



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

RESEARCH UNIT

PO Box 15 Cape Town 8000 Republic of South Africa
Tel: 27 (21) 403 8273 Fax: 27 (21) 403 8118
www.parliament.gov.za

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ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF EARLY- CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) IN SOUTH AFRICA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universalising Early-Childhood Development (ECD) has been highlighted more often in the government strategies and is on the epi-centre of most government priorities and relevant departments i.e. Department of Social Development (DSD), Department of Basic Education (DBE) and various Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) have contributed immensely to ensure that this priority is addressed. Moreover, the President reiterated in the June 2014 State of the Nation Address (SONA) that there will be continuance in ensuring compulsory education for children as enshrined in the Bill of Rights; that everyone has the right to basic education. This has been confirmed by the remarkable growth that has been reported from about 300 000 in 2003 to more than 700 000 in 2011 of children who benefited in Grade R¹ since 2003. A number of intervention strategies and policy responses i.e. Action Plan to 2014 and the National Development Plan (NDP) are clear on what the government will do to make Grade R-12 schooling system better.

This move has been supported by the Strategic priorities set by the DBE for the 2011-2014 period² and also the priorities highlighted in the Action Plan to 2014. Towards the realisation of Schooling 2025 and the Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1 that seeks to achieve the following:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- Undertake regular assessment to track changes;
- Improve early-childhood development; and
- Ensure a credible, outcomes-focused planning and accountability system.

On the basis of this afore-mentioned background, this brief will provide the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education (herewith later referred as the Committee) with the analysis of the current status of ECD in South Africa, challenges and roles played by different partners in its landscape.

¹ SONA (2014)

² DBE (2011)



2. COMPLIANCE TO POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

It is clear, as included in the Education for All (EFA) Country Report³, that importance of education is hardly a doubt today and has tremendous multiplier effect that brings lasting benefits to individuals and communities. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number two, encourages that all boys and girls must complete their primary schooling⁴. The way the right to education as reported in various parliamentary papers is understood and recognised by the international laws is that, each state or country is obliged to provide a minimum of free basic education, of which primary education is considered a component. Responding to the call, the South African government has made significant strides in incorporating international principles on the right to education into domestic law. Section 29(1) (a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa⁵ recognizes that “everyone has a right to a basic education”, thereby placing a primary obligation on the state to provide such. There is noted significant progress towards realising the relevant prescriptive measures in ensuring the right to basic education, however, more is required to be done. For instance, as identified in the 2000 Dakar framework of Action, six global goals from which countries were meant to align themselves were set. One of them which is Goal 1, talks to “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the vulnerable and disadvantaged children”. The tone of these goals manifest in many national instruments guiding a route to education for all that have been developed or revised in the dawn of democracy, namely: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the 2000 White Paper on Early-childhood Development and so on.

3. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)⁶

Early Childhood Development (ECD) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers. It is aimed at protecting children’s rights to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. ECD provides children with an opportunity to thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially while being in an educational and learning environment. Other than these, there are wide-ranging benefits of ECD, including that:

- ECD is a foundation for lifelong learning.
- it gives children a better chance to escape the “poverty curse”.
- It serves as formative years where children develop their cognitive and wider skills that will prepare them for school.

³ Stofile (2014)

⁴ Koyana (2011)

⁵ RSA Constitution (1996)

⁶ Komle and Stofile (2014)



- as an early start (head start), it is an advantage to children from disadvantaged families.
- ECD plays a critical role in offsetting social, economic and Language-based disadvantages.
- Head start education for the 3 and 4 year olds provide them with cognitive, social-emotional, health and parenting benefits.

Government has placed a high premium on the provision of ECD in South Africa. The DBE is now the custodian and lead department in the provision of ECD, in particular, Grade R. Much of the work done by the DBE in the ECD sector has its roots in the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training. This policy elevates ECD to an essential factor in building a foundation of social relations and the starting point of human development strategies. As such, this policy mandate maps government's commitment to providing ten years of free and compulsory education for all children, starting from Grade R.

The former Department of Education (DoE) launched the national ECD pilot project in 1997 which ended in March 2000. The aim of the pilot project was to test the interim ECD policy, and involved 2 730 ECD centres and practitioners serving about 66 000 learners. The pilot project report recommended, *inter alia*, that ECD needed to be mainstreamed as a core business of the operations of the DoE. Following the findings of the national ECD pilot project and the nation-wide audit of ECD provisioning and services, the DoE launched the Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development in May 2001. The Education White Paper 5 constitutes the largest ever government's commitment to the provision of ECD, and provides a policy framework for the establishment of a national system of provision for the Reception Year, targeting children aged five years. With regards to ECD services for children younger than five years, the DBE is working on the development of a strategic plan for intersectoral collaboration in this area.

The medium-term policy goal of the DBE is for all children entering Grade 1 to have participated in an accredited Grade R programme. This is an important step given the fact that an important indicator of pre-school access tracked by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), as part of Education for All (EFA) mandate, is the percentage of 3-5 year old children who have access to ECD programmes. This is particularly important for the vision of expanding access to ECD as research reveals that access to ECD programmes improves learner retention and performance in subsequent years of schooling. In 2010, the "General Household Survey: Focus on Schooling" (2010) indicated that South Africa had made substantial progress concerning access to accredited ECD programmes. For instance, in 2010, about 64 per cent of 3-5 year old children attended an ECD facility or an educational institution. This reflects an increase of 4 per cent since 2009. When access is looked at provincially, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Gauteng provinces had the highest percentage of 3-5 year old children attending an ECD facility or an educational institution, all at approximately 70 per cent, followed by Free State at 63 per cent. Northern Cape had the smallest percentage of this cohort attending an educational institution at 52 per cent in 2010.



The “General Household Survey: Focus on Schooling” (2010) indicates that the initial medium-term policy goal was that approximately 85 per cent of all five-year-old children would be accommodated within a primary school-based Reception Year programmes in 2010. The 2010 policy target was, however, shifted to 2014 by the President during his 2009 SONA. In 2010, 83 per cent of five-year-old children attended an education institution. This figure reflects a massive improvement from 39 per cent in 2002. The high increase of learners aged five who are attending educational institutions particularly in 2009 and 2010 could be attributed to such factors as the provision of nutrition in public ordinary schools to Grade R learners, increased subsidies to ECD practitioners, creation of substantive post for Grade R educators, cheaper fees paid by parents at public ordinary schools offering Grade R, the automatic acceptance of registered Grade R learners to Grade 1 in public schools and the increase in the registration of ECD centres by the Department of Social Development.

Access to ECD for five-year-old children varied from province to province in 2010. The level of participation of children in Grade R, usually measured by the Grade R Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), is a measure of the country’s capacity to prepare young children for primary education. The “General Household Survey: Focus on Schooling” (2010) reported that the Grade R GER in 2010 stood at 91 per cent of the countries average and Grade R participation rates in all provinces stood at over 80 per cent in 2010, with Limpopo having a Grade R participation rate of over 100 per cent. A GER of over 100 per cent means that there were probably many under and over-aged children enrolled in Grade R in the Limpopo province (which could indicate community interest in these programmes). As such, Limpopo had the highest percentage of children aged five years attending an educational institution at approximately 96 per cent, followed by Eastern Cape at 92 per cent. Western Cape had the least percentage of five year old children attending educational institutions, at approximately 70 per cent in 2010. It is important to note that provinces considered “poor”, namely, Limpopo and Eastern Cape, had the highest proportion of five-year-old children attending an educational institution as compared “less poor” provinces such as Gauteng and Western Cape.



The progress in access in Pre-Grade R as calculated by the DBE in the table below confirms growth across provinces with Free State leading on access⁷.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EC	9.3	14.2	12.5	17.5	18.8	18.6	20.3	29.5	32.6	32.9	37.8	37.1
FS	6.8	11.3	11.8	20.4	20.2	21.2	18.0	36.8	33.4	38.2	46.7	58.2
GP	11.9	18.8	18.3	21.7	28.4	24.0	25.4	43.5	42.6	43.6	45.7	56.4
KZN	4.9	8.1	7.3	7.2	7.9	10.4	11.7	23.7	25.1	24.9	27.9	37.9
LP	5.3	10.1	11.8	13.4	17.6	15.5	14.5	27.9	29.6	42.1	37.3	45.6
MP	5.2	8.4	13.1	11.3	13.5	12.4	16.2	28.1	28.5	31.0	28.8	32.7
NW	6.7	11.1	8.9	11.8	8.3	15.6	8.0	21.8	26.7	29.0	32.9	34.2
NC	3.4	5.1	4.1	9.0	8.6	14.2	10.6	19.3	21.1	26.9	25.6	36.0
WC	10.3	14.1	14.3	19.1	16.0	14.1	14.4	27.6	39.4	36.2	39.6	44.8
Total	7.5	12.1	12.0	14.8	16.6	16.5	16.7	29.8	32.3	34.5	36.5	43.3

Since 2010, in accordance with the proposals of the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development published in 2001, the DBE has implemented a phased approach to introduce publicly funded Grade R classes across the whole public schooling system. For instance, all Reception Year programmes are now required to register with their respective provincial education departments. In addition, DBE has established substantive posts for Grade R, and all Grade R educators, who have a teaching qualification, are now required to register with the South African Council of Educators (SACE), and those who do not have a teaching qualification are channelled towards approved training programmes.

⁷ DBE (2014)



In the President's 2009 SONA, the main priority was to intensify the implementation of ECD. Since then, progress has been satisfying. For instance, 80 per cent of children in Grade 1 received formal Grade R programmes, with 707 203 children in Grade R classes in 2010, and 49 619 children were in Pre-Grade R services in 2010. DBE has managed to put the Integrated Strategy on ECD in place and from which different roles and responsibilities of respective stakeholders has been highlighted. The impact demonstrated that ECD programmes benefit children, families, and communities. There are reduced dropout and repetition rates; improved school enrolments and achievements; greater adult productivity; improved nutrition and health care because children are fed, immunised and are able to receive necessary medical attention in these centres (via mobile clinics); reduced social inequality; and higher levels of social and emotional functioning encouraged by ECD programmes.

The 2013 Draft Policy Framework towards Universal Access to Grade R which seeks to make Grade R compulsory has been gazetted for public comments and consultation processes is on finalisation stage as only two provinces are left which are the Western Cape and Gauteng. When consultation and approval is done, costed implementation plan with clear roles and responsibilities for the key departments will be developed.

4. CHALLENGES

ECD programmes in South Africa focus more on Grade R and less on Pre-Grade R (i.e. 0-5 years). The DSD with DBE considered that and has been included in the Medium Term Strategic Framework: 2014-2019 for DSD to spearhead the focus on Pre-Grade R. The ECD environment is clouded with constraints in resources especial in poor communities and there is a need for coordination between the DBE and DSD if such an ideal is to become a reality in the near future. Though the system is plagued by challenges e.g. overcrowding, there is great progress already reported. For instance, during the 2014 SONA the President announced that the number of children attending Grade R has more than doubled representing an increase from about 300 000 in 2003 to more than 700 000 in 2011. This is 65.5 per cent of children who are of Grade R going age, which stood at 1 063 880 in 2010.

Amongst other challenges in provisioning of ECD in South Africa, include⁸:

- ECD provisioning for children from 0 to 4 years is still the responsibility of parents, families and community-based organizations, with minimal or no state intervention.
- The 0 to 4 year sector is still poorly coordinated.
- There is no formal curriculum available at present.
- ECD teachers/practitioners are still largely unqualified or under-qualified.

⁸ Ibid



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