

By Wilfred Sanya

The Government is reviewing the curriculum of Early Childhood Education (ECE) popularly referred to as nursery education, the state minister for higher education Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo has said.

"In the past, the Government was concentrating on funding primary education. ECE was left in the hands of the private sector and NGOs. In addition, Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres are mainly in urban centres, this left out rural areas," Dr Muyingo said.

He made the remarks last week, in Kampala during a meeting with the board of Victoria Village Children's Group from Canada and the SOS Children's Villages team.

"The Government realised that ECE is critical in a child's development. Currently a review is being conducted by the National Curriculum Development Centre to provide an assessment that suits the demands of our educational market," Muyingo said.

He explained that when the review is complete, the Government will train teachers in skills managing children.

Muyingo said it would then become mandatory for every nursery teacher to undergo training in ECD at government centres.

The minister said Uganda did not have a National Academy to monitor nursery teachers, but there were plans to put one in place.

Muyingo added that the ministry was reviewing policy and the process of admitting applicants. At the moment, many school authorities pick their relatives to teach children and sometimes they are not qualified to do so.

According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ECE encourages children to play, explore to learn and develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. Play is central to children's learning, regardless of the actual content.

According to the 2011 education ministry statistics, the distribution of ECD centres per region indicated central had 783 (53%) which is the highest number. Eastern 554 (24%), northeast 106 (5%), northern 354 (15%), southwest 128 (5%), and west had 436 (19%). Most of the ECD centres were within the nearby primary schools in the area.

About the status of the

New nursery schools curriculum to be launched



(Left) Amarshi received by Muyingo (right) at the ministry headquarters in Kampala. Second-left is Lumonya, Zeena Amarshi and Nkaada. Amarshi will build ECD centres. Photo by Wilfred Sanya

implementation of the education sector of the ECD policy of 2012, it was reported that there was need for guidelines for stakeholders or direct government control over nursery teachers.

Before the launch of the ECD policy in 2007, many of the nursery schools countrywide were neither licensed nor registered. There was inadequate supervision and inspection by the inspectorate as most district inspectors of schools did not consider it their duty.

A 2016 study by Oxford University, shows that children who receive a nursery education are almost twice as likely to go on and join A'level and university.

Related studies also show that those children who went to nursery

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school are more likely to be employed and earn high salaries. For such children, their talents might be discovered at a tender age by looking at what they like most

The research also shows that a child's educational experience at home when they are under five, which is part of ECE, matters in their academic success.

"Unfortunately, not all children get the same support from their parents and for these pupils, preschool is, especially important in helping them develop. Our findings prove that an investment in preschool pays off, with particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds," reads the Oxford research titled *The Study of Early Education and Development*.

Dr Daniel Nkaada, the commissioner for primary education, who was in attendance, said the ECE review, would be ready within three months. He said the Government

will need support from NGOs and other agencies on setting up ECD centres around the country.

Meanwhile, the President of Victoria Village Group of Companies, Farid Amarshi, announced his organisation's donation towards the construction of three ECD centres, a training school in Entebbe and donation of learning materials worth \$500,000 in a period of three years.

Amarshi said the organisation would construct ECD centres at Bugiri Public Primary School in Entebbe, Kirugaruga Primary School in Kakiri-Wakiso, Kweyo Primary School in Gulu and Butebe Primary School in Kabarole district.

At these schools, the classes would be expanded to accommodate children in the nursery section.

The classes would accommodate 40 children per stream and over 1,200 are expected to benefit in the first phase, to be completed by December.

Amarshi, a Ugandan of Asian origin was among those expelled by former President Idi Amin in 1972.

He has established 21 ECD centres in Canada and has 41 years of experience in education training.

He said plans were underway to construct the training institute at the SOS Children's Village. The nursery teachers' training institute will follow the Ugandan curriculum.

Amarshi appealed to the Government to waive taxes on scholastic materials, which would be imported from Canada.

The national director for SOS Children's Village, Olive Lumonya, said the Government should sort out the issues of land ownership where the centres would be established. Some of these schools are community-based and on privately owned land.

"Land issues should be sorted out to avoid conflicts, which may arise when the projects are completed," Lumonya said.