have the highest rate of economic returns of all levels of education. Research conducted by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2013, showed that Uganda's benefit-to-cost ratio for pre-primary education is 1.6 implying that money invested in pre-primary schooling has a return of 60% in terms of future incomes, productivity and health.

The UNICEF study indicates that for every Ug shs 1,000 invested in Universal Primary Education (UPE), Government loses Ug shs 600 because majority of the children have not accessed pre-primary education. This is because most Primary one (P.1) classes are crowded (most of whom are underage) and they take more than two years in primary one yet Government continues to provide capitation grants for these children. Government loses out on completion and retention rates as the numbers are recorded as drop-outs. The lifespan of textbooks provided to under-age children in P.1 reduces to one year because they mishandle them. In addition teachers attending to under-age children mixed with six-year-olds in one class are strained.

In order to increase access to pre-primary education, the MoESTS is proposing to make it universal. This policy brief highlights the challenges in access to ECD and provides recommendations on how to achieve universal access.

KEY ISSUES

- 91% of Uganda's children are not accessing pre-primary education.
- Over 80% of the population cannot afford the fees charged for pre-primary education, which limits access.
- For every Ug shs 1,000 invested in UPE, Government loses Ug shs 600 because majority of the children have not accessed pre-primary education.
- Inappropriateness of learning materials, poor quality of Infrastructure and shortage of qualified pre-school teachers affect quality of pre-primary education.

INTRODUCTION

The Education Sector Policy recognizes pre-primary as the first level of education in Uganda under four programmes; day care centers, home based centers, community centre and nursery schools. The Education Act (2008) however pronounces the management of pre-primary education under the management of the private sector which limits access. Over 80% of the population cannot afford the fees charged for pre-primary education (NPA, 2015).

There are few children benefiting from institutionalized ECD centers, with the rest at home with parents who cannot address the ECD needs of those children.¹ It is important to note that the linkage between pre-primary and primary education is so critical that if it is not well handled, the Government may lose all the UPE gains.

Access to Pre-primary Education

By 2014, the total number of pre-primary schools was 4,956. Out of these, 4,465 (90.09%) were nursery schools, 49 (0.99%) were daycare and home based centers. The regional analysis shows that Buganda had the highest number of ECDs totaling to 1,802 (36.36%), followed by Bunyoro region with 519 (10.47%), whereas Karamoja region had the least number of ECD centers totaling to 101 (2.04%). See table 1.0

Table 1.0: Number of Pre-primary Schools by Category

Region	Community Based	Day Care	Home Based	Nursery	Total
Acholi	17	3	1	203	224
Ankole	15	2		255	272
Buganda	97	5	6	1694	1802
Bukedi	18	1	1	193	213
Bunyoro	35	6		478	519
Busoga	18	3		304	325
Elgon	12			153	165
Karamoja	79	5		17	101
Kigezi	12			171	183
Lango	12			232	244
Teso	15	2		207	224
Toro	98	5	6	387	496
West Nile	14	1	2	171	188
Grand Total	442	33	16	4,465	4,956

Source: MoESTS Statistical Abstract 2014

Intervention into Pre-primary Education

- Public Private Partnership; the government has leveraged on Public Private Partnership (PPP) to develop ECD in the country. This approach involves the collaboration between the public and private sectors.
- While government through the MoESTS concentrates on creating an enabling environment (i.e. policy development, standards’ setting and quality assurance), the private sectors role on the other hand, involves provision of infrastructure and services.

- Monitoring, Inspection and Supervision of ECDs; the MoESTS monitors, inspect and carries out supervision of ECDs to ensure that they conform to the basic requirements and minimum standards set by the sector. For instance, in FY 2014/15, 164 pre-primary schools were licensed and registered and 20 nursery schools were inspected.
- Training of caregivers: the MoESTS has continued to train caregivers for example in FY 2014/15, 300 caregivers were trained in the use of the learning framework.



Source: <http://africanrevival.org>

There is easy access from pre-primary schools to the nearest primary schools with the largest percentages of ECDs (49.4%) being within a radius of 1km. However the net enrolment into pre-school in Uganda is very minimal. There was a decline of 0.6 from 10.1% in FY2013/14 to 9.5% in FY2014/15 (ESSAPR,³ 2015).

The ECD enrolment stood at only 433,258 yet there were over 5 million aged 3-5 years children; which means that for every 100 children of pre-school going age (3-5 years), only 9 were enrolled. This translated into a gap of 90.5%. These ones

¹ The Uganda Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2013

² MoESTS Statistical Abstract 2014

wait until they are 6 years to join primary education most especially those in the rural communities.

Figure 2.0: Net Enrolment Rate at Pre-primary Level in Uganda



Source: EMIS 2014

In comparison to other East African countries, Uganda’s enrolment in pre-schools is far behind. In Kenya, enrolment is at 53.5%; Tanzania at 35.5% and Rwanda at 29%. In Kenya, pre-primary education is free and compulsory; in Tanzania each primary school has a pre-primary classroom (*financed out of capitation grants provided to primary schools*); while in Rwanda, the government has established and enforced national standards (*which define the objectives for the sub-sector*), and is responsible for teacher training as well as curriculum development.

Challenges

i) Inappropriateness of Learning Materials

Although the Learning Framework specified the kind of learning materials for pre-schools, the appropriate materials were only found in “high class” pre-schools. The rest used improvised and sometimes primary education instructional materials.⁴

In an interview by the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, one of the teachers in Mukono District indicated that the scarcity of teachers guide materials compelled some of them to adopt primary textbooks for teaching their

lessons.

ii) Shortage of qualified pre-primary school teachers;

Pre-primary education has not attracted many professionals making the few available expensive to be hired by economically struggling schools. By 2014, there were 15,332 qualified pre-primary teachers, however most of the pre-qualified pre-school teachers with child care skills are only attracted by the high paying pre-schools located in the urban centers leaving the rural pre-schools with Senior Four and Primary Seven leavers.⁵

iii) Poor quality of Infrastructure;

Majority of the pre-primary school proprietors lack adequate finances to put up requisite structures for pre-primary schools especially in rural areas. According to the Statistical Abstract 2014, 10,255 (66.6%) classrooms were permanent and 5,133 (33.4%) were temporary. There are inadequate pre-primary sanitation facilities. There are only 31,292 latrine stances of which 29.3% are for boys, 30.6% for girls, 12.2% shared by both male and female pupils and, caregivers/teachers and 27.9% for teachers.

³ Education, Science, Technology and Sports Annual Performance Report FY 2014/15
⁴ Ejuu, 2012

⁵ MoESTS Statistical Abstract 2014

A big number of these have neither doors nor shutters.



The existing structure was being used as an ECD center in Kiryandongo District

Conclusion

Despite the importance attached to pre-primary education in Uganda, the pre-primary sector remains private-sector led which has limited access and quality is still poor. Majority of children aged 3-5 years in Uganda do not access pre-school educational opportunities with a regional imbalance in the spread of ECD Centers in favour of urban areas. This is because private sector providers naturally seek to balance profitability and service delivery. The Government needs to intervene to ensure that children access pre-primary education because it is a human right and the 2008 Education Act spells out pre-primary education as the first level of education.

Recommendations

1. The MoESTS needs to adopt a policy to **attach an ECD unit to existing primary schools** for ease of transition and create more access. Each ECD unit should have at least three rooms (for baby, middle and top); with furniture/sitting facilities for baby class and an office for the lead care giver, a store and a kitchen. Each ECD unit should have several play materials (swings, sand, visuals etc), a separate pit latrine and a rest room.

2. The MoESTS needs to **train more ECD teachers and have them certified**. In addition the ministry should consider having pre-primary teachers on the Government payroll.
3. **The MoESTS should sensitize communities** (especially parents and teachers) to appreciate the purpose of pre-primary education as a mechanism for enhancing the holistic development. There is need for a multifaceted sensitization campaign by all stakeholders to enlighten communities on the importance of ECD.

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