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**Transition from Preschool to Standard One in Botswana Public  
Primary Schools**

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## Transition from Preschool to Standard One in Botswana Public Primary Schools

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper examines transition from Preschool to Standard One in the Early Childhood Education programme implemented in 2013 in Botswana public primary schools.

**Methodology:** The methodology employed in this study is the qualitative approach with multi-case study technique to investigate the implementation of the Early Childhood Education programme. Transitional Bilingual Education is used as the theoretical framework to benchmark the realities of transition from Preschool to Standard One classrooms. Data collection was done using open ended questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and scrutiny of learners' artifacts.

**Results:** The findings indicated that transition is not smooth due to the languages of instruction used at both Preschool and Standard One, learners who do not attend Preschool and lack of teacher aides in Standard One classes. The study concluded that there must be harmonization of languages of instruction at both levels to enable smooth transition.

**Unique contribution to theory, policy and practice:** Lastly, the study recommends compulsory Preschool learning for all young learners before entry into Standard One.

**Key Words:** Transition, Preschool, Standard One, Learners, Teachers, Primary School

### INTRODUCTION

Transition is about change or development; it means passing from one stage to another. In this paper, transition involves movement of Early Childhood Education (ECE) to formal learning in Standard One in Botswana public primary schools. It involves change because after spending one year in the ECE programme at Preschool level, learners proceed to Standard One. The ECE activities develop learners' motor skills, physical development, communication skills and acquisition of the target language at Preschool. Transition from Preschool to Standard One seems to be problematic and the contributory factor being the languages of instruction used at both levels in Botswana public primary schools. Learners are taught in English and home languages at Preschool while in Standard One the language of instruction is Setswana (national language) only. Research indicates that children learn best in their mother tongue and if home languages differ with the school languages there could be a negative impact. When learners' cultures are excluded

in learning, it could have a bearing on their academic performance. Hence, this paper examined transition from Early Childhood Education classes to Standard One level and problematizes this transition.

The ECE programme in Botswana public schools was implemented in 2013 due to pressure from UNESCO to enact ECE programmes in the countries of the world. According to UNESCO (2019), ECE is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2019). In this regard, the ECE programme has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens. Not only this was orchestrated, but a further development was for education systems to use mother tongue in Preschool classrooms. Evidence from around the world indicates that learning first in one's home language leads to better learning outcomes in the future for individuals, cultures, and nations (UNESCO, 1953, 2019). The organization (UNESCO) raises a concern that if the use of mother tongue is advantageous, why is mother tongue used so rarely in ECE programmes and, even more rarely, in the early grades of primary school, and why are so many children therefore forced to learn in a language they poorly understand and in an environment which neglects and even represses their cultural identity and the language which "carries" it? (UNESCO, 2019). UNESCO interrogates that how many of these languages are used at all in education – as the medium of instruction or as a subject? If they are not used, what could be the reasons. (UNESCO, 2020:18). The questions asked by UNESCO are relevant and are raised later in this paper.

In Botswana, it is not clear which language/s of instruction was prescribed for ECE learning in Botswana Preschools, hence, teachers use their own discretion to teach preschoolers, but prefer to use English and learners' home languages. At Standard One, the language of instruction is Setswana with the use of the Breakthrough to Setswana programme to enable learners to acquire the basic morphology, phonology and syntax of Setswana (Revised National Policy on Education, 1994). At Standard Two, teaching and learning switches to English as a language of instruction and in subsequent levels (Revised Nation Policy on Education, 1994). This means that the use of languages from Preschool, Standard One and Standard Two can be summed up as English and home languages, Setswana and then English. This paper problematizes this transition from Preschool to Standard One as regards the languages of instruction used at both levels.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper discusses transition from Preschool to Standard One which is affected by the language choice at both levels. In Botswana primary schools, transition from one level to another has always been affected by language. For example, in a study conducted by Mokibelo in (2012), on the implementation of Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) in Botswana primary schools, the findings indicated that transition from Standard One to Standard Two was a problem in linguistically diverse situations because learners go to school speaking their home languages and at Standard One, Setswana is introduced as a language of instruction to learners who do not speak it. Before they could master Setswana within one year of the school calendar, the language of instruction changes to English at Standard Two. Learners struggled to understand both English and Setswana structures as well as content of the subjects. Consequently, the struggle to understand

the structure of the two languages and content at the same time drove learners away from school (Mokibelo, 2016). Further, there were communication problems in the classrooms with limited learning taking place at both levels. In addition, the intervention of unqualified ancillary staff to translate and interpret concepts to learners were sought and this had very little impact on addressing the language barrier and made transition even more difficult (Mokibelo, 2016). In schools in urban centres there was no transition because teachers decided to teach learners in English at Standard One to avoid confusion in Standard Two, where the medium of instruction is English (Mokibelo, 2016). Hence, schools in urban centres did not struggle with transition because they also admitted learners who were from English medium Preschools and already speaking English. Also, schools admitted foreign students and therefore teachers were forced to use English to accommodate all learners. In this regard, transition was experienced in various ways (Mokibelo, 2016). From the previous research above, the language choice was at the centre of learning, it either impacted negatively or positively on the learning and teaching process.

The impact of language from the colonial era cannot be underestimated. The colonizers' languages strongly influenced their colonized (Benson, 2008). The colonized glorified languages of their colonizers and forgot to develop and glorify their own and empower them in the education systems. Further, even after the colonizers left, language colonization did not leave, it went deeper into ethnic groups (Benson, 2008). The politics decided to colonize their countrymen with languages they did not speak and imposed national languages which were later prescribed in schools as languages of instruction despite the fact that countries were multilingual (Benson, 2008). Botswana government was no exception to this, despite the 29 languages spoken in the country, the national language was imposed in education as a language of instruction despite the fact that research indicated that it disadvantaged groups that did not speak it as a home language (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999). Hence, Benson (2008) confirms that upon gaining political independence from the colonial powers, most nation-states chose to maintain the status quo in terms of official languages in public administration and schooling. In this regard, lack of corpus planning in indigenous languages contributed towards systematic underdevelopment during colonization and after.

After colonization, some nations tried to promote mother tongue education to enable effective learning. However, it was the parents who rejected the home languages in the education system. For example, Sekou Toure's in Guinea's cultural revolution of 1968 stipulated that eight national languages would be used for instruction in primary education, the notion lost momentum and eventually came under attack. Parents criticized the poorly trained teachers, lack of materials and proclaimed doubts on whether mother tongue was good for the future of their children (Sekou Toure, 1968).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section discusses the theoretical framework to benchmark some practices related to transition from Preschool to Standard One in Botswana public primary schools. Transitional Bilingual Education is preferred as a framework because the language issue seems to be a contributory factor in the smooth transition from Preschool to Standard One levels.

Bilingual education programmes date back to the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) introduced in 1967. The Act was an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. BEA supported and enhanced the rights of minority language speakers. Then, there were no grounded rules forced on school districts to offer bilingual education programmes to minority language speakers. Under BEA, the government allocated funds for minority language speakers to learn in their languages as they shifted to English in the classroom (Crawford, 1989; Baker, 2011). The core idea of BEA was to provide part of the instruction in the student's native language to ease the transition into mainstream English classrooms. This programme is known as a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programme (Nieto, 2009). The goal of the transitional bilingual education program was to use the native languages (L1) of learners to develop the target language (L2). The goal was to ensure that students would be proficient in L2 (Baker, 2011). TBE programmes are designed to respond flexibly to learners at different English proficiency levels, who are fluent in their home languages. In TBE programs, initial content and literacy instruction is in the learners' home languages, paired with systematic and sequential ESL instruction. Teachers leverage students' linguistic and cultural resources to support language and literacy development and grade-level-appropriate content learning. The TBE programmes teach children to read in their L1 through the primary grades while gradually transitioning into English between second and fourth grade. This way of thinking about bilingualism, as 'living in two or more languages', makes clear the link between language and identity. An understanding of this link is very important for success in education. Learners' identities are formed from the activities they do everyday and the conversations they have with the people around them. Through this, learners develop a sense of where they belong, and of how they identify with the social worlds that surround them. There is a great deal of evidence to show that, when pupils feel they belong in the classroom and that their teachers value them as individuals, their attitudes to learning will be much more positive, and their achievement will improve. According to (Baker, 2011), bilingual children need to feel that their first language is valued in school and that it is not seen as second rate to English. Children will often be using the first language in the home situation, so it is a large part of their social lives, as well as being the main constituent of their thought processes in the early stages of learning English. If, as a teacher, you do not share your pupils' languages, you can do a lot to enhance their self-esteem and show that you value their languages through using dual language texts, multilingual labels in the environment and stories from their own and other cultures. There are two models of TBE; the early exit and the late exit. In the early exit, learners transition to English after a maximum of two years of L1 instruction. In late exit, learners receive L1 usually throughout the elementary grades, ensuring reading mastery before continuing with instruction. TBE programme challenges the Ministry of Education and Skills Development to seriously consider languages to be used for learning and teaching in the ECE classrooms before implementing a programme. The main challenge is early exit from the home languages and English from Preschool to Setswana at Standard One level. The learners would not have fully mastered the languages they used at Preschool. The other challenge for teachers of Standard One, is introducing another language which learners do not speak and this language is not supported by learners' home languages. This not only stifles learning and teaching and disempowers the teachers themselves because they cannot fully discharge their teaching and pedagogies learnt. They face language barrier and yet the TBE enhances the use of home languages in the classrooms and gradually reducing its usage in the learning and teaching. Lastly, learners' bilingual situation could be undermined at Standard

One because it seems there is no support of teacher aides. Instead of the TBE programme promoting learning and allowing smooth transition, learning falls into cracks in Standard One and leaves both teachers and learners frustrated.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The goal of research, especially the qualitative approach is to rely on the respondents' views of the situation being studied. This study evaluated the implementation of the preprimary orientation programme (Early Childhood Education) in Botswana primary schools. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to: investigate the views of teachers about the Early Childhood Education in Botswana public primary schools; find out the language/s of instruction used; examine the measures used to implement the ECE programme; explore the challenges encountered by implementers and establish the solutions to the challenges encountered. This paper focuses on transition from Preschool to Standard One as one of the major themes that emerged from the study. This study was conducted in six districts out of the nine official ones, and they were coded as A, B, C, D, E, and F. The districts were ethnically and linguistically diverse and therefore it was important to gather the participants' views in different contexts.

The population of the study were teachers of Preschool, teachers of Standard One and Heads of Infant. The notion behind the selection of participants was that teachers of Preschool are direct implementers of the ECE programme, teachers of Standard One receive learners from Preschool after one school calendar year while the Heads of Infant supervise the lower primary and therefore are accountable and responsible for the implementation of the programme.

Sampling of the participants was convenient at Preschool level because the researcher involved teachers of Preschool who were available at the time of data collection. Because classes of Preschool were not many, some teachers were absent for one reason or another. Therefore, whoever was available and agreed to participate was involved. Teachers of Standard One were randomly and conveniently sampled, and if there were more than two (2) classes, the researcher through the assistance of Head of Infant selected the teachers. In this regard, in all schools one (1) or two (2) teachers of Standard One were selected depending on how many Standard One classes were available in each school. There was only one (1) Head of Infant in each primary school and therefore they were conveniently sampled, there was no choice but to request them to participate due to the role they played in lower education of supervising and monitoring learning and teaching. All in all, 130 teachers from the studied districts and primary schools were involved in the study.

The study triangulated the data collection tools and hence, used multiple techniques such as open ended questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, learners' artifacts and observation of structures used by Preschool learners. This enabled the researcher to draw multiple insights and perspectives about transition from Preschool to Standard One. A meeting with teachers of Preschool, Standard One and Heads of Infant was held at the beginning to explain the objectives of the study and also for the researcher to be accepted in the schools. Then open ended questionnaires were issued out to selected teachers and these were followed by individual interviews to close the gaps observed in open ended questionnaires and then observations of outdoor equipment and classrooms was done. Meetings were held on the last day of research to share some of the findings of the study that needed immediate attention with School Management

and teachers who participated in the study. The triangulation of data collection tools portrayed the results to be reliable and valid, hence, trustworthiness was confirmed. The results from various instruments orchestrated basically the same themes and messages from the three types of participants.

Data were coded according to districts, schools and participants. It was also categorized according to minor and major themes from key research questions. Patterns and trends that emerged were categorized and compared to see similarities and differences in participants' responses. Some of the information was tabulated for better understanding especially the challenges in each district and schools. Rigorous cleaning of the data was done to paint a clear picture of the implementation process through reading and rereading the data. Analysis of data was done according to the key research questions using the SPSS software to see how they were answered. The key research questions were interpreted according to minor and themes with a blend of the Atlas ti method. Themes that appeared frequently from each key research question in all the schools were identified and categorised as major and followed by the minor ones. It was from the analysis that transition from Preschool to Standard One emerged as one of the major themes and now problematized in this paper.

This study had limitations because not all districts were covered and not all public primary schools with Preschools were covered. Again, parents were left out because of Covid-19 protocols. The idea was to see how implementation of the ECE programme was done and share ideas with other scholars on Early Childhood Education.

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

This section reports the results of transition from Preschool to Standard One. The views of teachers of Preschool, Standard One and Heads of Infant were considered. The letters of alphabets, A, B, C, D, E and F were used to label districts while schools were labelled with numbers that also reflected the districts and Preschool, hence, for teachers of Preschool as representatives of schools were labelled as, PA1 or PB2 (P stands for Preschool, A for district while 1 stands for teacher number 1). Teachers of Standard One, were labelled SA1 or SB2 (S stands for Standard One, A for District while 1 stands for Teacher number 1). Heads of Infant include the letter H and the alphabet for the district and the number of the respondent hence, HA2, HB1 HE2 were used for their verbatim.

The question that this paper addresses is on transition from Preschool level to the subsequent level, Standard One. The question was critical because if there were any positive or negative developments observed by teachers that affected transition it was important for teachers to share them. The results of the study are presented according to categories of respondents being; teachers of Preschool, teachers of Standard One and Heads of Infant. Below are the responses of teachers of ECE.

### **Transition from Preschool to Standard One: Preschool Teacher's Perceptions**

The results of teachers of Preschool are presented. The verbatim used are shared by most teachers and not all of them will be shared in this paper. In District A, nine teachers reported that the use of English and home languages at Preschool impacted negatively in the teaching and

learning at Standard One because the language of instruction is Setswana, hence, learners mix up the structures of the two languages. The teacher who used Setswana reported that the use of Setswana at Preschool learning had a positive impact on learners because transition is smooth into Standard One where the language of instruction is Setswana, hence, learners do not struggle with understanding Setswana language. The teachers reported that English should be used at both Preschool and Standard One for continuity.

In District B, all the seven teachers reported that the use of English and local languages impacted negatively on Standard One learning and teaching because there is a sudden shift to Setswana. Teachers reported that:

*...it causes confusion...there is a mismatch and transition is not smooth...things that they were taught at Preschool become new...the use of Setswana makes them fail Standard One or perform poorly...it is difficult for learners to shift from English to Setswana...it takes time for them to get used to Setswana because most of the children use isiNdebele or Ikalanga at home... (PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5).*

This suggests that there is no coordination of languages between Preschool and Standard One and therefore learners' performance is negatively affected, it could delay acquisition of skills and knowledge.

In District C, all the eight teachers reported a discrepancy from Preschool to Standard One caused by languages of instruction. They reported that;

*...Preschool learners are taught in English and their home languages and when they get to Standard One they are taught in Setswana and they have to go through the Setswana Breakthrough programme, this delays their progress because they were used to English...children do not understand Setswana and therefore it becomes difficult to instruct them in Setswana... (PC1, PC3).*

This suggests that teachers have observed that the use of English and home languages at Preschool impacts negatively on learning at Standard One because the language of instruction switches to Setswana, a language they do not speak and therefore learners perform poorly.

In District D, all the eight teachers reported a similar view like in District C that languages of instruction seem to be a problem. They said:

*...English and home languages make it easy to understand the concepts but, the use of English at Preschool and Setswana in Standard One has a negative impact on learning because learners perform poorly, they confuse the structures of the two languages...they are introduced to Breakthrough to Setswana programme and forget about English...children respond in English or their home languages when they are talked to in Setswana...transition to Setswana language in Standard One is difficult... (PD1, PD2, PD3, PD4).*



This suggests that the use of home languages together with English helped learners to acquire knowledge and skills that learners can use in the next levels. However, the introduction of Setswana becomes another burden, learners grapple with concepts and trying to understand the structure of Setswana while they have not yet mastered the structure of English.

In District E, teachers elaborated on the issue of language, three teachers reported that:

*...when children get to Standard One from Preschool their results/performance drops because in Standard One they strictly teach in Setswana and it becomes difficult for them to understand Setswana...children struggle to understand when they get to Standard One...there is no link between the two levels because at Preschool the language of instruction is English while at Standard One it is Setswana... language barrier exist because some kids do not speak Setswana...the language makes it difficult for teachers and kids to work together... Setswana lowers their confidence and self-esteem...learners find it difficult to change from English to Setswana... children get confused...( PE1, PE2, PE4).*

Two teachers reported differently and they said:

*...the use of Setswana prepared learners to understand Breakthrough to Setswana concepts... learners understand concepts better because they already understand some of the sounds and phrases in Setswana... (Schools, E3 and E5).*

The verbatim by teachers suggests that there were problems when learners shifted to Setswana in Standard One. Transition is not smooth because of the shift from English to Setswana. Learners perform poorly academically, language barrier exists because teachers do not speak to them in their home languages and a gap is created between Preschool and Standard One. Further, learners who were taught in Setswana at Preschool seem to benefit more because they understand the Breakthrough to Setswana programme better.

In District F, all the ten teachers had similar views on transition that it is not smooth and they reported that:

*...it is a bit confusing because they have been using English at Preschool and therefore transition is difficult...The use of Setswana in Standard One affects learners performance negatively and again they do not understand Setswana most of them...learners get lost with the introduction of Setswana in Standard One...learners confuse sounds... when they are talked to in Setswana they respond in English... the switch to Setswana brings a lot of problems, students do not answer, they confuse sounds, their performance is affected negatively... (Schools, F1, F2, F3, F4, F5).*

This suggests that transition is not smooth at Standard One as teachers grapple with the switch to Setswana.

All in all, the verbatim above suggested that teachers of Preschool were aware that the use of English and learners' home languages as languages of instruction in Preschool classes impacted negatively on learning and teaching at Standard One level. At Standard One learners shift from English and their home languages to Setswana and this according to the teachers caused confusion and affected negatively learners' performance, confidence and self-esteem.

### **Transition from Preschool to Standard One: Standard One Teachers' Perceptions**

This section reported transition from Preschool to Standard One as perceived by teachers at Standard One. In District A, ten teachers of Standard One reported that transition is difficult because of languages of instruction and lack of development. They reported that:

*...it is difficult to transit from English as a language of instruction they were taught with at Preschool because at Standard One, they are required to learn in Setswana using the Breakthrough to Setswana programme... not all learners develop skills at the same time, some still need to repeat the one year ECE programme...restricted number of intake disadvantages learners, they start Standard One without a foundation... (SA1, SA2, SA3).*

The verbatim from teachers suggests that there are conflicting issues from Preschool to Standard One which make transition to be a tedious job. Not only is there a problem of language, but there are other issues such as learners who did not attend Preschool, learners' motor skills that were not fully developed at Standard One.

In District B, ten teachers of Standard One reported that the switch of language to another is a problem. They said:

*...introducing content in Setswana becomes a challenge because learners are taught in English at Preschool ...they respond in English even though we talk to them in Setswana...they can count numbers even though they cannot identify them...learners who were not registered for Preschool lag behind because they are not yet used to the school environment... (SB1, SB2, SB5)*

The teacher's verbatim suggests that transition is not smooth. The issue of language and learners who are not yet fully developed also surface in this district.

In District C, eight teachers reported confusion of the structures of Setswana and English. They said that,

*...at Preschool some children are taught in English and when they get to Standard One, they are taught in Setswana and it is not easy to divert them to Setswana...learners get confused by the structures of Setswana and English...children who did not attend Preschool are left behind – it is difficult to teach them with those who have been to Preschool...Preschool duration is short – it should last for two years...some learners complete one year when they are not yet ready for Standard One... (SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5).*

These teachers seem to be troubled by the use of different languages at Preschool and Standard One and also by learners who did not attend Preschool. The teachers also suggested extension of Preschool education because according to them learners would not have fully developed.

In District D, all teachers reported communication problems and they said that:

*...they experience communication problems since learners are taught in English at Preschool...some of them proceed to Standard One while they are still very young and have not yet developed physically, emotionally and need more time to develop... sometimes they are hyperactive and think they know too much and do not want to be corrected...they respond in English and yet the language of instruction is Setswana...they confuse words and phrases in Setswana and English. (SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5).*

The teachers' verbatim suggest that transition from Preschool to Standard One is not smooth, there are still some grey areas to address.

In District E, teachers of Standard One reported some deficiencies in writing and lack of development in fine motor skills. They said that:

*some students cannot write their names...not all learners have developed fine motor skills... some learners still have a problem with counting and identifying numbers...they recite without understanding... learners are drilled at Preschool...learners get confused with the introduction of Setswana at Standard One...they get frustrated when teachers introduce primary ruled/lined exercise books because they are not familiar with them...the size of the class should be reduced to 25...there are learners who have not been through Preschool and they are always lagging behind...Preschool guidelines are not aligned to Standard One activities... (SE1, SE2, SE3, SE4, SE5).*

These verbatim suggest that there is still more to be done by Standard One teachers. The issue of language barrier emerges, lack of development, learners being drilled, class size and a curriculum that is not in line with that of Standard One.

In District F, all teachers reported that transition is not smooth because:

*learners' motor skills are not refined...they are hyper-active sometimes hindering learning...it is difficult for a teacher to change the way they shape letters as they have been taught at Preschool...teachers vary in the way they teach Preschool learners, some put effort while others do not...some learners' writing skills are not developed...some are being surpassed by those who did not attend preprimary classes...lack of parental involvement... they do not grip writing tools correctly...they do not shape letters properly...they use English during Setswana lessons...they respond in English most of the time... (SF1, SF2, SF3, SF4, SF5).*

This suggests that teachers of Standard One experience problems with learners from Preschool, some of which are contributed by the language of instruction used at Preschool.

In essence, teachers of Standard One went further than the issue of language at Preschool. They observed that some of the learners were not yet developed when they go to Standard One. Also, they noted that some of the learners' motor skills were not refined and hence their development in Standard One was slow.

### **Heads of Infants' Perceptions about Transition from Preschool to Standard One**

This section reports Heads of Infants' views on transition from Preschool to Standard One. Important to note is that Heads of Infant were also teachers of Standard One or Two or have taught at the initial stages of learning before.

In District A, three HODs reported that transition is not smooth from Preschool to Standard One because of the two different languages used; English at Preschool and Setswana at Standard One. The HODs said, *'it is difficult for learners to connect...they get confused by the switch to Setswana'* (HA1, HA2, HA3). The other two HODs reported that transition is not smooth because some learners are not yet ready or fully developed to proceed to Standard One and therefore learners should be allowed to repeat the Preschool programme.

In District B, all HODs admitted that transition is not smooth from Preschool to Standard One because learners are taught in English at Preschool and switch to Setswana in Standard One, this causes confusion. They said,

*...some learners develop slowly due to communication problems...they confuse sounds, syllables and words... at the end of the year they are expected to read Setswana fluently and in some cases this is not possible... there are learners who do not attend Preschool but go directly to Standard One, these learners are slow to catch up and they adapt to the school environment slowly... (HB1, HB2, HB3).*

This suggests that transition from Preschool to Standard One was problematic because of the languages of instruction used at both levels as well as learners who have not been to Preschool for one reason or another who are left behind in pre activities.

In District C, 3 HODs reported that transition is not smooth because learners are taught in English and home languages at Preschool and taught in Setswana at Standard One and learners get confused in pronouncing and spelling some words. Also learners prefer to answer in English in Standard One. Three of the HODs reported that there is smooth transition because most of the learners go to Standard One more developed, for example, they argued that the programme develops their motor skills, cognitive skills, they become familiar with numbers and letters as well as the school environment. This means that HODs in this region have two differing views about the transition, some see it as a success while others report the gaps brought about by the switch of languages.

In District D, HODs reported that there is no smooth transition because of the different languages used at each level. They said,

*...learners at Preschool are taught in English while at Standard One they are taught in Setswana and this opens a gap as Preschool does not build on Standard One...it brings confusion... confidence gained is lowered by the language used...their participation is lowered by the language they are not used to...children still converse in Naro in Standard One classroom...the use of Setswana in Standard One demoralizes them... (HD1, HD2, HD3, HD4, HD5).*

This suggests that HODs are aware of the discrepancy brought about by the use of English at Preschool and that before learners could master the language, Setswana is introduced and this makes transition difficult. The HODs seem not happy with such an arrangement as it delays learners' progress in Standard One as they try to understand the structure of Setswana.

In District E, all HODs reported that transition is not smooth because of the languages of instruction used. The HODs reported that:

*...transition is not from preprimary to Standard One because of the two different languages used which are English at Preprimary – and Setswana at Standard One... (HE1, HE2, HE3, HE4).*

In one school, One HOD reported that:

*...there are no challenges because learners are taught in Setswana at Preschool and Standard One... (HE5).*

This suggests that there are contradicting views mentioned by HODs. First, School Management (SM) believes that transition is smooth while others believe that using English at Preschool and Setswana at Standard One does not coordinate well. It only causes confusion amongst the learners. Also, the SM confirmed that the use of the two different languages impacts negatively on learners' performance.

In District F, the HODs reported that,

*“transition is not smooth because of the different languages used at each level...it is not smooth because learners are too young to switch from one language to another...no because pupils at preprimary are taught in English and at Standard One they are taught in Setswana... ”. (HF1, HF2, HF3, HF4).*

The quotes above indicate that HODs are aware that the two languages used at Preschool and Standard One disturbed the smooth transition and could affect learners' progress.

Despite the discrepancy in transition, HODs reported that there is continuity in the topics covered in Preschool and Standard One classes. Again, learners would have acquired skills in pre reading and pre writing activities they learnt from Preschool and use them in Standard One. This suggests that HODs observed the discrepancy brought about by the use of English at Preschool and Setswana in Standard One. Again, HODs seem to be against the six-week orientation

programme at the beginning of Standard One as they believe it delays commencement and completion of the Standard One programme. It was gathered from the majority of HOD's except three that transition from Preschool to Standard One is not a smooth one due to the two different languages used at Preschool and Standard One. As a result, the use of two different languages brews other problems that impact negatively on the learners' development.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the study indicated that transition from Preschool to Standard One in Botswana public primary schools is not smooth. One of the major contributory factors to this problem is the languages of instruction used at Preschool which is English and home languages and a switch to Setswana at Standard One. All the languages learners used at Preschool are not used at Standard One level. Learners have to drop them immediately they enter into Standard One classes. The reason for such an abrupt exit is that the language of instruction at Standard One is Setswana and there is a ready-made programme that learners have to go through to master Setswana. Teachers showed their frustration by arguing that when learners are spoken to in Setswana, they respond in English because they are used to speaking English and home languages at Preschool and this delayed their acquisition of Setswana. When learners talk to their teachers in English, it is regarded as a problem because in Standard One there is a policy that learners should be taught in Setswana and there is a Breakthrough to Setswana programme that supports and nurtures the use of Setswana. In this regard, teachers have a mandate to fulfill, they have to make sure that learners acquire Setswana. Therefore, when learners speak in English, it only frustrates the teachers' efforts to help learners acquire Setswana and learners have to be reprimanded many times on something they do not clearly understand. Learners seem not to understand why they have to suddenly switch to a language they do not understand. Learners also get frustrated by discarding their home languages because all of a sudden they are not supposed to be used in the classrooms. In this regard, weaning them from the languages of instruction from Preschool is done in an abrupt manner and this impacts negatively on learners' self-esteem.

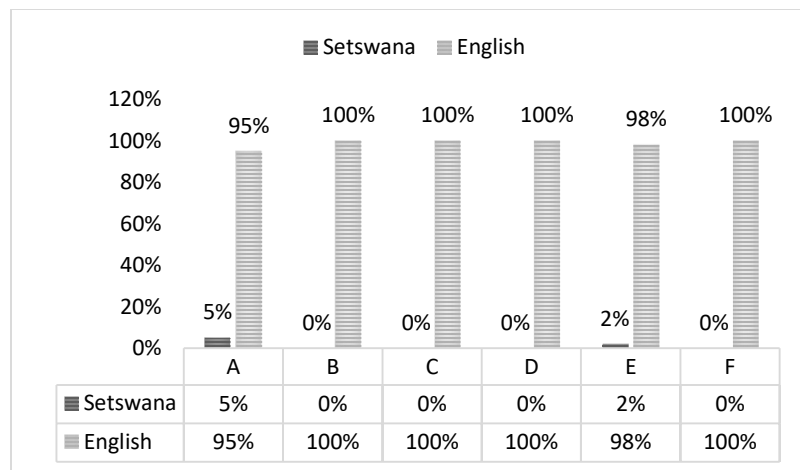
Secondly, teachers argued that learners perform poorly in all subjects because they still have to understand the structure of Setswana and some do not break through to Setswana despite the programme in place that introduces them to Setswana language. According to the teachers, learners who have been hyperactive, who have been speaking confidently and those who were enthusiastic to learn become silent and lose confidence in learning because all of a sudden they are unable to understand, they cannot speak, they cannot write, they have to grapple to understand the structure of Setswana as well as the content. All of a sudden the language of instruction; Setswana, which they do not speak and understand has to be used across subjects and this contributes towards their poor academic performance.

The third contributory factor is that there is an immature exit from learners' home languages and English to Setswana only. At Preschool, English language and learners' home languages are nurtured, used and therefore, learners are able to sail through Preschool because the gap between home and school is closed by nurturing their home languages in school. This was confirmed by teachers of Standard One who argued that transition at Standard One is complicated by the fact that at Standard One, there are no teacher aides in the classrooms to assist with

translation or interpretation of concepts in learners' home languages. Most learners do not speak and understand Setswana and therefore an interpreter is necessary. Teacher aides are only heard of at Preschool level but not in Standard One. Although learners switch to another language which they do not speak at home and such a language is introduced as a language of instruction for all subjects without any input from teacher aides, it makes learning and teaching a nightmare for learners and teachers. Consequently, it was in Standard One classrooms where school dropouts were recorded due to different teaching styles as well as lack of understanding the language of instruction. Baker (2011) argued that the use of home languages in the classrooms eased transition into the mainstream, hence, a sudden drift to Setswana only in Standard One creates problems.

Due to the use of different languages at Preschool and Standard One levels, transition has been difficult and findings revealed that there was tension between teachers of Preschool and Standard One because of the languages of instruction used at both levels. Teachers at Preschool introduced the ECE programme in English and learners' home languages because the materials are printed in English. Teachers at Standard One introduced learning at this level in Setswana and take learners through the Breakthrough to Setswana programme. Teachers at Standard One follow this route because the Language-in-Education Policy prescribes that learners should be taught in Setswana at Standard One with a switch to English at Standard Two (Revised National Policy on Education, 1994). In this regard, teachers of Preschool and Standard One argued that Standard One should be taught in English if Preschool is taught in English because learners would then transit smoothly with English from Preschool to English in Standard One and English in Standard Two. The reasons advanced by teachers are that learners from Preschool use English and learners go to Standard One speaking and communicating in English and when Setswana is introduced, it causes confusion, learners respond in English when teachers talk to them in Setswana, they mix up words and therefore learners take time to understand the structures of the two languages. Teachers of Standard One see the use of English at Preschool as a drawback and therefore in some cases they negotiate with teachers of Preschool to teach learners in Setswana for smooth transition. However, the negotiation was not always possible because teachers of Preschool argued that Preschool learning materials are printed in English and most of the teachers prefer to teach in English instead of translating the materials to Setswana, which would be a double job. According to the teachers, this tension will forever exist until the MOESD comes out clearly on which language of instruction should be used at Preschool and why. Teachers at Preschool suggested that Setswana should be taught as a subject from Standard One for smooth transition. Below is a table that represents the views of teachers of Standard One regarding which language to use for smooth transition.

**Figure 1: Preferred language at Standard One according to Districts**



**Source: Data collection material (2021)**

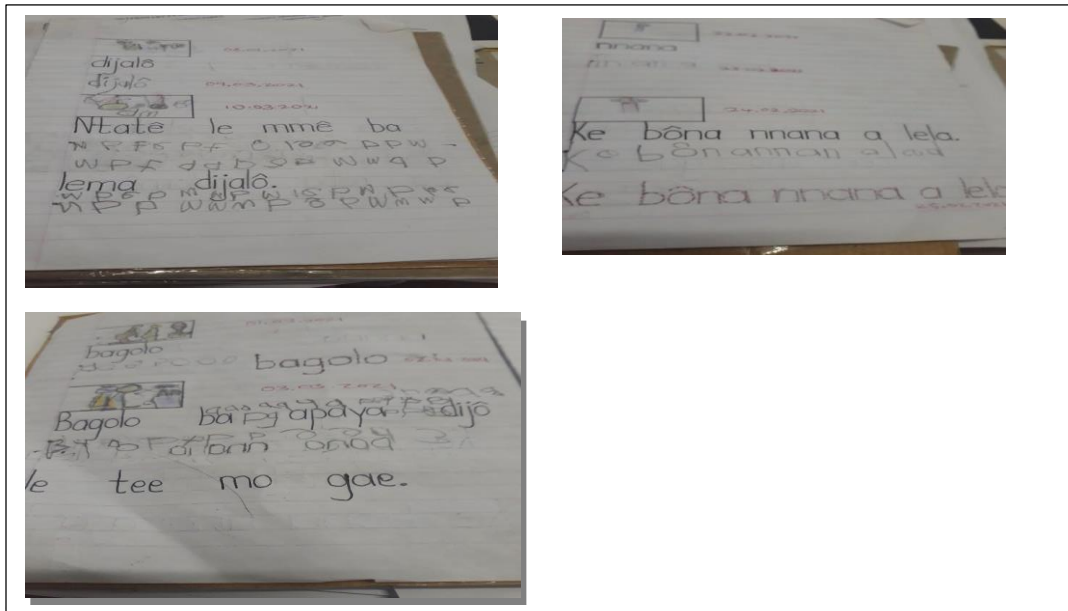
The above table indicates that despite the tension between teachers of Preschool and Standard One caused by the difficult transition due to languages of instruction, the tension can be resolved by teaching Standard One in English and learners taking up Setswana as a subject for smooth transition into Standard Two. Almost all the teachers preferred the use of English at Standard One except in a few instances where teachers argued that children should be taught in Setswana from Preschool to Standard One for smooth transition. While it is critical for MOESD to make informed decisions on which languages of instruction to use in the education system, there is an indication that transition at Preschool to Standard One was overlooked and therefore not planned for. It is a complex issue for learners to learn in English and home languages at Preschool for one year, learn in Setswana for one year at Standard One and then go back to learning in English again in Standard Two. Thorough language planning needs to be done for smooth transition between the levels of education.

The findings of the study also revealed that teachers of Standard One have high expectations from Preschool learners. Teachers of Standard One argued that they had high hopes that their work would be easier, transition would be smooth because they will be teaching learners who have been introduced to learning activities before. Although Preschool learning only acclimatizes learners with the school environment, teachers of Standard One expect learners who enroll into Standard One to know how to write, how to read fluently, how to colour and knowing mathematical concepts. According to teachers, some of the learners seem to be left behind and therefore they still need to be taught how to handle crayons because at Preschool they start colouring from left to right, while in Standard One they start colouring from right to left and colouring within boundaries. Therefore, teachers of Standard One believe that teachers of Preschool are not doing enough to enable smooth transition into Standard One. For example, some of the teachers said, “*learners come with bad posture and a wrong way of holding writing materials and it is very difficult to change them... (SA1 teacher) they cannot write their names... (SB3 teacher) number recognition is a problem, they just sing them... (SC4 teacher) preprimary teachers should take their work seriously as they are the very people who groom pupils...*” (SD2



teacher). These verbatim were common in most schools especially with teachers of Standard One. The examples below are some of the samples of Standard One learners work from Preschool who were still not able to write and therefore teachers of Standard One blamed teachers of Preschool that they did not do their work. Teachers of Standard One showed the researcher artifacts below to indicate that transition was not smooth, they struggled with teaching learners as if they have not been to Preschool.

**Figure 2: Learners' artifacts**



The above samples of learners' work demonstrate that learners who have been to Preschool for one school calendar year have not yet acquired the writing skill. Learners were supposed to copy the sentences provided but failed to do so. The work is unreadable. Although teachers debated about such learners, these could be clinical cases that need special attention. Therefore, special education teachers could assist in this regard. Teachers of Standard One argued that had these problems been taken care of at Preschool level, there would be no need for them to spend another six weeks with Standard One learners in Preschool activities at the beginning of the year as they regard it as a waste of time. Although it is not clear why teachers of Standard One expect children to know 'everything,' teachers of Preschool also argued that they cannot do all the work for teachers of Standard One. This is where the two levels could communicate and collaborate with the School Management on the implementation of the ECE programme so that the duo reach a common understanding of what is being taught at ECE and what is not. It seems teachers of Standard One know little about the activities that learners do at Preschool and hence, they expect learners to hit the ground running at Standard One level. These could be the outcome of early exit from the TBE programme (Baker, 2011). In this regard, some teachers suggested the extension of the ECE programme to two years instead of Standard One. However, this would require a lot of planning that could also affect teaching at Standard One. It could mean that a year is spent without Standard One learners as they are still groomed at Preschool level.

Another important factor that complicated smooth transition was learners who had not been to Preschool. According to teachers of Standard One, there are learners who have not been to Preschool but registered directly into Standard One. There are two types of such learners: those who do not attend Preschool by the choice of parents and those who do not because the number of Preschool learners is restricted either by limited classrooms or numbers. Teachers of Standard One argued that they are faced with a dilemma because they have two caliber of learners in the same classroom. Teachers argued that although they all have to be taken through the Breakthrough to Setswana programme, those who are fresh from home are a problem because they are not yet used to the school environment, they have to be familiarized first with the school rules while those who have been to Preschool are hyperactive. Teachers argued that the acute shortage of Preschool classes in primary schools contributes towards this problem because in most cases there will be one or two Preschool classes against three to five Standard One classes. It would be preferable to tally Preschool classes with Standard One classes so that all learners go through Preschool education. Further, there are parents who do not register their children for Preschool education because they believe they are still too young to go for boarding school and therefore wait until they are ready for Standard One. Teachers have no control over such decisions taken by parents because boarding schools have their own problems that sent children going back to their parents.

In essence, the language of instruction, lack of teacher aides in Standard One classes, learners who do not attend preschool and learners who are not yet developed make transition from Preschool into Standard One a problem. The TBE programme was supported only at Preschool level. The early exit from home languages affected negatively Standard One learning and teaching.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Transition from Preschool to Standard One has implications on decision makers to consider language planning at primary school. It calls for a review of the Language-in-Education Policy at lower levels of education. The discrepancy noted demands a closer look at the languages of instruction and basing on empirical evidence, make decisions on language planning that will benefit the learners, teachers and the schools in general. Further, there are learners who do not go through Preschool but are admitted directly into Standard One. These learners delay the learning and teaching of Standard One content because they have to be acclimatized with the school environment first. They cannot be ignored.

### **CONCLUSION**

Transition from Preschool to Standard One in Botswana primary schools has been found to be difficult by respondents at different levels. The main contributory factor being the languages of instruction used at Preschool and Standard One. The shift from English and learners' home languages to Setswana confuses learners, slows their academic progress and impacts negatively on their confidence. This could also brew other problems such as disengaging from school. Also, the exit from learners' home languages to Setswana cannot be overlooked, it is done haphazardly. At Preschool, learners are assisted by teacher aides with their home languages to close the gap between school and home and also to get grounded with content taught. This shift of languages to Setswana makes learning difficult. Further, learners who have not been to Preschool in Standard One complicate transition, for them there is no transition as they are directly from home. They

have to be oriented into a new environment and this delays progress because a ‘new orientation’ into Standard One is done to accommodate all learners, hence, there is repetition of material from Preschool. In this regard, there is an indication that transition was not planned for. Learners struggle with the introduction of the national language (Setswana) as a language of instruction and also the content. Also, teachers struggle to wean learners from communicating in English which they learnt at Preschool level. The fact that there are no teacher aides to assist in Standard One classrooms to translate content to their home languages makes learning a nightmare for both learners and teachers. In this regard, the TBE programmes run parallel with classroom practices in the ECE and Standard One classrooms.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, this study recommends that the Language-in-Education Policy should be reviewed in order consider language planning for ECE learning and explicitly state with valid reasons which language/s of instruction should be used to address the realities of the Preschool and Standard One classrooms. Secondly, the study recommends the employment of teacher aides for Standard One learning to facilitate learning and teaching. Their presence in the classrooms enables learning to take place. Third, the study recommends that all children should go through Preschool education before they can be registered for Standard One. This will put all learners at Standard One at the same level. Lastly, the study recommends that more Preschool classrooms should be built by the government so that all learners could be registered for preschooling before they can start formal schooling. Currently, there was a shortage of Preschool classrooms to increase the number of Preschool learners.

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