A POSSIBLE MEASURE FOR ENSURING QUALITY PROVISION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA

Naledi Binnie Mswela
University of Botswana
mswelanb@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract
This study sought to consider issues of accreditation to try and argue for the introduction of a model in ECE as a measure of ensuring quality provision. The article is a document analysis study and starts by defining accreditation and what is entailed in the accreditation process. It further presents the benefits of accreditation and goes on to deliberate on possible features of an accreditation model that could be suitable for ECE programs in Botswana.

Key words: accreditation, early childhood education, quality education, standards

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to discuss issues of accreditation for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Botswana. Accreditation is the action or process of officially recognizing someone as having a particular status or being qualified to perform a particular activity. It is also defined as a mark of excellence that is awarded by an independent, third party organization when a centre proves that it continually maintains high standards of quality in early childhood education and care. Jenkings and Englander (2016) define accreditation as a particular form of quality assurance, with the distinctive characteristics that leads to the formal approval of an institution or a program that has been found by a legitimate body to meet predetermined and agreed upon standards, eventually resulting in an accredited status granted to the provider or program by responsible authorities (Gol-Guven, 2017).

Accreditation is both a status and a process. As a status, accreditation provides public notification that an institution or program meets standards of quality set forth by an accrediting agency. As a process accreditation reflects the fact that in achieving recognition by the accrediting agency, the institution or program is committed to self-study and external review. The external review would be done to meet standards and to continuously seek ways in which to enhance that quality (Winterbottom & Jones, 2014).

Background Information: The Accreditation Process

Accreditation usually goes through defined processes. Here the centre seeking accreditation status prepares materials that effectively display the program accomplishments. At the same time the program must also prepare a written report of its accomplishments according to standards set by the accreditation organization (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2015). The following are some examples of the process of accreditation.

Peer review-: Administrative and program peers conduct an intensive review of the prepared material, written report and general workings of the centre seeking accreditation status. Teams of peer reviewers visit the centre. Most of the accreditation boards are populated by administrative peers in the field.

Visit and examination-: In addition to the visits made by the peer reviewers, most accreditation organizations also constitute a visiting team that visits the centre seeking accreditation. This team is often made of peers and members of the public who volunteer their time because of strong interest in the quality of standards of ECE programs.

Judgement action made by accreditation organization:-When the previous steps are completed the accreditation organization calls upon the commission to review the steps and affirm or deny accreditation status for the centre under scrutiny. By accepting accreditation status, a centre agrees to undergo a review on a rotating basis every few years. A program is usually required to go through all the steps of the accreditation process each time it is reviewed (Piasta, 2015).

Benefits of Accreditation

Accreditation is a tool that allows for consistent national standards, meaning that parents can be assured knowing that their children are provided with quality education whose standards have been approved nationally. Accreditation helps build a stronger team of teachers, administrators and families working together to improve quality for children. Team building is important because it can boost the morale of teachers, which can in turn increase success in teaching. It can also facilitate better communication between teachers and management and thus improve relationships and the quality of work done. It motivates teachers. Team leadership and team building go hand in hand. The more comfortable teachers are to express their ideas and opinions, the more confident they will become. This motivates them to take on new challenges. Furthermore, accreditation promotes creativity:-taking a team outside of an office setting and exposing it to new experiences will force members to think outside of their normal routine. Working together with team members can ignite creativity and fresh ideas, which are great qualities to bring back to the school (Whaley, Cate, Del, Vinh & Nietzel, 2017)

Accreditation develops problem-solving skills. In public relations a crisis can happen at any time. Team building activities that require teachers to work together to solve problems can improve the ability to think rationally and strategically. Teams that are able to determine when a problem arises and know what they can do about it can then effectively take charge when a real crisis occurs. Accreditation also breaks the barrier. Team building increases the trust factor with teachers. Team building exercises give the leader the opportunity to be seen as a colleague rather than a boss, which can do wonders for employee morale (Heckman & Masterov, 2007)

Accreditation also does the following: It improves standards for the program. High standards attract more families to enrol their children in the program. It is a proven method for

improving school performance. It also eases the transfer of pupils from one accredited program to another. Students get quality education. Alumni share their experiences and participate in curricular updates in view of emerging technology and tools. There is also the development of realization of efforts, the opportunity to attempt more complex problems, career advancement and consultancy and exchange of views—opportunities tend to supplement each other. Institutions build up a brand continuous improvement toward excellence. Accreditation also assures parents, the business community and the public that a program is committed to raising pupil achievement, providing a safe and enriching environment and maintaining an efficient and effective operation (Anderson & Sayre, 2016).

Accreditation also assists parents in making the right choice when making decisions about where to place their children. Further, it offers the government a process that supports systematic planning, focuses on student learning and provides a vehicle for meeting accountability requirements. Accreditation ensures continuity in planning for improvement because improvement goals for each centre must complement those of the district. Accreditation also recognises and validates improvement efforts of the centre, district and the community and generates recommendations for further improvement. Accreditation provides school boards with independent, non-governmental validation that the centres they oversee are effectively using public funds to deliver quality education for the children (Heckman & Masterov, 2007).

Components/features of an accreditation model
Standards and indicators for accreditation in higher education as summarized in Table 1 were adopted for this discussion.

Table 1: Standard and Indicators for Accreditation

Categories	Standards	Indicators
Context	The Physical /material and Human resources	Adequate resources and facilities
Input	Student Selection and Intake	Staff quantity and quality Admission requirements Student intake and access
Processes	Mission and Objectives Effective Learning Processes	Clearly defined strategic mission and objectives Correspondence of educational objectives to qualification level descriptors. The relation of curricula, contents and educational approaches to program objectives
Output	The realisation of objectives Efficiency	Correspondence of learning outcomes to qualifications – level descriptors Impact on society

		Efficient use of input resources to realise output
Feedback	Effective Internal quality management	Effective internal evaluation procedures
		Effective quality management and innovation arrangements
		Capacity for strategic change and improvement processes
	Strategic planning	Effective organisational strategies to improve quality and student participation.

Adapted from: Van Damme, (2004)

Table 1 shows that for a program to have ideal accreditation standards, it has to satisfy the categories, standards as well as indicators for accreditation outlined in Table 1. Categories include *content*, *input*, *processes*, *output*, and *feedback*. For standards physical /material and human resources, the program has to have adequate resources and facilities.

The ideal accreditation standards include *input*, which includes standards such as students' selection and intake. The second category is input, where indicators such as staff quantity and quality, admission requirements, student intake and access are considered. The third category of the ideal accreditation model is *processes*, which include mission and objectives. Indicators for *process* include clearly defined strategic mission and objectives and correspondence of educational objectives to qualification level descriptors. Still on *processes* category there are standards of effective learning processes and for a program to achieve these they need indicators such as the relation of curricula contents and educational approaches to program objectives.

The fourth category deals with *output* where the standards are the realisation of objectives efficiency while the indicators are correspondence of learning outcomes to qualifications— level descriptors, impact on society and efficient use of input resources to realise output. The fifth category is *feedback* and the standards are strategic planning while the indicators are capacity for strategic change and improvement processes as well as effective organisational strategies to improve quality and student participation.

The standards of accreditation outlined above are crucial for adoption in an accreditation model in Botswana because they are very comprehensive and relevant. For a country like Botswana, teachers and all practitioners teaching young children would not be overwhelmed by accreditation as the standard and indicators model are straightforward and easy to follow.

Possible features of an accreditation model for ECE programs in Botswana
This model could have the *input* category which deals with the training of personnel such as teachers and managers. These would need to be trained before they are employed in the

services of young children. In regards to *acting* all stakeholders would need to fulfil their mandate with regards to ECE provision. Teachers would be required to make sure that they deliver quality services that would positively impact on children's development; service providers also follow policies and ensure their schools are providing quality services as expected. Parents would have to form partnerships with the school and be fully active in the education of their children.

Regarding the *content* category, each program would be mandated to meet the requirement standards such as safe environment and pre-school facility. The environment would have to be conducive to learning and also meet required safety measures such as having fire extinguishers, alarms and sensors. *Processes* are very important in ECE programs. In an accreditation model, the mission and vision, as well as the admission policy would be essential. Each program would need to have clear mission and vision statements to guide both the teachers as well as parents and assist them in knowing what the school would be aiming to achieve.

It is important to have *feedback* in any organisation, more especially in ECE; otherwise it would be difficult to judge if the objectives of the program are met. Evaluation and monitoring of teachers' performance as well as indicators of progress towards achieving the desired goals would need to be prioritized. These two aspects are very important in the accreditation process.

Conclusion
The following points are made by way of conclusion. The model could be used as a guide to assist the teachers and the school managers in making sure that the aspects outlined in the accreditation model are catered for. This would go a long way to guarantee quality ECE in the country. Learners and their parents, as consumers of the service, would benefit immensely from an accreditation model that would ensure quality service, and schools would not be comfortably lax because of accreditation requirements. Economically, Botswana would also benefit as a country. Research has pointed out that children who received quality ECE are considered more likely to acquire steady jobs, own a home, have more than one car and are unlikely to be jailed (Henniger, 2017). The economic and social benefits of ECE are many, pointing to the importance of establishing accreditation standards.
The formulation of an accreditation model could be the base for further research in the area. Potential areas for future research could include the *Effects of Accreditation in Botswana ECE programs*. Such a study would be interested in finding out improvements in the quality of education for young children after the inception of the accreditation model. The study could further note major developments and setbacks in order to improve the provision of ECE in Botswana.

References

Anderson, K., & Sayre, R.L., (2016). *Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes in Tanzania.* Centre for Universal Education. Unicef. The World Bank.

Gol-Guven, M., (2017). Ensuring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: The Case of Turkey.. Taylor and Frances Group. UK.

Heckman, J.J& Dimitriy V. Masterov, M, (2007). The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children ' *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, 29(3),* 446-493.

Henniger, M. L., (2017). *An Introduction to Teaching Young Children.* Pearson Education. New Jersey.

Jenkings, D. & Englander, K. (2016). A Pacer Policy Brief: *Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems. Research for Action.* . The Heinz Endowments. Howard.

Winterbottom, C., & Piasta. S., (2015). *Does Accreditation Matter. School Readiness Rates for Accredited Versus Non- Accredited Child care Facilities in Florida's Voluntary Pre- Kindergarten Programs.* Routledge. The Ohio State University.

Winterbottom , C., & Jones, I (2014). National Accreditation and its role in Early Education: An Analysis of Florida's Gold Seal Quality Child Care Programs and |Licencing. *Journal of Early Childhood Education, 12(1),* 64-76.

Whaley, K.T; Cate, D; Del,P; Vinh, M; & Nietzel,J. (2017). *State Early Childhood Inclusion Self-Assessment* retrieved from http://ectacenter.org/-pdfs/topics /inclusion/ectadassy_inclusion-online-self assessment.