

# Embrace the early childhood education reforms

**THE** new Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy is a step toward building a stronger educational foundation for our children. By clearly separating daycare (ages 0-3) from preschool (ages 3-6), the framework addresses decades of confusion where nursery schools have been operating dual structures without proper regulation. Daycare centres will now focus exclusively on social development and life skills in corporate settings, while preschools will provide structured early education, which will end the tendency of drilling academic material to toddlers who previously wore uniforms in holding facilities.

This reform responds to various challenges: With 1.8 million eligible children (nearly half the target population) lacking access to early education and over 600,000 primary school repeaters costing Uganda sh6.8b annually, the economic and developmental case for quality early childhood education is now clearer. Teaching standards across the sector will rise because of the policy's requirement for professional qualifications, mandatory licensing through the National Teachers' Council and continuous professional development.

Most importantly, the framework acknowledges that early childhood education is a critical developmental



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stage requiring specialised approaches, not merely preparation for primary school. The competency-based curriculum, elimination of homework, age-appropriate content and the introduction of cursive writing for brain development reflect modernity in educational science. Expanding learning areas, including physical health, environmental interaction and English language, will ensure holistic development aligned with global best

practices.

However, implementation will determine the policy's success. With less than 20% of Uganda's over 20,000 early childhood centres registered and 58% failing to meet basic standards, authorities should rigorously enforce the new licensing requirements without exception. Past initiatives have faltered due to lax enforcement, leaving policies gathering dust while substandard facilities continue operating. The education ministry could allocate sufficient resources for monitoring, provide meaningful support during the transitional period and follow through on closing non-compliant centres.

These reforms come at a time when Uganda is striving for socioeconomic transformation. Therefore, investing in early childhood education will deliver great returns, including reduced grade repetition, improved learning outcomes and stronger human capital. The policy's emphasis on parent engagement and community understanding addresses the persistent awareness gap that has undermined previous efforts.

While the over 8,000-school shortfall in under-served areas remains challenging, the policy's proposed subsidies for private investors in rural communities