

# Creating an experiential training route for early childhood care and education practitioners

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## Introduction >>>

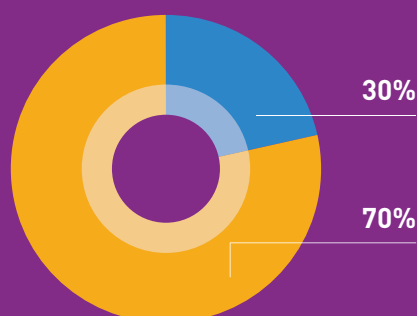
In recent years the evidence has become overwhelming that providing children of five years of age and below with active stimulation (as well as adequate nutrition), is absolutely crucial to ensure that their cognitive development is enhanced to its fullest. At this age, children's brains are developing at a faster pace than at any other time in their lives and studies (see Kagitcibasi, et al., 1995) have shown that the impact that can be gained from active cognitive stimulation at this age remains in effect for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, evidence also suggests that failure to achieve adequate cognitive development at this stage is irreversible later in life. **Arguably, early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more important for children's life chances than education at any other stage of lives.**

Much of this cognitive stimulation can be achieved in the home, if mothers know how, but there is also great value in enhancing this with ECCE programmes where possible. To better achieve the former requires that mothers are themselves educated as to what strategies and activities they can adopt with their young children. The latter requires the creation of a cadre of trained professionals and community-based adults capable of providing such cognitive stimulus to children, either at the community level and/or in pre-school settings. This paper looks at the options for creating both of these.

## The Need >>>

Uganda has approximately 2.9 million children between the ages of 3 to 5, and of these Cambridge Education in a recent study for the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) estimated only 30% are currently in ECCE programmes of any kind. Furthermore, many of those already practicing are untrained and unqualified to fill this role.

The chart represents the percentage of population of 2.9 million children



Blue represents only 30% of children of 2.9 million children who are accessing pre-primary education.

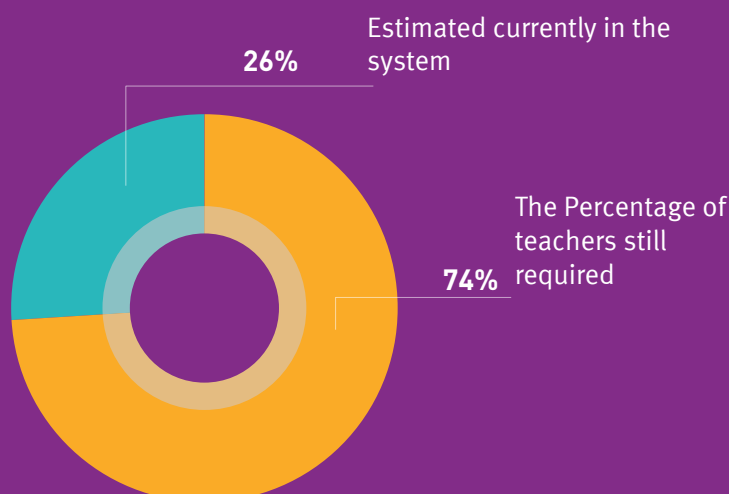
Orange represents the rest of 70% that are unable to access the pre-primary education.

The Diagram below shows the Teacher to Child Ratio per Class



The Graph below shows the Percentage representation of Teachers

Of the **116,000** ECCE teachers needed, only 26% are estimated to be already in the system



There is already a qualification framework in place for the training of ECCE teachers (currently called ECD Caregivers) which leads to a qualification equivalent to that given to teachers at primary level education. Unfortunately, Uganda does not have the capacity to train 80,000 new ECCE teachers to this standard nor can it afford to do so within the public sector. Even if 5000 new ECCE teachers could be trained each year it would take more than 20 years to fulfil the need, and the cost of providing a 2 year residential course for so many new teachers would be prohibitive. To this would need to be added the ongoing cost of the salaries of 80,000 new teachers although, depending on how the system develops, much of this might be absorbed by the private sector.

A more practical and affordable solution is required in the short and medium term. Such a solution would be to partition the cadre of ECCE practitioners into those who are fully qualified to be ECCE teachers, supported by a much larger number of other ECCE practitioners with lower levels of training and qualification. These latter personnel would act in lower level supportive roles and would not receive qualified teachers' salaries. In the short-term these latter will far outnumber the qualified teachers but over time a better balance can be achieved. The immediate priority is to ensure that as many children as possible have at least some access to ECCE delivered by adults, who can perform competently with a minimum level of training and qualification.

## The principles for developing an ECCE practitioners' qualification >>>

In creating a training and qualification route to satisfy this demand there are a number of principles that should apply:

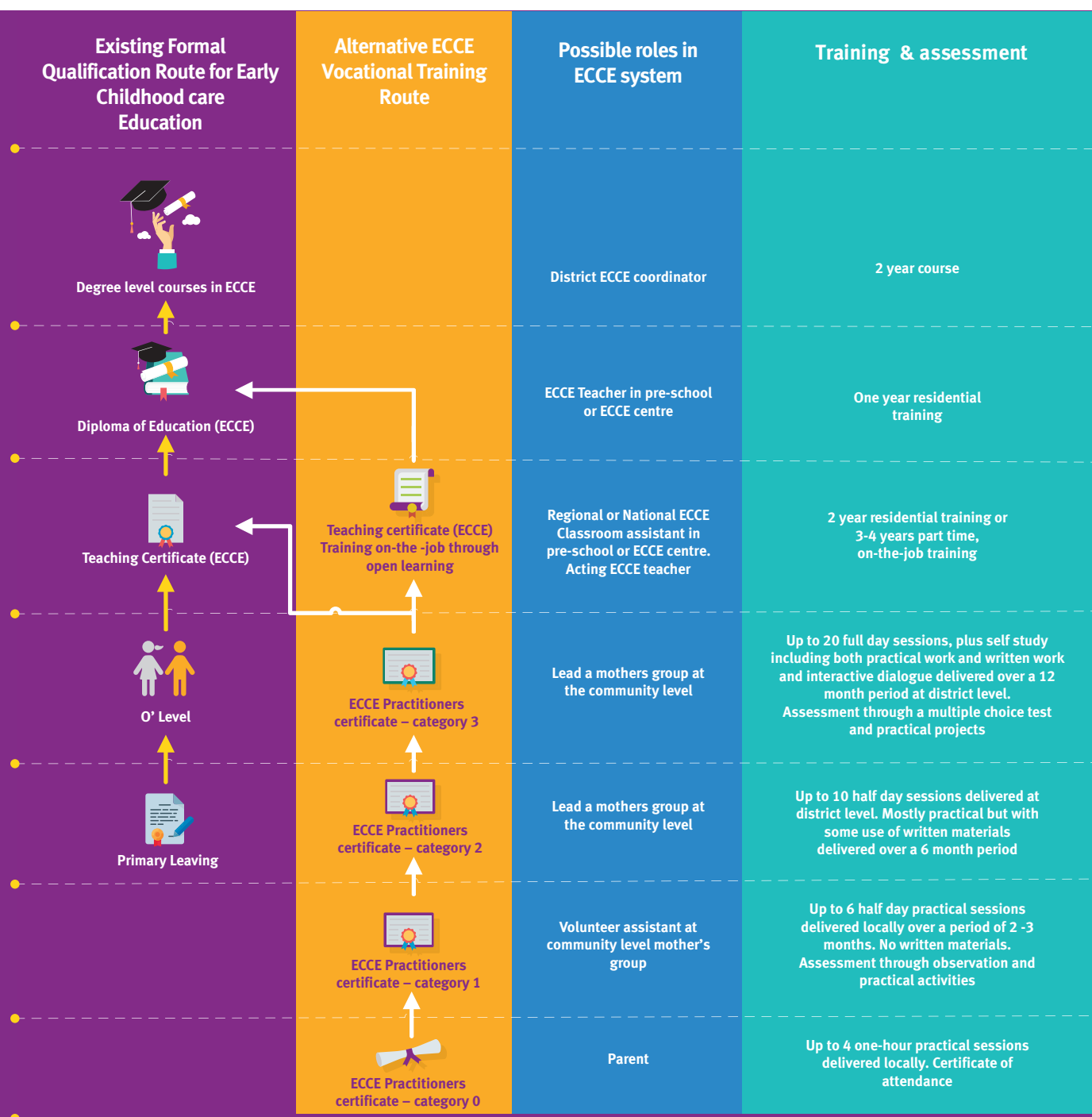
1. **Uganda needs to mobilise all of its available human resource, not just a sub-set of highly qualified personnel.** This should include parents (particularly mothers), community members and volunteers to supplement a professional ECCE workforce.
2. **The resulting ECCE system and the training required to produce personnel to deliver it should be affordable for Uganda.** The annual salary budget for educators in the rest of the education system was running at Ushs 1,378.66 billion in the fiscal year 2016/17, which is 56.3% of the MoES budget; 41.04% of the overall Government wage allocation; and under extreme pressure (MoES 2017 p19-20). Adding to this requires strong justification, and the options selected should represent the best value for money, i.e. maximum impact for minimum cost.

It would not be affordable or practical to train the required number of ECCE practitioners estimated above (80,000) to the level of a Teaching Certificate within a reasonable timeframe. If large numbers of children are to be reached in a relatively short period of time, at an affordable cost, then it will be necessary to design a differentiated system. In such a system those with Teachers' Certificates would sit at the apex but there would be a large number of subordinate and assistant roles for those with lower levels of qualification. This will cost much less but still has the potential for high impact.

3. **Within a framework, it is assumed that there will be multiple options for providing ECCE.** For example, the system might include pre-school classes within established schools or specially created pre-primary schools. It might also include community level school readiness programmes and/or it might include localised mother's groups. At the most basic level it should also include individual mothers who might be given basic orientation on how to provide the necessary levels of cognitive stimulation to their children.
4. **It is also assumed that the ECCE system will be very flexible, that there will be multiple roles within it, and that qualifications/training should be matched to these roles.** For example, at the basic level mothers could be trained either to run or to assist with Community level initiatives, pre-primary schools would need both qualified ECCE teachers and assistants, and at the District level there is need for ECCE coordinators.
5. **There should be a dual track for progressing along the qualification ladder, and by inference, up the career ladder within ECCE.** One track would be similar to that of other teachers, i.e. progression through the PLE, 'O' Level and then onto a Certificate of Teaching specialising in ECCE. The other will be a 'experiential' or practical track, based upon practical experience, on-the-job training and open learning. For those who demonstrate the highest levels of aptitude this track should eventually merge with the formal education track so that these people can eventually also obtain a full teaching certificate. [It is expected that only a few practitioners on this track will reach this level but the opportunity should be available to them.] Those who only reach part way up this ladder can still be usefully employed in lower level roles. For example, as leaders of mothers' groups or as pre-school classroom assistants.
6. **The private sector will be significant players in the ECCE service sector.** While government should not interfere too deeply within the private sector, it does have the responsibility to regulate the sector and should ensure that all adults coming into contact with young children, have been appropriately vetted and adequately trained.

## An example of an experiential training route

The diagram below gives an example of what such an experiential training route might look like.



## Notes: >>>

- The first column of the diagram summarises the existing ECCE formal qualification route.
- The second column shows how a lower level practitioners' qualification might be designed that fulfils the immediate needs of the system, but also allows those who show sufficient aptitude to eventually progress to higher level qualifications IF they reach a sufficiently high level of general education.
- This practitioners' qualification is divided into 4 categories or levels.
  - i. **Category 0** is intended for parents. It does not qualify them to work with children other than their own, but does give them some basic training and provides a certificate to show they have completed this training. This is deliberately motivational for the people who can potentially make the most impact.
  - ii. **Category 1** qualifies community members to act as volunteers and assistants in community or parents' ECCE groups.
  - iii. **Category 2** qualifies community members to initiate and run community or mothers' ECCE groups.
  - iv. **Category 3** qualifies candidates to become teaching assistants in pre-school classrooms or to 'act' as teachers where no qualified teacher is available. To cope with this level of training candidates will require basic skills at least equivalent to PLE, i.e. they will be able to read, write and demonstrate basic numeracy skills expected at PLE. The qualification itself will be set at a standard equivalent to the 'O' level.
- As already noted, it is anticipated that only a small number of locally based practitioners will reach the highest level and then move on to a full ECCE teaching qualification, but the opportunity to do so should exist.
- The upper part of the second column also shows an alternative part-time training route to a Teachers' Certificate. This would take longer but be cheaper than full-time residential training.
- It is recommended that those who progress to this level from the ECCE Practitioners' Certificate should be given course 'credits' for their earlier training and experience thereby cutting their overall training duration and cost.
- The lowest level of this practitioners' qualification (Category 0) does not qualify participants for any particular role but is meant to motivate parents to take some very basic training. This is a small amount of very basic training but has potential for large impact.
- The third column shows some possible roles that could be played by people attaining these qualifications. These could be defined in other ways and given different titles.
- The fourth column suggests some training and assessment scenarios. These require further discussion and refinement.

This example shows how the above principles could be applied, but it is not the only option for doing this. The main intent of this paper has been to crystallise the issues, state the practical constraints that must be overcome, and to suggest some principles that might underpin pragmatic and practical solutions to these issues in Uganda. The exact details of such a model would need to be worked out and agreed by MoES and other stakeholders. The next step would be for MoES to table these proposals to the MoES's ECD-Working Group to consider the principles and add detail to the model.

## References

- Cambridge Education. (2017). Report on the existing ECE models and implementation status of the ECD policy provisions. Kampala: MoES.
- Kagitcibasi, C., Bekman, S. & Goksel, A. (1995). Multipurpose Model of Non-formal Education: The Mother-Child Education. Coordinators' Notebook No. 17.
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