

Early Childhood Education in Africa

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Abstract

In brief we examined Early Childhood Education in the participating African Union countries on the basis of expansion, enrolment, teachers, rural, and gender distribution. In the last three decades, Early Childhood Education has undergone tremendous changes in terms of growth and development. More schools for Early Childhood Education have been constructed in villages, rural and urban areas. Such construction has been in response to the demand of the people for such provision. The sample consisted of 15 African Union countries linguistically using Arabic, English and French. The data collected was based on a questionnaire administered to senior officials in the Department/Ministry of Education in each one of the participating countries. In addition, documents were solicited from the Departments for statistical purposes.

Keywords: *history of early childhood education, teacher for kindergartens, urban and rural children, growth and development, government involvement, role of private sector, centres attached to primary schools.*

1. Introduction

African countries realize and embrace the fundamental importance of education, for without education, there can be no meaningful development (African Union, 2008) Through education, there is interrelated and interdependent sets of human capacity that predispose a person to think, to know and to act in the context of social awareness, as well as values and skills. In fact, education is the corner stone for sustainable development; it is a tool for producing and managing human resources; for inculcating values, thus ensuring the common bond of humanity in a global village; a tool for scientific research and technology (African Union, 2008)

In this context, it is significant to take note of President Abdou Diouf of Senegal, who at the meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, stressed that only through education will Africans be in a position to address the demands and challenges of this century. Mwencha (2010), deputy chairperson of the African Union Commission asserts that". Africa has for some time now, decided o anchor its development of education". For a country or a continent, there is no greater wealth than well-trained human resources. Kadar Asmal, former Minister of Education in South African, addressing African Ministers of Education, argued that education is not only critical, but also a solid foundation for both the reconstruction and development of Africa. Further pointing out that providing education for our people is investing in economic development, given that sustainable development calls for adequate and ever increasing both skills and knowledge bases, inherently a product of education. Moreover, Education does not only contribute to economic development, but also contributes to a sustainable democratic society, as its graduates positively contribute in the governance of their society

Addressing African Union Ministers of Education in Johannesburg, former Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (2007), preambled her speech as follows: "As Ministers of Education of the 53 member- states of the African Union, your task, destiny and even privilege is to do your bit even against all the odds to take an African child from the worst possible background, invest in them through education and change their reality for ever" She went on to point out that the reason the African Union is committed to education is that it transforms lives and contributes to success and prosperity in society

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a significant role in the introduction of basics learning skills, which are vital for their subsequent formal education at all levels.

Children who have had ECE have the following advantages: less likely to repeat classes; less likely to drop out of school; and are less likely to be assigned to special need classes. ECE leads to higher achievement scores; higher completion rate in subsequent years of education; low correlation between such children and criminal activity. Hence the argument for classifying ECE as an integral component of formal education system, which currently is not the case in the majority of African Union countries.

In every one of the participating African Union countries, there has been dramatic expansion of early childhood education in terms of establishing schools and centres as well as the increase in enrolments

2. Method

2.1 Sample and Population

Africa is a huge continent consisting of 54 countries and a population of over a billion people. This poses a gigantic task for the proposed study. This poses further complication, when one takes into account the numerous cultures and languages existing and being used in these countries.

The questions raised were should every African country participate in the study? If so, was it feasible to communicate with each one in their own official languages? Similarly, are 54 countries not too many to constitute a sample for the study? Would a random sample of about ten or 15 countries be good enough to serve the purpose? In the random sample, would all countries be involved irrespective of their official languages?

The sample participating in this study was based on the five regions of the African Union, namely North Africa, Southern Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and West Africa. From each of these five regions, four countries, making a total of twenty countries were selected based on the size of the country's population. Such selection comprised small and large countries. Equally important, each of the four major official languages: English, French, Portuguese and Arabic were represented. Spanish was not included, given the small number of people using it in Africa. Figure 01 is a map of Africa displaying the participating countries. There is a reduction in the number of participating countries from 20 to 15, due to logistic problems, and therefore were dropped from the original list

2.2 Instrument

Interviews based on a questionnaire were conducted with senior officials in the Departments of Education for each one of the 15 participating countries. Another source of information in terms of statistical data was solicited from the Departments of Education. Other statistical information was retrieved literature review.

2.3 Procedure

Research assistants were selected from each country's university to carry out the interviews with officials in the Department of Education and collect the data from other sources from the identified sources.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews and other sources of information are reported here for each one of the 15 participating countries, as displayed on Figure 1. Both the Results and Discussion are presented simultaneously



Figure 1: Map of Africa showing participating countries

West Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa	North Africa	Central Africa
Ghana	Ethiopia	Botswana	Egypt	Cameroon
Nigeria	Rwanda	South Africa		
	Tanzania	Zimbabwe		
	Uganda	Zambia		
	Kenya	Lesotho		
		Namibia		

Ethiopia: Early Childhood Education started as long time as the 1900 for French children, whose parents worked as railway consultants in the country (Perham, 2007). This was followed by English, and German schools intended for affluent families in Addis Ababa. By 1971, a pilot project of Early Childhood Education in major towns commenced, administered by Swedish and American Peace Corps Volunteers (Ministry of Community Development and Social affairs (1972). There were 77 ECE schools for children whose age ranged from 4-6 years, for a population of 3.5 million. Most of such schools were in urban areas, and there were hardly any in rural areas. Those responsible for schools were missions, private organisations and the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs. The Ministry of Education was involved in the administration of Early Childhood Education.

The turning point in Early Childhood Education started in 1981, with the establishment of The Ethiopian Children Commission, whose primary function was to care and educate Ethiopian children. This resulted in policy development, activity involving awareness, workshops and seminars; followed by the inclusion of Early Childhood Education into Educational Policy. A curriculum was developed and teacher education for ECE was introduced with relevant support from UNICEF (2007)

By 1990s, government role was confined to teacher training, curriculum development, monitoring and improving quality education. In the last ten years, the government has relegated ECE to NGOs, communities and faith-based organisations, as it has focused on Primary School Education.

Despite the government's disengagement in ECE, Early Childhood has grown from strength to strength. Prior to 2001, there were 964 schools which increased dramatically to 3,318 schools (Ministry of Education, 1957, 88, 89). The enrolment increased from 109,358 to 341,215, with the number of 3,214 teachers rising to 9,647.

ECE is predominantly accessible to urban children, while for those in rural areas access is very low. Fees are charged, and therefore this makes it rather difficult for parents whose income is low. There are equal numbers of boys and girls attending ECE, which reflects a middle class of parents, who practise no discrimination between boys and girls when it comes to education.

Some of the teachers have had teacher education for such level of education, whereas others are not trained. ECE plays a significant role in the introduction of basic learning skills which is vital for their subsequent formal education at all levels of education (Ministry of Education, 1994a). Many of the story books used are of foreign origin, and English or some other foreign languages are used as medium of instruction (Gesesse, 2007). Such languages are preferred to indigenous languages, by parents and school owners.

To address various problems encountered in ECE, both the Ministry of Education and that of Health, as well as the Women's Affairs have joined hands to see that there is parental education; health and early sanitation programmes, promote accessible, equitable and quality ECE for all children, irrespective of their social and physical state: start ECE in every urban and rural primary schools throughout the country; facilitating the opening of ECE by NGO's and other organisations; developing learning and teaching materials; monitoring of quality education and preparing suitably qualified teachers (MoE, 2010; Teferra, 2007).

Lesotho: Children whose age ranges from 4-6 years of age are eligible to enrol in Early Childhood Education. They are exposed to basic educational skills consisting of pre-writing, pre-reading, and pre-numeracy, as starting point for subsequent Primary School Education (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Those operating ECE Centres are individuals, private organisations, communities and NGO's. However, in recent years, the Ministry of Education has introduced a reception class phase, aimed at 5-year-olds to ensure that prior to joining formal Primary Education, they complete such programme, known as readiness programme (2010). Reception classes are attached to existing Primary Schools with a minimum of one per District (MoE, 2005).

The history of ECE started in the 1970 by women organisations known as the Lesotho National Council of Women and the Lesotho Day Care and Community Centre. In the course of providing such useful service, they were of the view that to do the programme justice, there was need for government involvement in Early Childhood Education. This led the government to establish ECE under the Ministry of Education, funded by Bernard Van Leer Foundation, a Netherlands-based organisation (MoE, 2010).

Ten years later, ECE was established as a formal Unit of the Ministry of Education, whose functions were: develop

ECE curriculum, run in-service training for teachers and caregivers, develop policy, monitor and regulate ECE programmes. In 2001, in response to the needs of children of poor families unable to access ECE, the government started home-based ECE in four of the ten Districts (Sebatane & Lefoka, 2004; UNICEF, 2007)). Such programmes ran on the same lines as the other existing programmes.

By 2001, there were 3,4507 children enrolled which rose to 52,646 by 2010, with the number of boys and girls being equal (Bureau of Statistics, 2011). On the average, every two children in four have access to Early Childhood Education. It is important to note, that a programme for the preparation of ECE teachers has been introduced at Lesotho College of Education, in addition to in-service courses provided by the ECE Unit in the Ministry of Education (Sebatane & Lefoka, 2008).

Zambia: The history of ECE commenced in 1957, when law was passed in support of Early Childhood Education, stressing its importance in the development of a child, the emphasis being placed on registration and regulation of ECE schools (Ministry of Education, 2003). From 1977 to 1992, an Education Policy recognised ECE as part of the Education System, though there was no guarantee that ECE would be accessible to all eligible children. Initially ECE was placed under the Ministry of Local Government, NGOs and communities. In practice, it was the following organisations that ran it: private providers, NGOs, and faith-based organisations (Ministry of Education, 1977; UNESCO, 2006). The government through the Ministry of Education provided teacher education; whereas the Ministry of Local Government was responsible for legislation of ECE involving child health and nutrition for expectant mothers, and children under the age of five. By 1999, 6% of ECE children had access to Early Childhood Education. There was a difference in the rate of access between urban and rural children with the former 6% having access, while the latter had 2% access. Notwithstanding such difference, there was remarkable progress in the preparation of teachers which rose from 473 in the 1990s to 1,200 teachers by 1997. Moreover, there were also more private Colleges offering teacher education for ECE. In 2004, ECE was placed under the Ministry of Education, and was responsible for training of pre-school teachers, monitoring standards and developing guidelines. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has focused on the establishment of ECE Centres for rural children, and those whose urban parents are poor to achieve this, the Ministry of Education works hand in hand with other Ministries, district councils, local communities, NGOs, faith-based organisations, families and individuals. The number of ECE children joining Grade 1 has increased substantially, though still small compared to the number of eligible children. About 17% of eligible children have access to ECE. The number of girls and boys attending ECE stands at 52.4% for girls and 47.6 for boys. Contrary to government language policy, ECE medium of instruction is English (Matafwali & Nunsaka, 2011).

Tanzania: Early Childhood Education in the context of Tanzania is for children aged 5-6 years, which is unlike in other countries where children below such age are considered eligible for Early Childhood Education (United Republic of Tanzania (URT), 1995). ECE in Tanzania is traceable to the 1980s when it was realised, through the National Economic Programme of 1981-2000, that the success of the programme was linked to the growth and development of children (Mtahabwa, 2009). It may be argued that, the success of Early Childhood Education is as a result of both private and public efforts combined. While the private sector deals with children of 0-4 years, the public sector focuses on 5-6-year-old (Ibid).

For three decades, there has been no formal curriculum followed by ECE; each one making the choice of the programme, they wish to pursue. Most no-government organisations base their ECE on Montessori, whereas the public sector bases it on what the Tanzania Institute of Education comes up with. In terms of gender disparity, there is not much difference between girls and boys attending ECE. By 2010, the ratio was 51.2% girls and 49.8% boys in government schools, compared to 48.7% boys and 51.3 in the private sector (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010).

In the private sector, there is no uniform criteria in the recruitment of teachers, whereas in the public, primary school teachers not specifically trained for Early Childhood Education are responsible for providing instruction (URT, 2010). Nonetheless, in recent times, more and more teachers are studying Early Childhood Education in preparation which is offered at both Colleges of Education and University in the Faculties of Education.

In private schools fees are charged, which is not the case at public schools. The charging of fees poses a problem for parents who cannot afford to pay such fees. This may lead such parents to not sending their young ones to school for other options, such as employment or helping with work at home. Thus limiting access to education for such children.

Both English and Kiswahili are used as medium of instruction, though in a number of schools, English is preferred as medium of instruction. It is important to note that UNICEF has played a significant role in the promotion of Early Childhood Education, through actual construction of Centres, and funding the running of such Centres and ECE-based research.

Kenya: The earliest beginning of Early Childhood Education was in 1942, when a school was opened for European children (Ministry of Education, 1987). In subsequent years, ECE was available for African children as well,

particularly in urban areas where mothers needed to go to work. Expansion of ECE was more felt following Independence in 1963, as more and more ECE schools opened to meet the existing demand for such education. The Ministry of Culture and Social Services was entrusted with the responsibility of administering Early Childhood Education. However, by the end of 1970s, it was incorporated as part of the Ministry of Education. As this happened, the Ministry of Education assumed the role of registration, curriculum development, teacher education, supervision and inspection; thus contributing to quality education (Ministry Education, 2011).

Through the years, there has been substantial increase in enrolment. For example (MoE, 2011). During this period, there was an increase in enrolment of 27% nationwide. About 64% of ECE Centres were publicly administered. Nationally there were 73% boys and 72.6 girls registered in 2007. The national average of ECE children registered stood at 42% during the same period (Kenya Education Directory, 2011).

The teacher-pupil ratio nationally is 1:27 in public ECEs and 1:17 in private ECEs. More teachers are being prepared in addition to 43,165 in public ECEs, given that it is projected that by 2015, there will be need for 61,434 teachers (MoE, 2011).. Various Kenyan languages are used as medium of instruction, but in most private urban ECEs, English is used as medium of instruction.

Zimbabwe: In the early years of Early Childhood Education, only children from urban areas had access to ECE education (UNESCO-IBE 2010). There were no attempts to facilitate black children accessing such education, which was available to white children (Nyoni, 1996). In the course of time, this state of affairs changed, particularly following the attainment of Independence in 1980. It was during this period, that ECE was placed under the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (Ministry of Education, 2005). This meant opening ECE in both urban and rural areas for purposes of greater access.

The Ministry developed the curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher education for ECE. By 1988, ECE was placed under the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (Zimbabwe EFA, 2000).. Most ECE Centres are organized by government which pays allowances for teachers, supervisors and grants for construction of Centres. NGOs, UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children are responsible for provision of construction of physical facilities, training of teachers and trainers (Zvobgo, 1990).

Currently, there is a policy calling for at least two classes (A&B) being part of an existing Primary School. Class A is for the 2-4-year-olds and class B would be for those aged 4-5-year-olds. By 2007, there were as many as 74% Primary schools which had attached to them ECE Centres (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Those attending public rural ECEs do not pay fees, whereas private ECEs charge fees. In terms of gender, 50.5% girls and 49.5% boys have access to ECE. In 2006, 64% of those joining Grade 1 had ECE education. Total enrolment consisted of 67% urban and 63% rural children.

To boost the number of ECE teachers, the government requires that each College of Education offers a programme in ECE (Cleghorne & Porchner, 1997; UNESCO-IBE, 2010). A number of universities also offer a degree in Early Childhood Education. This contributes to the reduction of many untrained teachers who are more than the trained ones.

The language of instruction is the mother tongue, which would be either Shona or Ndebele, in keeping with government policy. However, this is not adhered to, as English is conventionally used as a medium of instruction. In fact, in some urban private ECE children are prohibited from speaking their mother tongue. Moreover parents expect their children to pursue a conventional curriculum as obtains at primary school level (Mushoriwa & Muzembe, 2011; Cleghorne & Porchner, 2003).

Nigeria: Early Childhood Education is considered rather new, as far as the government is concerned, in view of the fact that the government is not that deeply involved, other than dealing with the formulation of policy (Lawal, 2003). Attending ECE has a lot to do with the socioeconomic status of parents. There is only a small number of children attending ECE. By 1999 there was only 1.8% of Nigerian children who had access to Early Childhood Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2010, 2009).

As a result of joint efforts with other organisations such as UNICEF, and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, in 1996 there were 2,045 Centres established for both urban and rural children numbering 75,000 children selected from ten states (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009). By the year 2000, the number rose to 7,300 Centres from which 400,000 children benefited in twelve states (Bamiro & Adedeje, 2010).

There has been provision of personnel training parents and caregivers and curriculum development. There are more than 20 million children who have no access to ECE (NPE, 2004). The government of Nigeria is less involved in ECE compared to Primary Education. In the main, responsibility for ECE is delegated to NGOs, local community, parents and individuals (Offorma, 2008, 2009).

Uganda: Prior to Independence in 1962, Early Childhood Education was the function of individuals, families,

religious bodies, communities and NGOs (Ministr of Education and Sports, 2007). Given the government negligible role in ECE, the blame was placed on the government in view of its importance in preparing children for subsequent levels of formal education (Ministry of Education and sports, 2007).

As a result, there has been tremendous change in the manner government has got involved in ECE, for the past one decade. The government has demonstrated its determination in the promotion of ECE, as it has aimed at founding, owning and administering ECE Centres.

Teacher education for ECE is offered at Colleges and Universities. By 2007 there were 2,852 qualified male and female teachers. The number of female teachers (2,216) outnumbered that of male teachers (636). By 2008, there were 4,418 teachers, with a breakdown of 903 male teachers and 2,515 female teachers (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). Between 2008 and 2010, the enrolment and expansion of ECE has grown significantly (Ministry Education and Sports, 2010). The national GER was 6.03% and that of boys was 6.1% and that of girls was 6.5%

Egypt: Early Childhood Education is for children whose age ranges from 0-6 years, though the governments focus is on those who are 4-6 years, who are under the Ministry of Education, preparing for formal education at Primary School level (The Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2010). During 2003 to 2008/09 there were a variety of increases in enrolment, classes and number of schools (Ibid). For example there was an increase of 66% in the number of schools, an increase of 68% in enrolment and an increase of 58% in the number of classes.

There are a number of challenges faced by ECE: shortage of funds which has impact on quality; there is shortage of qualified teachers; there is no capacity to accept all eligible children; private ECE is not affordable; those in rural areas and the poor consider ECE no more than a luxury which they can ill-afford(The Egyptian Ministry of Education (2002//3-2008/9), 2010).

Rwanda: Early Childhood Education is said to be the least developed, compared to other components of Education in the country (Government of Rwanda, 2010). Nor does it consider ECE as necessarily part of Education, as understood in a formal sense. The only role the government has played is that of building model schools and training. However, not all is lost, as far as the government is concerned. As recent as 2005, the government has extended its involvement in the form of developing policy, attempts to mobilize funds for ECE purposes (GoR, 2008b).

In 2003 there were 257 ECE schools out of which two were under the government with an enrolment of 18,399 which was 1% of the 2 million eligible children in the country. The number of teachers was 527. The role of the Ministry of Education was that of supervision and training. Even as recent as 2008-2012, the government has not shown keen interest in getting involved in ECE as such. Nevertheless, rather interestingly and surprisingly, in 2010 the government made available Rwanda Francs of 183 million for the construction of 400 model ECE Centres (Ministry of Education, 2010).

The majority of ECE schools are in urban areas and the language of instruction is either French or English and in some cases Kinyarwanda is used

Ghana: The early history of Early Childhood Education in Ghana is traceable back to the 19th century when the Basel Mission had ECE established and attached to some of their primary schools in class one (Morrison, 2001; Adam-Issahet et al. 2007). Such a model was followed by other missions engaged in the establishment of ECE Centres (MoE, 2010)

In 1930 Cape Colony Department of Education introduced a syllabus for infants classes, whose content consisted of games, physical activities, sports, English, singing and arithmetics (UNESCO International, 2006; Ntwl, 1992). The mother tongue was used as the medium of instruction. The ECE Centres were government-assisted and private. With private ECE fees were charged, as this was their main source of income.

In the 1990s some private organisations (NGOs) rendered the government some assistance by opening schools throughout Ghana. Such organisations were known as 31st December Women's Movement and Plan International Ghana (MoE, 2010).

In urban centres private individuals started ECEs in response to the growing demand for such service. The ECE Centres privately opened are many more than those publicly established. However, this is not the case with ECE for 4-6-year-olds publicly run, which are three times as many as the private ones. In terms of gender, boys registered are as many as the number of girls (MoE, 2010).

Teachers teaching at ECE schools are not enough, and only 7.3% of them are trained (Morrison, 2001). For both private and public teachers are trained. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:27. In 2002 the ECE for the last two years for the 4-6 years was made part of formal primary school, approved in 2004 All private basic education have a minimum of one ECE Centre attached to each existing school (MoE, 2010).

Botswana: It is recorded that Early Childhood Education in the 1960s was intended for mothers in towns, who worked full-time, and therefore had to have someone take care of their children in their absence (Botswana Government,

2010). The pioneers in ECE were NGOs and others such as individuals, religious organisations. Prominent among them was the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)

The children enrolled are those of 4-6 years of age. After years of non-involvement, the government came in by placing ECE under the Ministry of Local Government, Land and Housing (1977; Government of Botswana, 1994) which came up with a policy providing guidelines for the registration and operation of ECE. After some years, it was recommended that ECE should be part of the Ministry of Education (1994) which has been the case to date, forming part of Primary Education. As such the Ministry of Education is responsible for planning, national coordination and development of policy.

By 1997 there were 291 ECE Centres, 118 in urban areas and 173 in rural areas. As of now (2010) there are over 514 Centres (Republic of Botswana, 2010). However, there is no approved curriculum being used, other than to say currently there is a newly formulated curriculum being piloted in 31 schools across the country. The enrolment is 24,433 with gender parity of 50.2% females and 49.8% males (Re).

The number of trained teachers is very small, with more of them in urban areas and much less in rural areas. The majority of teachers (98%) are women, and only 2% are men. The total number of trained teachers is about 5.3%. Language of instruction is Setswana for the first three years at primary followed by English. While ECE is part of Primary, there is not much to show what is happening, other than the government continuing with its role of curriculum development and coordination of ECE activities.

South Africa: Early Childhood Education exists from age 0-6 years. Here it is dealt with in the context of the sixth year, when children join what is known as Reception year, before joining Primary school. In 2001, the government decided that ECE should be phased in as part of Basic Education, so that by 2010 those entering Grade One would have completed their Reception year (Department of Basic Education, 2001).

This meant it would be funded by the government and would have 85% enrolment which would translate to 810,000 children in the Reception year throughout the country. All such ECE Centres would be placed at existing primary schools. However, such ambitious was not achievable within the assigned period. And for this reason, there was an extension with the deadline being in 2014, which is considered that its being met is certain (DBE, 2011a).

Between 1999 and 2009, the enrolment in ECE increased by 29% from 156,292 to 620,223 children (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The GER difference between boys and girls is non-existent, as there was 60.4% girls and 60.2% boys registered in 2007 (DBE, 2011a).

Namibia: There has been a national policy on Early Childhood Education dating back to 1996, supporting the existence of ECE in Namibia (Rommelzwaal, 2001). Such policy has been revisited during the years 2005 and 2007. Historically, ECE was introduced by Christian missionaries namely the Lutherans, Anglicans and Catholics. Many of such pioneering programmes initiated by Christian missionaries are still operational today. Other organisations such as the Red Cross, SOS Children Village also are involved in the promotion of ECE (Victor, 2011). This is in addition to the involvement of NGOs, as well as both public and private providers.

Following Independence in 1990, more and more Namibian children have had access to ECE. In 2006 the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for the 5-6-year-olds who are considered part of formal education learners (ETSIP, 2010). This is in spite of the fact that, ECE is not considered as formal education eligible for public provision.

After Independence ECE was placed under the Ministry of Local Government and Housing, before being passed on to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. Effectively ECE has remained in the hands of private providers with inadequate trained teachers and infrastructure that leaves much to be desired (Wiedlich, 2011). About 32% ECE age children have access to such education, and there is outcry for increasing the number of ECE Centres across the country, and demand for the Ministry of Education to assume responsibility for Early Childhood Education (MoE, 2010; Wiedlick, 2011).

Cameroon: It is claimed that there is Early Childhood Education in every village, town and urban throughout Cameroon (Cameroon Government, 2011). This includes both public and private ECE as well as those in urban and rural areas. There is, nevertheless, a distinction between urban and rural ECE as there are more schools in towns than there are in rural areas

In the urban public ECE is largely free, though some token fees maybe expected. In private ECE, however, fees are charged for the service rendered. For the years 2005/2006, there were 180 ECE Centres, 572 teachers and 12,211 enrolment in the South West Region of Cameroon (Ministry of Basic Education, 2011). In 2009/2010 there were 295 ECE Centres, 1,246 teachers and an enrolment of 25,981 children (Ibid).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Early Childhood Education in the participating African Union countries has been examined on the basis of expansion, enrolment, teachers, rural, and gender distribution. In the last three decades, Early Childhood Education has undergone tremendous changes in terms of growth and development. More schools for Early Childhood Education have been constructed in villages, rural areas and urban areas. Such construction has been in response to the demand of the people for such provision. This indeed is a new chapter in the history of Africa, given that for too long, neither the governments in power nor parents paid that much attention to Early Childhood Education. Governments did not pay that much attention, simply because the governments they succeeded did not have that much attention to Early Childhood Education. They too had inherited such concept from where they came from. Parents did not care just as much, because in their lives, they never attended Early Childhood Education. And so this brings to mind an anecdote related to us in Maseru Lesotho three decades ago. Some UNICEF representative from Nairobi visited a senior government officer in one of the Southern Africa countries, marketing the idea of starting Early Childhood Education in their capital, which would be financed by UNICEF. The response was not a palatable one. He said he was brought up in a village by his parents, and as he grew up, he never attended any Early Childhood Education. For that reason, he saw no need for the establishment of Early Childhood Education Centres.

On hearing this, I was rather disturbed. But as I have gone through the experience of reading what has been going in Early Childhood Education in Africa, I realize that there are many people who still hold similar beliefs about Early Childhood Education. Take any one of the participating countries, and see how long the Ministry of Education finally accepted to house Early Childhood Education as part of Education. ECE had to be housed by several departments before it was finally accepted as part of Education. In most countries, Early Childhood Education has been in the administration of the private sector, and only in recent years have governments have reluctantly agreed to be involved.

On the other hand, many Africans have moved on to embrace Early Childhood Education as an integral part education for their children. It is partly for this reason, that Early Childhood Education has made strides that are unprecedented in African history and development.

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