



**ESEPARC**  
ESWATINI ECONOMIC POLICY  
ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH CENTRE



# Early Childhood Care and Education in Eswatini



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# Let's talk about Early Childhood Care and Education in Eswatini



A conversation needs to be had about access to **good early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Eswatini.**



The foundation at preschool level sets the tone for success later in education and career pathways and so the country needs to ensure that ECCE improvement is a critical part of human capital/skills development investments prioritised for economic growth.



The education system is struggling to produce a relevant labour force that can be productive in the current and future industries. All discussions point to the need to fix the education problem at the grassroots level, which is, as early as preschool.



Many people are increasingly realising that trying to solve skills development challenges such as entrepreneurship and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) later on in a pupil's journey within education usually at high school and tertiary levels of education is not likely to yield any transformational results.

## WHY DOES ECCE MATTER?

ECCE covers a broad range of support initiatives for young children and their families, including health care, early childhood care and education, home visiting programmes, social protection and child welfare (Britto et al, 2011). Whilst ECCE may vary between countries, the quality and effectiveness of ECCE depends on how well the programmes empower children to develop their four key developmental domains – physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional (Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes [MELQO], 2017; Heckman, 2011; and Karoly et al, 1998). **Over and above these domains, the ideal ECCE programme should infuse the latest science on child development/pre-primary education with the relevant local policy goals and priorities on child development.**



## THE CURRENT ECCE SITUATION IN ESWATINI



The GoE considers ECCE a growing priority and recognises that there is room for improvement to expand access to ECCE services, as well as improve service quality among ECCE providers.



The ECCE Centre Baseline Survey in 2008 indicated that about a quarter of age eligible children received ECCE with the majority of these children coming from privileged, high income families who could afford to pay the fees charged by ECCD centres.

Even though the ECCE is an important pillar of the **Education Policy (2018)** in Eswatini, the GoE is yet to introduce publicly funded ECCE programmes to ensure that all children who enter Grade 1 under the Free Primary Education (FPE) Act, have a solid footing for learning and success in their school life. The MoET recognises that in order for these children to be prepared for Grade 1 and future learning, they need access to quality pre-primary schooling.

**4 QUALITY EDUCATION**



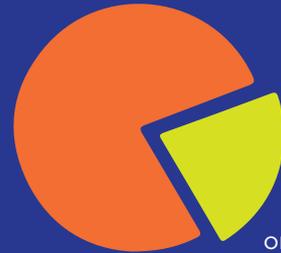
Yet, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) places emphasis on improved learning outcomes and equity within education systems to ensure that all girls and boys complete, equitable, quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (United Nations, 2015).

Hence, in its development pipeline, the MoET is piloting a **Grade 0 programme in 80 public schools; 20 schools in each region of Eswatini.**



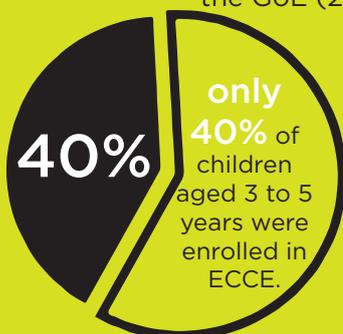
Yet a UNESCO survey in 2012, the last year in which a comprehensive survey of preschools was undertaken in Eswatini, found that out of the...

**1,200 preschools** operating in the country at that time,...



only **18** were **Government supported.**

Hence this study provides the necessary information on the extent and type of private and public ECCE provision in Eswatini. According to the GoE (2013),



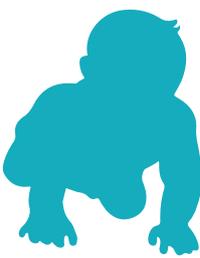
The Government intends to increase enrolment to **60%** in 2018 and to **80%** by 2022.

The major policy instrument to increase ECCE enrolment in Eswatini will be the introduction of

**Grade 0 in public primary schools** by 2018 and increasing ECCE registered centres.



# FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON ECCE IN ESWATINI



The Self Help Action to Mitigate the Burden of AIDS (SHAMBA) Trust engaged the Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre (ESEPARC) to conduct a National Survey on the provision of ECCE in Eswatini. The Findings from this study suggest that access to some form of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is much more widespread in Eswatini than previously reported. **Reports from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank have suggested that 20-40% of children go to preschool. In this study of the 2019 cohort of G1 pupils, the critical finding is that, of this cohort, 80% have attended an ECCE centre of some kind before their enrolment into their 2019 Grade 1 class.**



However, access to good quality ECCE remains low and is highly inequitable. Only **22% of the 2019** Grade 1 cohort had attended a preschool delivering good quality ECCE. Among Grade 1 pupils from higher wealth households, **40%** went to good quality preschools. In contrast just **10%** of those from the lowest wealth households attended good quality preschools.



**Good quality ECCE is delivered by a few preschools** in all six types identified in this study (private, community, Church, NGO, NCP and Grade 0). At the same time there are some preschools of each type delivering poor quality ECCE.



**Provision of preschool places is not dominated by the private sector** as previously reported. More children attend community preschools than private preschools. And Church and NCP preschools together provide more places than private preschools.



The implication of these findings is that there is a need for a radical rethink in the approach to promoting preschool provision in Eswatini. The commonly held notion that the problem is a lack of preschool places is not borne out by this study. The idea that the Government of Eswatini (GoE) needs to supplement the provision delivered by the private sector with Grade 0 classes at Government primary schools is contrary to the findings of this study.

The reality is that preschool places are available to meet most of the current demand/need. The primary objective should be to improve the quality of the ECCE provided at all preschools (including private and Grade 0) wherever they are located, and to enable children from the poorest families to gain access to quality ECCE.

Examples of the provision of quality ECCE for the most disadvantaged children in communities exist in Eswatini. These are to be found in community preschools, NCP preschools, NGO preschools and church preschools. It is important to identify these examples, and to develop ways of replicating their experiences and supporting their expansion.

The UN Sustainable Development Goal for 2030, which has been incorporated in The Education and Training Sector (EDSEC) policy goal of 2018, is to provide equitable access to quality pre-primary education for all children, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings from this study will contribute to the development of an informed strategy for meeting these goals, which have not been well advanced by current initiatives of Government or international donors.

# FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON ECCE IN ESWATINI

continued

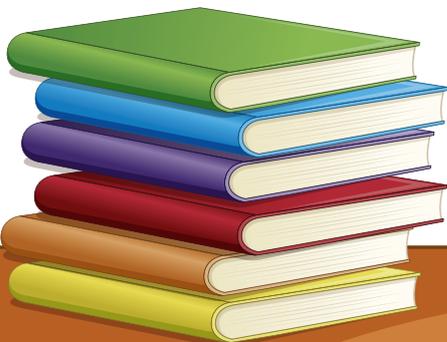
a 1 pupils were enrolled in 603 Government primary schools. A **9%** random sample of this cohort was taken for this study. A cluster sampling approach was used, with primary schools used as the clusters. A stratified random sample of clusters (primary schools) was selected and a sample of **30 pupils** was taken from the 2019 Grade 1 class at each sampled primary school. This generated a sample of **3210 Grade 1 pupils**.

From the study sample, it is estimated that **82%** of 2019 **Grade 1** pupils had attended a preschool prior to enrolling in their Grade 1 classes. This is a much higher estimate than in previous reports from the Ministry of Education and Training, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, which indicate a preschool attendance rate of **33 to 50%**. The higher figure in this study partly reflects the methodology adopted: with Grade 1 pupils rather than preschool institutions being used as the sampling unit.

This study was designed to enable a breakdown of attendance at preschool by two key factors. First, the background of the pupils in terms of the wealth levels of their households and second, the quality of the preschool learning provided by the preschool attended by the child. This is the first ECCE study in Eswatini to directly link the socio-economic status of the child with the quality of the preschool attended. The quality element is important as this varies substantially across preschools and it determines whether attendance at preschool is of any value. It is why SDG 4.2 refers to access to quality ECCE and not just ECCE.

## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY CAN BE SUMMARISED AS FOLLOWS:

1. One third of Grade 1 pupils from low wealth households had not attended preschool and only 10% received high quality ECCE.
2. In contrast only 3% of children from high wealth households had not attended preschool and over 40% received high quality ECCE.



# FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON ECCE IN ESWATINI

continued

The ECCE attendance rate (regardless of the quality) for Grade 1 pupils is **82%**. This is considerably higher than previous official estimates from **World Bank and UNICEF studies**, which put the preschool attendance rate at 30 to **50%**. The data for this study come directly from the parents/guardians of Grade 1 pupils. It is a different metric than that previously published and provides a more comprehensive picture of preschool attendance.

The received wisdom, from official documents that preschool provision in Eswatini is dominated by the private sector, is not borne out by this study. Just **25%** of Grade 1 pupils who had attended preschool went to private preschools. More pupils (**36%**) went to community preschools. And **26%** went to church or NCP preschools. Again, this is about attendance, not quality of the ECCE programmes received by the learners.

## **The quality of ECCE delivery does not depend on type of preschool.**

Six types of preschool were identified by parents/guardians (private, community, NCP, church, Grade 0 and NGO). Some preschools in each of these types provide high quality ECCE. Also, some preschools in each of the types provide low quality ECCE. High quality ECCE is most commonly provided at private, NGO, and church preschools. High quality ECCE is least commonly found in **Grade 0**, community, and NCP preschools.

The Government Grade 0 pilot needs serious reassessment. First, few Grade 0 schools provide high quality ECCE. Second, they do not cater for the most disadvantaged children, and third, there is evidence that they may crowd out existing preschools in the neighbourhood. Providing preschool education through the Grade 0 option is probably not cost effective compared with other community-based options.

Remember, the MoET **target is for 100% of children**, especially those from disadvantaged households, to attend **good quality ECCE centres by 2030**. For disadvantaged children the gap between actual and target is huge.



# THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Hold a national workshop to review the current provision of quality ECCE. Review ECCE policy on the basis of current information and develop an evidence-based implementation strategy.



Commission a study to review current models of non-government sector provision of ECCE and to identify those that are delivering quality ECCE to the most disadvantaged children.

Conduct cost effectiveness studies of promising models of provision to inform value for money investment options.



Enter into dialogue with donors to establish a fund to promote and extend cost effective models of ECCE provision.



Review methodologies for establishing ECCE provision and identify the approach to be used to consistently provide periodic (e.g. biennial) assessment of access by socio-economic groups and quality of delivery.

