# ASSESSING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES USED BY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN SELECTED PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN GABORONE

Gorata Nomasonto Sepopa
University of Botswana, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
sepopagratanomasonto@gmail.com

Marea Maggie Tsamaase
University of Botswana, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
tsamaase@ub.ac.bw

Kelebogile Kgosi
University of Botswana, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
kgosik@ub.ac.bw

**Abstract**

Professional development (PD) is deemed as instrumental in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of educators in early childhood education (ECE) programs. This study assessed the PD strategies used by early childhood educators in selected private preschools in Gaborone, Botswana. The research aimed to identify the strategies employed, the challenges faced, and the educators' perceptions of these strategies. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study gathered data through interviews with six educators and three administrators from three private preschools in Gaborone. Findings revealed that PD strategies used included both internal activities (in-house training, mentorship, team building, and personality tests) and external activities (workshops, short courses, first aid training, and long-term studies). The challenges identified by this study included lack of funds, legal restrictions, inflexible work schedules, language barriers, educators' disinterest, reluctance to attend workshops on weekends, and insufficient communication of early childhood educators' needs. This study expands the current knowledge on early childhood PD by bringing insights from Botswana.

**Keywords:** Private preschool, Early childhood educators, Professional development

## 1.0 Introduction

Over the last few years, gathering solid data to verify the effectiveness of various professional development (PD) strategies has become an area of great interest in the field of ECE research. Across different countries, researchers have sought to find the most effective PD approaches through which to develop the skills of early childhood educators (Karoly, 2012). These are known as professional development strategies, which are continuous experiences meant to enhance the skills, knowledge, and abilities of early childhood educators serving children from ages 0 to 8 years, in early childhood programs (Sheridan et al., 2009). In various Western countries,

these experiences are mandated and guided by differing national frameworks and policies. Early childhood professionals are required to enrol in PD experiences for a specified number of hours annually and take part in activities such as short courses and workshops (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2020)**.**

Ideally, several policies and frameworks should exist to support PD practices in learning institutions. In Botswana, the Revised National Policy on Education (1994) provides the structure for professional training in schools. The policy recommends that all schools should have staff development committees (SDCs) that plan and execute teacher professional development initiatives at all levels continuously and in line with the teachers' individual needs (Republic of Botswana, 1994). However, extant literature in Botswana (Macheng, 2016; Mphale, 2014) show greater interest in studying the PD of teachers in public primary and secondary schools, indicating a gap of knowledge in the literature pertaining to PD for early childhood educators in the context of Botswana. Additionally, the findings from Mphale (2014) show that although SDCs do exist in Botswana government schools, teacher development is either lacking or non-existent in these schools due to a lack of resources, time, and other factors. It is apparent that SDCs mostly conduct workshops on an ad hoc basis for teachers at random times when a need has been identified. Even so, Mphale (2014) states that the workshops are often general and do not cater for the teachers' individual needs. It should be noted that the workshops mentioned above are for primary and secondary school teachers and none have been reported for ECE professionals. Thus, this lack of elaborate and specialised PD for early childhood professionals has adverse impact on their professional growth and hence on the quality of ECE in the country.

## 2.0 Background

Countries across the globe continue to recognize and develop policy structures that support teachers' professional training. For example, Singapore is considered one of the four best countries regarding teacher PD due to its detailed framework that entitles all teachers to 100 hours of PD annually (Jensen et al., 2016).

The country offers teachers various PD activities through the Ministry of Education in partnership with school staff developers (SSDs) that are found in every school (Jensen, et al., 2016). In the USA, the PD of early childhood educators is supported and managed by organisations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). As a national organisation, NAEYC promotes high-quality ECE programs for children in many ways, including the creation of a framework for the standards and opportunities for practice and development within the profession and enforcing it (NAEYC, 1994).

Similarly, some African countries such as South Africa and Ethiopia have policy frameworks that guide PD. In South Africa, the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development of 2006 is used. Covering teachers from the early childhood level to high school level, this policy details the responsibilities of stakeholders in continuous professional teacher development and a system that includes suggested PD activities and a point system for all teachers

to encourage them to engage in PD activities throughout the year (Department of Education, 2006). Similarly, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994 also outlines the requirement for annual teacher PD at all levels and the relevant stakeholders (Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia, 1994). Beyond the peer support, coaching, and personalization of PD strategies used in the west, countries on the African continent base their strategies on the common culture of community. This translates to the creation of representative committees where stakeholders such as school administration, teacher representatives, and teacher unions are tasked with planning PD initiatives under a common vision which has proven to be effective in countries such as South Africa (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2015). Educators in South Africa also utilise strategies that encourage reflection through methods like SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis, as individuals and committees.

In Botswana early childhood care and education dates back as far as the 1960s. As described by the Report of the National Commission on Education of 1993, women across the country at that time, would voluntarily gather children in their communities and care for them during the day while engaging them in activities such as games to stimulate their development. Over time, this evolved into organisations such as the Red Cross, churches and individuals voluntarily running day-care centres in these communities. By the 1980s, the Botswana government identified the need to regulate the different day-care centres that were springing up, and in response to the National Day Care Centre Policy (NDCCP, 1980), to manage the day-care centres and ensure that children were receiving an adequate, quality education. As the years progressed, and women's empowerment became a priority for the government, more women entered the workforce, meaning they required external, quality care for their children and necessitated the expansion and commercialization of the day-care centre industry (Maundeni, 2013). Along with this commercialization and implementation of policies, came the recognition of the importance of PD of teachers at all levels. This instigated the Ministry of Education to become the main proponent of teachers' PD through in-service training in schools, until the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) was published in 1994. To complement the formal education received by teachers in training institutions, the ministry organised workshops on general topics relevant for teachers. When the RNPE was published, it mandated that all schools have a staff development committee (SDCs). These committees are required to formulate school development plans (SDPs), that outline the in-school PD activities planned for the year and the funds needed to implement them. In every school, this committee handles planning and executing PD initiatives according to the SDPs, to support the professional growth of staff (Mphale, 2014). Ideally, these SDCs are expected to function in ECCE schools as well. The RNPE also recommended the formulation of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, which was published in 2001. This policy was meant to outline regulations and standards for high-quality ECCE programs in the country (Bose, 2001) and now guides the operation of ECCE centres.

Thus, Botswana has several policies that guide ECE, but with minimal emphasis on the PD of educators at this level. For example, the National Day Care Centre Policy (NDCCP, 1980), stipulates the requirements for running day-care services in terms of entry age, structures, equipment, material, adult child ratio, registration procedures, supervision, and the training of teachers (Maundeni, 2013), while the ECCE policy of 2001, outlines the regulations and standards of operating ECCE programs in the country (Bose, 2001). However, both fall short of providing guidance on PD of educators in the ECE profession. In essence, other than the RNPE of 1994, there is a limited framework for the PD of teachers, and in particular, early childhood educators. Moreover, due to the relative novelty of advanced ECE in Botswana, there are no known organisations like NAEYC available in Botswana, and representative committees such as those proven to work in South Africa are currently unutilised at the early childhood level. Additionally, limited research exists on PD strategies employed by early childhood educators in any ECE institutions in Botswana, triggering the question of how the professional growth of educators is being facilitated in these institutions.

## 3.0 Theoretical Framework

In this study we used the social learning theory (SLT) posited by Bandura (1977) as a lens for exploring PD of early childhood educators in selected preschool settings. The theory fits with the current study as it provides an integrated view of learning by considering not only the individual, but also the cognitive aspects of learning, that include knowledge and beliefs together with participatory aspects of learning. Thus, it combines both cognitive and social aspects of learning which are crucial for the interpretation of the findings of the study. Further, the SLT principles propose that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modelling and these align with the strategies that are generally used in PD.

This study builds on the existing knowledge on early childhood educators' PD by bringing insights on how private preschools in Gaborone, Botswana support the growth and development of their educators.

## 4.0 Research Questions

Specifically, the current study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the PD strategies used by early childhood educators and administrators in private preschools in Gaborone?

2. What are the challenges impeding PD in private preschools in Gaborone?

3.  How effective are the PD strategies used?

## 5.0 Literature review

In alignment with training policies and frameworks in various countries, different approaches to PD have been tried and found effective for early childhood educators. Much of the research conducted around these PD approaches gathered copious amounts of observational data from various ECE programs, with a limited part of it being experimental (Karoly, 2012). Evidence from studies based in the US found that strategies that take a personalised approach to PD tend to be considered more effective by educators (Schachter & Gerde, 2019). Among these strategies are personalised feedback on practice from one's peers, commonly known as peer support, and coaching/mentorship either for individuals or small groups, as they were found to drastically improve early childhood educators' in-class practice by showing the exact practices they needed to improve. PD approaches that encouraged self-reflection through watching back recordings of activities educators did in class with their learners were also found to also be effective for improving in-class practice (Schachter & Gerde, 2019). Likewise, strategies that involved online, personalised materials and courses also proved effective. The effectiveness of these online strategies is due to the accessibility of learning content that allows teachers to access learning content at any time and from anywhere, depending on their individual needs and availability. Building on these findings, it is essential to examine the specific strategies employed by early childhood educators globally, which can be categorised into internal and external strategies.

## 5.1 PD Strategies Used

Substantial literature exists on global findings regarding the strategies used by early childhood educators, and these generally appear in two categories: internal and external strategies. Internal strategies include reflection and communities of practice, while external strategies include workshops, short courses, and further education.

### Internal Strategies

**Reflection.** Reflection can be defined as the active, continuous, and thorough examination of knowledge, considering the evidence that supports it and the potential conclusions it may lead to (Nguyen, 2015). A comparative study in Denmark, Poland, and Italy found reflection, CoPs, and networks as the most used PD strategies in these countries (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Reflection involved mentorship, videos, diary entries, and case studies for personalised feedback. This approach improved practice quality and inspired new educational programs in these countries of study. Reflection can also occur in group settings, such as lesson studies, a cyclical group reflective process involving goal setting, lesson design, implementation, observation, and refinement (Dzasemi & van Heerden, 2020). This reflection is a practice originating in Japan that has been slowly infused into ECE teacher practice in South Africa over the years, helping teachers understand lesson plans better, enjoy collaboration, and seek improved teaching methods (Dzasemi & van Heerden, 2020). Additionally, studies conducted in Italy by Cigala et al. (2019), found that reflection improved early childhood educators' well-being by enhancing their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and agency. Gananathan (2011) found that reflection through mentorship and peer

group activities helped educators develop new working practices and improved their professional competence. Another effective form of group reflection that is commonly used by early childhood educators in South Africa are communities of practice.

**Communities of Practice (CoPs).** CoPs are informal support groups of ECE professionals who discuss practice issues and share improvement ideas. They are similar to professional networks and meet outside seminars, workshops, and conferences (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Akin to CoPs are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which is a strategy that is common in South Africa. The PLCs are mandated by the 2011–2025 Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED) (Venketsamy et al., 2022). These PLCs serve as valuable reflection and reference points, often used for lesson studies and consultation on practice.

## External Strategies

**Workshops.** Workshops are a prevalent PD method for early childhood educators, providing opportunities to learn new skills, interact with colleagues, and engage with experts. According to Buell et al. (2018), workshops are particularly effective in rural areas. For example, in Ghana, early childhood educators' workshops that focused on hands-on learning and reflection improved curriculum implementation in kindergartens (Dzasemi & van Heerden, 2020). In such workshops, the teachers engage in activities like playing with clay and storytelling, followed by discussions on applying these in their classrooms. As explained by Sarama et al. (2016), these strategies not only led to better adaptation of stories and activities in lesson plans, but also increased consideration of the environment, and effective adoption of evidence-based maths teaching practices. However, the success of workshops is deemed to depend on the training quality, content relevance, and reinforcement over time (Grisham-Brown & Hemmeter, 2014). Besides, combining workshops with other PD forms, such as coaching, may enhance their impact (Buell et al., 2018). Other than workshops, early childhood educators may enrol in short courses.

**Short Courses.** According to the South African Qualification Authority, a short course is a brief educational program where learners may or may not receive credits, depending on the program's objective (National Qualifications Framework, 2016). These courses significantly aid PD for early childhood educators by enhancing their skills and knowledge for better classroom practices. Focus areas can include child development, classroom management, and instructional strategies, providing targeted, practical knowledge for immediate application. Research shows that PD activities such as short courses, positively impact educators' self-efficacy and job satisfaction, helping them build confidence and understand effective practices better (Downer et al., 2009). Additionally, short courses enable educators to engage with peers, share experiences, and gain new perspectives, furthering their professional growth and field commitment. The flexibility and accessibility inherent of short courses especially those offered online and during weekends make it practical for educators with demanding schedules to attend (Garet et al., 2001). For longer term commitment and deeper learning, educators may pursue further education.

**Further Education.** Further education, or continuing education, includes post-secondary learning activities and programs that educators pursue beyond formal education, like undergraduate degrees (Merriam & Brockett, 1996). The authors further explain that further education comprises of courses at colleges and universities, PD workshops, specialised certifications, and certificate programs aimed at enhancing knowledge, skills, and competencies in a specific field for professional and personal growth. Monk and Phillipson (2016) noted that educators in Asia link professionalism with ongoing education and diverse competencies essential for managing roles and improving relationships with children and families. Further education also boosts self-efficacy, which is positively associated with work engagement and job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

**5.2 Challenges Impeding PD**

Regarding PD and implementing PD programs, several overlapping challenges have been identified in literature, and these include negative attitudes of teachers, insufficient funds/resources, and a lack of trained personnel and inadequate support from the program administrators.

**Negative Attitudes of Teachers.** Negative attitudes of early childhood educators are reported to have a significant impact on PD. Chen (2016) explains that educators' attitudes towards PD can impact their motivation to participate and engage in professional learning opportunities. According to Kostelnik et al. (2013) when educators have negative attitudes towards PD, they may be resistant to change, and uninterested in learning new skills. This attitude of teachers can lead to a stagnation in growth and development of their skills and knowledge, ultimately affecting the quality of education provided to young children. Attitudes can stem from bias or pre-existing beliefs. For example, in a study that was carried out by Yang and Rao (2021) in rural Heilongjiang - China, the teachers' preference for training stemmed from a pre-existing belief that external initiatives have more credibility than those hosted internally.

**Insufficient Funds/Resources.** Research has shown that a lack of funding is a common barrier to accessing high-quality PD opportunities (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2018). Without adequate funding, educators may not be able to attend conferences or workshops, access online training resources, or participate in ongoing coaching and mentoring programs. Consequently, lack of funds can lead to a lack of skills development and knowledge growth, which may affect the quality of instruction in early childhood classrooms (Whitebook et al., 2018). Time is also an essential resource for PD since educators often find themselves working with full schedules that do not make accommodations for PD activities.

**Lack of Support and Encouragement**. Support from school leadership or administration plays a significant role in educators' ability and desire to engage in PD. Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) found that teachers' self-esteem in their professional competency often dictates their desire to engage in PD. Thus, lack of encouragement from administrators can impede

educators' engagement in PD activities that are either planned by administrators or activities they can pursue on their own.

**Lack of Trained Personnel**. A lack of trained personnel also hinders PD in two different ways. Firstly, when there are not enough PD-trained personnel available, it can be challenging to provide ongoing PD opportunities to early childhood educators. In such instances, educators may not have consistent access to mentors, coaches, or other PD resources that can support their growth and development (Whitebook et al., 2016). As a result, educators' ability to learn new skills and knowledge is limited and ultimately, the quality of education provided to young children is negatively impacted. Secondly, a shortage of trained early childhood educators in institutions often translates to high workloads, which can lead to burnout among early childhood educators. As a result, educators may find it difficult to prioritise and focus on their own PD needs or engage in reflective practice, which is critical for ongoing growth and development (Fletcher & Baffour, 2013).

## 5.3 Educators' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of PD Strategies

Teachers respond better to PD approaches that are tailored to address their individual needs. A study conducted by Schachter and Gerde (2019) in the United States on using videos/class recordings as a medium for PD found that strategies taking on a more personalised feedback approach were deemed more effective by early childhood educators in helping them improve their practice. This was because the videos allowed the educators to reflect on how they carried out activities and think through adjustments they could make in future lessons. Other approaches to PD that supply personalised feedback include mentorship, class observations, and communities of practice. European ECE professionals in the CARE project regarded reflection to be an effective way to gain insight about and hence improve their in-class practice (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Additionally, communities of practice were also seen as an effective way to increase collaboration among ECE staff, encourage co-creation and create opportunities for enhancing the teaching and learning experience in ECE environments in a sustainable and continuous manner (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). The specialised workshops held for kindergarten teachers in Ghana received positive feedback as well, with teachers reporting an improvement in their ability to make play, interactions, and indigenous stories more meaningful for children (Dzasemi & van Heerden, 2020).

In contrast, in Heilongjiang, China preschool teachers found the school-based workshops offered to be insufficient, mainly because they did not fulfil their specific needs for skills such as singing and classroom décor, and they did not cover subjects which were of greater interest to the teachers, such as ICT, curriculum planning and implementation (Yang & Rao, 2021).

## 5.4 PD Strategies Implemented in Botswana

Literature relating to the PD of early childhood educators in Botswana is limited. Available evidence is mostly from studies conducted in secondary schools (Mphale, 2014; Mphale 2016). School-based workshops organised by SDCs are cited as the most common avenues for PD in

Botswana secondary schools. Teachers in these schools expressed a similar lamentation that the workshops hosted were ineffective, as they did not address their specific needs in terms of knowledge and skills (Mphale, 2014). This lack of effective PD is attributed to several factors including; the lack of clear policies defining PD and how it should be structured at various levels, lack of resources such as funds, time, and facilities, teachers' negative attitudes (attaching less value to in-school programs in comparison to external programs), a lack of incentives for teachers planning initiatives for other teachers, and also for teachers participating in the programming (Mphale, 2014). Additionally, teachers cited a lack of support and encouragement from school leadership as an impediment to their PD (Macheng, 2016). It is not surprising that there is a dearth of information pertaining to ECE professional development given that the profession is still evolving and is predominantly driven by the private sector.

## 6.0 Methodology

### 6.1 Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design. This strategy allowed for an understanding of participants' experiences and was applied to describe the PD phenomenon as it occurs in early childhood centres from the perspectives and views of the participants (Chen et al., 2020). According to Ayton et al. (2023), qualitative descriptive design is a suitable design for research questions that are focused on gaining insights about poorly understood research. The design was also effective in allowing the study to be concluded within a relatively short timeframe and at low cost.

### 6.2 Sample and sampling procedure

The sample for this study comprised of six (6) preschool educators and three (3) administrators selected from three (3) preschools. The sample was selected as they had the experience and knowledge that was vital to the study questions. Gaborone was deemed to be the ideal setting to conduct this study because the city has the highest representation of preschools in the country. Private schools were selected because most preschools in the city are private.

Convenience sampling was used to derive the sample. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) individuals who worked in early childhood centres as educators and/or administrators; (2) individuals who voluntarily participated in the study; and (3) individuals aged above 18 years.

### 6.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to acquire insights regarding teachers' PD from the teachers and the administrators of selected private preschools in Gaborone. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format. A self-developed interview protocol consisted of questions relating to participants' role and engagement in PD strategies that were implemented in their

respective preschools, their perspectives on the effectiveness of the PD strategies currently in use, and lastly, the challenges impeding their PD. The interviews were audio recorded, and handwritten notes made with participants' permission.

## 6.4 Data analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that involves identifying common themes and patterns in the collected data (Caulfield, 2022). The analysis process included familiarisation, where audio recordings were transcribed and notes from the interviews were thoroughly read, followed by the creation of codes to start grouping responses. Overlapping themes were combined and checked for accuracy by the research team. For quality and validity, the authors discussed the coding process, reviewed each code and theme to reach a consensus, and finally, verified that themes were supported by codes and quotations.

## 6.5 Ethical Consideration

Several ethical considerations that included obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Botswana office of research and development, acquiring a study permit from the Ministry of Local Government, getting access permits from schools and participation consent from all participants were fulfilled prior to conducting the current study.

## 7.0 Findings and Discussion

### Participants characteristics

All participants were females. The educators ranged in age from young professionals in their early twenties to more experienced individuals in their early fifties, while the administrators were between their mid-thirties and early sixties. Many of the educators had formal qualifications in ECE, with some holding certificates and diplomas, and one educator holding a degree in ECE. The administrators were also highly qualified, holding degrees in Education, with one holding a master's in economics. All administrators had over three years of experience in the ECE field, bringing both academic and practical expertise to their roles.

### Findings

Several themes that emerged from the interviews are presented and discussed in this section. All administrators who participated in the study reported that they applied both internal and external PD activities to enhance competence of ECE teachers. They mentioned that the internal activities included in-house training, mentorship, team-building activities, and personality tests, while external activities encompassed long and short-term courses, first aid training, and workshops. According to these administrators, the short courses and workshops focused more on teaching children with disabilities, lesson planning and any other emerging issues in the school's

educational climate. The administrators also added that all planned workshops were paid for by the schools.

Similar findings were obtained from most educators except for two. One of the two educators recalled having had access to only one internal activity, while the other educator revealed that her school has never provided them with any PD activities at all.

**PD Strategies Used.** The study revealed that common PD activities applied in ECE centres included mentorship and team building through communities of practice. This is consistent to findings of studies by Iannone (2018), and Buell et al. (2018). It is apparent from the current study that PD activities are not only familiar to the participants of this study, but they are also a common phenomenon used to develop educators by the preschools that participated in the study.

**Frequency of PD Activities.** Participants shared varying perspectives on the frequency of PD activities. Administrators generally described organizing PD sessions once or twice a year, with some indicating that teachers attended such trainings two to three times annually. In contrast, educators' experiences varied widely. Some mentioned participating in PD activities more than three times per year, often at least once per term, while others reported fewer opportunities, ranging from twice a year to none. Both educators and administrators, however, agreed that the frequency of PD sessions had significantly decreased due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. They expressed that returning to pre-pandemic levels of PD activity had been challenging.

The study also uncovered a discrepancy in how PD activities were perceived. Educators tended to count school field trips as part of their PD, explaining that these experiences provided valuable learning opportunities. Administrators, on the other hand, did not consider these trips to be part of formal PD activities. This difference in perception contributed to the contrasting views on the number of PD activities taking place in preschools.

**Facilitation of PD Activities.** Most of the participants indicated that the trainings provided were facilitated internally or externally, depending on the type of activity. Further, the educators revealed that external workshops were usually facilitated by the workshop organisers. On some occasions, external facilitators (e.g., experts from the University of Botswana, community motivational speakers, pastors from local churches and managers from other preschools) were engaged to mentor ECE educators. The higher frequency of internal and external facilitators reported in this study demonstrate the administrators' commitment to exposing their educators to different experiences, to enable them to learn and grow.

**Payment for PD Activities.** All interviewed educators reported that management paid for their PD activities. One educator commented,

> "*Management pays, including for my participation in the activity, any tools I need, the food and even my transport if attending external events.*" (Anele\*, from school A)

The interviewed administrators shared similar sentiments as captured in one's comment, "*As Day Care Centre Association members we group ourselves together and gather our teachers for learning. Since University of Botswana staff do not charge us to facilitate, we just put our money together and pay for food for the teachers.*" (Neo*, from school B)

From the study findings, it seems that school administrators have devised economic ways of sustaining PD training in their schools, a strategy that is beneficial to both educators' professional growth and quality of student learning experiences.

**Challenges impeding participation in PD.** Educators were asked to share the challenges they faced concerning PD activities in their preschools, and they described several challenges ranging from lack of funds to inflexible schedules, legal restrictions, and language barriers whereas a few reported no challenges.

*Lack of funding.* Lack of funding was reported by several educators adding that because they could not afford to pay for their education, it deterred them from furthering education. One of the educators pleaded, "*The school should help us pay for training, and make us sign contracts that say we should work for them to pay them back.*" (Margaret*, from school C). Another said, "*Trying to hustle to put the money together to study has been a challenge for me.*" (Gloria*, from school c).

*Inflexible schedules.* Inflexible schedules were also mentioned as a challenge by participating educators. As one described,

> "*I work full days for five days, and I also take care of my family at home, I find it difficult to pursue long-term professional development like acquiring a diploma or degree.*" Another stated, "*They should also allow us to work for half a day so we can attend classes. As a wife and mother, I do not have time to work, take care of my family and study, but I want to upgrade my education.*" (Margaret*, from school C).

*Legal restrictions.* Educators of foreign nationality cited legal restrictions as a challenge to their PD. One such educator expressed, "*I am struggling to pursue further education due to my foreign status and I have issues with obtaining legal permission to study here. I have tried to enrol in courses here to further my studies, but it has been a challenge because I am a foreigner, and it has been tricky to get the correct permit to enrol in these courses here.*" (Gloria*, from school C)

*Language barrier.* One of the educators mentioned the use of English language in PD training as a barrier. She explained that due to English being her second language (Shona being her first), she often finds it difficult to communicate with people at external engagements and even felt out of place at times, saying, "*Because I am a foreigner, sometimes I attend workshops outside and when people hear that I am a foreigner they engage less with me. Because English is my*

*second language, engaging with people outside of my colleagues can be difficult, making it hard to fully participate in workshops.*"  (Opal*, from school A).

***Disinterest of educators.*** The administrators expanded the list of PD related challenges by stating, "*When planning in-house training, we usually have the same one or two teachers fully facilitating the planning because the others are not interested. This can be burdensome for others.*" (Amantle*, Admin from school C). To expand on the problems they faced, another administrator shared that some teachers are often reluctant to participate in workshops that happen over the weekend because it is their personal time. She said, "*Sometimes it can be challenging to convince teachers to go for a training or workshop on a weekend because they would want to rest instead, however, whenever they come from the training, they are always happy that they went.*" (Iris*, Headteacher from school A).

***Insufficient communication of needs.*** Furthermore, one administrator cited teachers' failure to express their needs as a challenge. She complained that teachers take a lacklustre approach to their own PD as they do not prioritise it or share their needs with management. She said, "*I have realised that the teachers do not see professional development as important, so they do not tell me what they need. Most of the time, I observe where their gaps are and then plan the right activities in-house to fill those gaps, or I send them to workshops outside to fill those gaps.*" (Amantle*, Admin from school C).

The findings demonstrate the diversity of challenges faced by both the educators and the administrators. While these challenges have been reported in earlier studies, the findings in the current study expand the existing knowledge by demonstrating that implementation of PD strategies have common challenges across contexts and cultures.  Firstly, there is lack of funding to support PD activities (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2018). Secondly, educators' face challenges of pursuing PD activities due to inflexible work schedules (Whitebook et al., 2018). The findings pertaining to teachers' disinterest, their reluctance to attend activities on weekends and teachers not vocalising their needs seems to be a problem amongst educators of varying levels as similar results were reported by Mphale (2014).

Regarding the educators' perception of the strategies used and their effectiveness, educators reported preference to internal activities such as team building, in-house training, mentorship, and personality tests more. Their perception of personality tests used in their school were expressed as, "*I like the personality tests because they helped me learn a lot about myself and my colleagues. I got to learn more about my strengths and weaknesses.*" (Anele*, from school A). Another educator preferred team-building and internal mentorship initiatives stating that they were effective ways for her to learn from her colleagues, and learn more about others, which has strengthened their bond over time. She said, "*Team building is really important. The teacher-student ratio for our class is one is to five, so we always have two or more teachers in a class and it's really important to work as a team.*" (Opal*, from school A).

The findings from the administrators show that they were unaware of the PD activities that the educators preferred the most or the least. The administrators indicated that the educators in their preschools do not provide any verbal feedback regarding the knowledge they acquired through PD activities or the activities they preferred, stating, "*After the teachers finish an activity, whether it is outside or inside the school, they do not say anything to me and I do not ask. I just assume that they have learned and watch to see if their work improves.*" (Neo*, Admin from school B). Another added, "*I do not know the activities the teachers like the most because they never express their preferences to me. I just observe to see if there is any difference.*" (Amantle*, Admin from school C). Only one administrator was able to share that, "*Whenever they [the Educators] come back from different activities they are always excited to share what they learned and enjoyed about the activities. So far, they have not shared their dislikes for any of the activities planned for them.*" (Iris*, Headteacher school A)

## 8.0 Conclusion, Implications of the Study, and Limitations

The study assessed professional development (PD) strategies among early childhood educators through interviews with six educators and three administrators in three private preschools in Gaborone. It identified both internal and external PD strategies, which were fully funded by the schools and held at least once every term. Internal strategies included in-house training, mentorship, team-building activities, and personality tests. They were facilitated by teachers, management, or external facilitators from other preschools and the University of Botswana. On the other hand, external strategies involved workshops, short courses, first aid training, and further studies, facilitated by external professionals. Educators faced challenges such as lack of funds, legal restrictions, time constraints, and language barriers. Administrators cited teachers' disinterest, reluctance to attend weekend workshops, and lack of vocalising their needs. Administrators also noted the need to push some teachers who didn't take PD seriously and had to plan activities based on identified gaps. Overall, educators found both internal and external PD activities effective. They recommended increasing the frequency of external workshops, providing more financial support for further studies, and offering flexible working arrangements to balance work and further education.

The findings of this study have implications for practice, policy, and research. To ensure that all educators continue to further their education, the administrators could form partnerships with universities and colleges to offer discounted or subsidised courses for their educators, Additionally, they could band together to formulate private preschool associations that can collaborate on creating PD opportunities for their staff. To support educators' PD, the government should consider enhancing existing education policies to include financial support schemes and plans for teachers in the private sector to engage in PD activities on a regular basis, to ensure their continued growth. This will also ensure that although private preschools are not as closely regulated by the government as public preschools, they will still provide high-quality educational services.

The findings of this study are limited in generalizability due to the small sample size. Thus, further research with a larger sample is necessary to establish the functions of the current preschool associations in planning and implementing PD for educators in Gaborone. Additionally, inquiry on the factors that influence educators' motivation and engagement in PD would be beneficial to the profession. This could help identify strategies to increase educators' interest and participation.

## References

Ayton, D., Tsindos, T., & Berkovic, D. (2023). *Qualitative research: A practical guide for  health and social care researchers and practitioners*. Council of Australian University Librarians, Open Educational Resources Collective. ISBN 978-0-6457554-0-4

Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 141-154).       Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bose, K. (2001). Early Childhood Care and Education Programs in Botswana: Policy (2001) Implementation. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education (2)*2, 83-98.

Buell, M. J., Hallam, R. A., Han, S., Strom-Mackey, A. L., Schadler, C. M., Stich, A. E., & Shannon, D. M. (2018). Rural early childhood teachers' professional development preferences: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 33*(2), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.15556/jrre.v33i2.251

Caulfield, J. (2022, November 25). How to do thematic analysis: Step-by-step guide & examples. Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/

Chen, D., Song, F., Tang, L., Zhang, H., Shao, J., Qiu, R., ... & Ye, Z. (2020). Quarantine experience of close contacts of COVID-19 patients in China: A qualitative descriptive study. *General hospital psychiatry*, *66*, 81-88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2020.07.006

Chen, R. (2016). Preschool Teachers' Attitudes toward Internet Applications for Professional Development in Taiwan. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, *12*(10). https://doi.org/10.12973/eurasia.2016.1300a

Cigala, A., Venturelli, E., & Bassetti, M. (2019). Reflective Practice: A Method to Improve Teachers' Well-Being. A longitudinal training in early childhood education and care centers. Frontiers in Psychology, 10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02574

Department of Education. (2006). *The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa.* https://www.dhet.gov.za/Teacher%20Education%20Frameworks/The%20National%20P

olicy%20Framework%20for%20Teacher%20Education%20and%20Development%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf

Downer, J. T., Kraft-Sayre, M. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2009). Ongoing, Web-Mediated professional development focused on Teacher–Child interactions: early childhood educators' usage rates and Self-Reported Satisfaction. Early Education and Development, 20(2), 321–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802595425

Dzasemi, F. E., & van Heerden, J. (2020). A professional development programme for implementing indigenous play-based pedagogy in Kindergarten Schools in Ghana. *South African Journal of Education, 40*(3), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n3a1793

Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia. (1994, April). *Education and Training Policy.* https://moe.gov.et/storage/Books/Education%20and%20Training%20Policy%20of%20Ethiopia.pdf

Fletcher, T., & Baffour, T. (2013). Reflection as a tool for professional development in early childhood education: An exploratory study. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 38*(2), 71-79.

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915–945. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915

Grisham-Brown, J., & Hemmeter, M. L. (2014). The coaching model: A system approach to improving educator practice. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 34*(4), 221-229.

Jensen, B., Sonnemann, J., Roberts-Hull, K., & Hunter, A. (2016). Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems (pp. 5–16). Washington, DC: Learning First. Retrieved from https://ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BeyondPDWeb.pdf.

Jensen, B., & Iannone, R. L. (2018). Innovative Approaches to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Europe: Findings from a comparative review. *European Journal of Education, 53*(1), 23–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12253

Karoly, L. A. (2012). What We Know from Research About Approaches to ECE Workforce Professional Development. *In A Golden Opportunity: Advancing California's Early Care and Education Workforce Professional Development System* (pp. 15–24). RAND Corporation. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1q60hz.10

Kostelnik, M. J., Soderman, A. K., & Whiren, A. P. (2013). Developmentally appropriate curriculum: Best practices in early childhood education. Pearson.

Macheng, P. (2016). Continuing Professional Development of Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana. *Research & Reviews: Journal of Educational Studies, 2*(3), 18-25.

Maundeni, T. (2013). Early Childhood Care and Education in Botswana: A Necessity That Is Accessible to Few Children. Creative Education (4)7A1, 54-59. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2013.47A1008.

Merriam, S. B., & Brockett, R. G. (1996). The Profession and Practice of Adult Education: An Introduction. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA83480392

Monk, H., & Phillipson, S. (2016). Early childhood educators' experiences and perceptions of professionalism and professionalisation in the Asian context. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 45*(1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866x.2016.1147527

Mphale, M. L. (2014). The Effectiveness of Teachers' Professional Development Initiatives in Enhancing Teachers Growth in Botswana Secondary Schools. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education, 7*(1), 75-90. http://168.167.8.130/bitstream/handle/10311/1233/Mphale_IJSRE_2014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (1994). NAEYC Position Statement: A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development. *Young Children, 49*(3), 68–77. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42725571

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2020). Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. In *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globallyshared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/standards_and_competencies_ps.pdf

National Institute for Early Education Research. (2018). The State of Preschool 2017: State Preschool Yearbook. Retrieved from https://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks/2018-2

National Qualifications Framework. (2016). Glossary-Short course. South African Qualifications Authority. https://hr.saqa.co.za/glossary/search_push_results.php?id=125

Nguyen, Q. D. (2015). What is reflection? A conceptual analysis of major definitions and a proposal of a five-component definition and model. https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/handle/1866/13118

Republic of Botswana (1994). *Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE)*. Gaborone, Botswana: Government Printer.

Sarama, J., Lange, A. A., Clements, D. H., Wolfe, C. B., & Copley, J. V. (2016). Professional development in early mathematics: Effects of a summer math camp on early childhood educators. *Early Education and Development, 27*(3), 321-342.

Schachter, R. E., & Gerde, H. K. (2019). Personalized Professional Development: How Teachers Can Use Videos to Improve Their Practice. *YC Young Children, 74*(4), 55–63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26783377

Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., Marvin, C. A., & Knoche, L. L. (2009). Professional Development in Early Childhood Programs: Process Issues and Research Needs. *Early education and development, 20*(3), 377–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802582795

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher Self-Efficacy and Perceived Autonomy: Relations with Teacher Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Emotional Exhaustion. Psychological Reports, 114(1), 68–77. https://doi.org/10.2466/14.02.pr0.114k14w0

Tsotetsi, C. T., & Mahlomaholo, S. (2015). Exploring Strategies to Strengthen Continuing Professional Development of Teachers in Rural South Africa. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique, 13*(1–2), 45–73. http://www.jstor.org/stable/jhigheducafri.13.1-2.45

Vanassche, E., & Kelchtermans, G. (2016). A narrative analysis of a teacher educator's professional learning journey. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(3), 355-367.

Venketsamy, R., Hu, Z., Helmbold, E., & Auckloo, P. (2022). Implementing Japanese lesson study as a professional development tool in South Africa. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists, 10*(3), 349–362. https://doi.org/10.17478/jegys.1129982

Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L. J. E. (2016). Early childhood workforce index 2016. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L.J.E. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Index-2018.pdf

Yang, Y., & Rao, N. (2021). Teacher professional development among preschool teachers in rural China. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 42*(3), 219–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2020.1726844