

State Of Affairs In Early Childhood Development: Are We Getting There? A Case of Bulilima District Schools

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Abstract: *The study sought to establish the status quo in the implementation of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) curriculum in Bulilima district of Zimbabwe. Focus was mostly on the availability of infrastructure, teaching learning materials and appropriate ECD staff. A mixed methodology approach was adopted in the form of a case study. The study was done in three schools with nine ECD teachers, three school heads and six parents. The schools were conveniently sampled considering their geographical location. The respondents were purposively sampled so as to get data rich responses. The study established that all the schools had ECD classrooms. However, they did not meet the stipulated requirements. It was also found out that schools were lagging behind in terms of sanitation facilities and staffing. The study recommends that more parental involvement must be entrenched in the schools so as to improve on infrastructure.*

Key words: *Early Childhood Development, Curriculum, Play, Parental Involvement*

I. Introduction

It has been noted that ECD is an international programme which aims at developing children from an early age in an effort to catch them young. According to Pence (2004) ECD has been in existence since time immemorial in the international context. Pence (2004) indicated in his researcher that ECD has been in existence dating back in the 1820s when it was known as the infant school. With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child in 1989, the period of 1990 marked the changes for children and ECD internationally and education was declared a fundamental right for every child. Pence (2004) track the existence of childhood to March 1990 where the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was held in Jomtien, Thailand. At the conference the importance of early childhood development was underscored as a crucial part of basic education. For many years ECD had been the invisible child in the education fraternity. Through ECD at Jomtien Conference, the rapid ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) and the World Summit for children held in New York in September 1990, the early years began to move out from the shadows to a place of recognition on its own right on international stage.

Ten years later, an Education for All follow up conference to Jomtien took place in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. At the Dakar World Education Forum, the profile of ECD was further enhanced as the delegates committed themselves to a number of goals. The first goal was to expand and improve early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO, 2000). Since then, a significant number of researches have been carried out internationally and findings have indicated that ECD programmes are of paramount importance. ECD programmes are seen as transforming the development of children in all aspects of their lives (Young, 2002). According to Young (2002) ECD programmes benefited the poor and disadvantaged children and families since it has the potency to fight poverty and its educational implications in developing countries. Wylie, Hodgen, Hopkins and Vaughan (2009) argue that high quality ECD centres provide lasting benefits for the participants regardless of their family backgrounds.

Wylie et al (2009) are also of the notion that the period of ECD has a strong and positive impact on further development and children's learning in later stages. Their studies reveal that children who go through ECD continue to benefit from their attendance later. In order to curb wastages in the education system, ECD has been touted in research studies as lessening the potency to drop out of school and it has also been found that grade repetition on primary education is reduced due to attendance in ECD education. These findings were replicated in the Plan Bangladesh, among others increase in retention rates up to the terminal grade. There is also reduction in educational expenditure as there is little or no need for remedial action for the learners as these are minimized through the ECD programmes (UNESCO, 1996). According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), ECD is a long term plan for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by developing a better skilled and more resilient population. Furthermore, quality early childhood education improves the effectiveness and cost efficiency of primary schooling by creating school readiness which leads to greater success. According to Young (2002) this is an important step towards universal primary education. Significance of early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world in the past few years. This situation is complementary with research results on long term effects of early education to later life.

The main purpose to link early childhood development education with primary education is to ensure that there is a smooth transition for children from one level to another (UNESCO, 1996). This entails that ECD is a bridging gap between infancy and primary schooling. ECD is further designed to stimulate children's interest in learning, to prepare them for further stages in educational processes. That is to ensure that certain basic skills are mastered and to do so in accordance with the child's mental and physical development. This is necessary in order to reduce failures in academic and social achievement as well as to help children to adjust to the environment and demands of their future learning institutions. ECD also ensures that certain basic skills are mastered before the learner is in primary school. Thus the ECD programme is of paramount importance in the lives of developing children. It is against this background that the researcher intended to find out the factors affecting the implementation of the ECD curriculum.

Zimbabwe adopted the CRC (1989) in September 1990 which states in article 28 that every child has a right to education and the state has a duty to ensure that primary education is provided on free basis. In addition the Government of Zimbabwe also adopted the MDGs. Goal number two of the MDGs was to achieve universal primary education by year 2015. The underlying factor was that the provision of early childhood education was on unequal basis. Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) (1999) reports that prior to independence some children mainly in those from privileged societies in urban areas had access to organised and development programmes whereas the rural communities were not provided for. The provision for EC programmes in rural areas was realised after Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980. Hence Zimbabwe made strides towards implementing the ECD programme by introducing ECD in its education system through the then Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. This was also an effort by the Zimbabwean Government and the Ministry of Education to implement the 1999 CIET recommendations, which recommended education for all.

Ministry of Education, Sport Arts and Culture (MOESAC) (2004) stipulates that ECD programme was to be incorporated in all Zimbabwe's primary schools with effect from the year 2005. This was to ensure the programme was more accessible to all children in the age range 3-5 years. Prior, the programme was only accessible to children from the elite backgrounds. Nziramasanga (1999:264), "findings state that since 1980 there has been a great interest in expanding the provision and providers of early childhood education and care but policies and strategies to access provision have been limited. This is an indication that ECD, which was formerly known as Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC), has been in existence since time immemorial.

However, despite the positive implications of the ECD programme its implementation has not been congruent; it differed from place to place. Implementation has been greatly affected by numerous factors. The Government of Zimbabwe came up with a policy on the regulations and guidelines on the implementation of the ECD programme in year 2005 to ensure uniformity in the implementation of the programme. Thus the 'Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005' was put into effect which up to date has not been fully adhered to by providers or implementers of the curriculum. Furthermore, year 2017 saw the birth of a new era in the education system in Zimbabwe, the introduction of the updated curriculum. A study on early childhood education carried out by Bredenkamp and Copple (2009) revealed that poverty, malnutrition and lack of proper interaction in early childhood can exert large costs on individuals, communities and the society at large. This is an indication that some factors that which affect ECD would have a negative impact on the developing child and the curriculum implementers. Hence the implementation would be negatively affected. Research carried out by Mohiuddin (2008) revealed that challenges continue to bedevil the implementation of the ECD curriculum. Therefore, there is need to have more literature on such factors. It is against this background that the researcher intended to find out the factors affecting the ECD curriculum implementation.

Zimbabwe considers access to high quality and relevant education to all children to be both a basic right and the foundation that underpins the cultural, social, economic and democratic growth of our nation.

According to Nhaka Foundation (2017) the education sector still face the challenge of a curriculum that that does not match the country's developmental needs. Thus, Zimbabwe has reviewed its curriculum to produce a well-grounded learner capable of contributing meaningfully to the development of the country while leading a fulfilling and happy life. Hence, year 2017 saw the introduction of the updated curriculum in the education sector. It is in this regard that the researcher was propelled to investigate factors affecting the implementation of the ECD curriculum.

It is of particular interest that since the introduction of the ECD programme in Zimbabwe some centres and schools have not fully implemented the curriculum in Bulilima District. This has been a major concern to various stakeholders in the education fraternity namely, the learners, parents, teachers school heads, education officers and some Non-Governmental Organizations concerned with the children's rights, to highlight just a few. Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) allude to that challenges continue to bedevil the ECD programme. Current trends in ECD indicate some gaping disparities among ECD centres. Hence this study seeks to unearth the causes of this drawback in this crucial stage of every child's life.

The rationale behind the implementation of the ECD programme globally is a clear and noble idea. The children going through the programme would become the drivers of the economy in the next few years of their lives. Assessing the benefits and challenges of ECD in schools is a worthwhile undertaking so as to ascertain the effects and impediments of the ECD programme. While following studies on the efficacy of ECD education have been carried out elsewhere, further studies need to be undertaken in Zimbabwe primary schools taking into cognisance that Zimbabwe has just, a year ago launched the updated curriculum. The study sought to establish the status quo in the implementation of the ECD curriculum in Mabonabala cluster.

II. Major Research Question

What is the state of affairs in the implementation of the ECD curriculum?

SUB QUESTIONS

- Is there relevant and adequate infrastructure in schools?
- Are there relevant and adequate resources in schools?
- Are there appropriately qualified personnel in schools?
- Is there effective parental or community involvement in ECD programmes?

III. Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on Tyler's objectives model. Keating (2006) alludes to that Tyler's model is sometimes called the objectives model and it is the basis for most common models in curriculum design, development and evaluation. Tyler's model is comprised of four major parts. Thus, defining the objectives of the learning experience, identifying learning activities for meeting the defined objectives, organizing the learning activities for attaining the defined objectives and evaluating as well as assessing the learning experiences. According to Keating (2006) the objectives of a curriculum must be relevant to the field of study and to the overall curriculum. Tyler's model obtain the curriculum objectives from three sources namely, the learner, the society and the subject matter. This entails that the input of the learners, the community and the subject matter is very crucial in curriculum designing and development. Tyler believes that a curriculum that does not address the needs of the learners, the community and the subject matter will not be the best curriculum. The second part of the Tyler's model involves the identification of learning activities that will allow learners to meet identified objectives. To emphasise the importance of identifying learning activities that meet the defined objectives, Tyler states that the important thing is for students to discover content that is useful and meaningful to them (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Tyler is a strong supporter of the child centred approach to learning. Overall, Tyler's model is designed to measure the degree to which pre-defined objectives and goals have been attained. In addition, the model focuses primarily on the product rather than on the process for achieving the goals and objectives of the curriculum, that is, it is product focused. According to Langenbach and Neskara cited in Ntumi (2016) the early childhood curriculum is a product of both long range and short term planning. Many programmes start with a master plan that covers a sizeable period, for instance a year and is then filled in with details for shorter segments of time. In other words, the curriculum of young children is a product the interests of the children. This means the spontaneously and flexibility are the hallmarks of planning as far as ECD curriculum is concerned. The ECD curriculum has to be integrally related to several prominent factors; programme philosophy, goals, objectives and evaluation. Thus activities should be evaluated on an ongoing basis, returning to the starting point, goals and objectives being reassessed and adjusted as needed, starting a new cycle.

IV. Teaching and learning resources

For effective teaching and learning to take place there is need for proper and efficient teaching-learning materials. Young (2002) alludes to that instructional material is very vital in learning and the intended programme cannot be easily implemented without them. This implies that without resource materials and facilities a teacher may not be able to achieve the objectives that he would like the learners to attain. Mkandawire (2010) points out that teaching and learning resource are a challenge to curriculum implementation. Mkandawire (2010) alludes to that there is limited procurement and supply of these resources in schools, thereby adversely affecting the effective implementation of the curriculum. ECD curriculum is play oriented which was advocated by Montessori. ECD children learn through play and their play is more cognitively mature in the presence of relevant materials and peers (Mayesky, 2007). Santrock (2009) further postulates that a child development curriculum is grounded in Piaget's (1970) persuasive rationale for the learning value of children's play and the child initiated activities. This entails that play stimulates children's interest to learn. Hence, teaching and learning material should seek to promote that in learners. Instructional materials and equipment that are in short supply or which may not be available at all have a negative impact on ECD teaching and learning process as well as the holistical development of children. As such, in the absence of teaching -learning materials, the teaching and learning process will be hampered. The Zimbabwe Government under its arm, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education introduced a new curriculum in the beginning of year 2017 and its implementation was met with a lot of challenges and drawbacks. The Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) chief executive officer, cited in the Chronicle 17 January (2017) was quoted as saying,

Our first challenge is that there are no resources to support the implementation of the new curriculum. Most teachers do not have the copies of the syllabi as there is no funding to facilitate the production of the copies

This entails that the implementation of a curriculum cannot be effectively executed if relevant resources such as teaching and learning materials are not put into place. Agere (2018) reports in the Sunday Mail that some rural schools are not ready to adapt to the new curriculum and the Government should equip the learning facilities with adequate resources if the programme is to benefit rural learners. This entails that some rural schools are hit hard by the unavailability and inadequate resources to implement the updated curriculum thereby creating a vast difference and gap between ECD centres in urban set ups and their counterparts in rural settings. Instructional materials and equipment are all in short supply or may not be available at all. Materials such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools are not available in the majority of ECD centres. Moreover, there is non-availability of electricity or any source of power to facilitate the teaching of learning areas such as the ICT and also to enable learners to utilize different ICT tools in various learning areas. Without an overhaul, rural schools will only be able to implement a fraction of the updated ECD curriculum.

Teaching materials is a generic term used to describe the resources teachers use to deliver instruction. Teaching materials can support student learning and increase student success (NAEYC, 2009). Ideally the teaching materials will be tailored to the content in which they are being used, to the learners in whose class they are being used and the teacher. Popular materials and resources for ECD include picture books, art supplies, puzzles, games, blocks, dominos, and technological devices amongst others. However the situation prevailing on the ground in most ECD centres, particularly in rural Bulilima is lack of teaching and learning materials. This, therefore negatively affects the effective implementation of the ECD curriculum. The majority of schools are incapacitated to procure adequate and relevant materials for ECD. Hence, the learners share the little materials provided. In this regard, some learners never get a chance to interact with any learning materials such as blocks, puzzles, dominos, to mention just a few. One of philosophical ideas of Pestalozzi cited in Santrock (2009) is that learning of young children is tied to concrete experience. This entails that the provision of concrete materials will facilitate the learning process for ECD children and as such the curriculum implementation will be highly achieved. Furthermore, Pestalozzi also stressed individual differences among learners. Hence, inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials is a great hindrance to the development of children as individuals. In this regard, there is a great need for parental involvement in these disadvantaged communities so that they engage in projects so as to provide labour and improvise teaching materials such as play materials.

The curriculum for ECD stresses the importance of learners understanding the foundations of their field before they develop and use quality teaching and instruction programmes. Piaget cited in Morrison (2011) asserts that young children are lone scientists. Therefore, the provision of adequate and relevant materials will enable the learners to explore and discover knowledge as they manipulate and interact within their learning environment. Thus, a prepared and conducive environment is of paramount importance in ECD settings. Montessori cited in Bruce, Meggitt and Greiner (2010) advocates for a prepared environment with developmental appropriate materials. A prepared environment will in turn lead to a positive implementation of the curriculum.

Additionally, Vygotsky cited in Santrock (2009) in his socio-cultural theory argues that young children learn and acquire knowledge through interaction in the social context. This entails that as children learn the playful way, which is one of Montessori's ideas, they construct knowledge through interacting with play materials and peers. Hence, materials play a significant role in the effective implementation of the ECD curriculum. .

According to Goodman and Brand (2009) no meaningful teaching and learning can take place without the provision of adequate resource materials. This also implies to curriculum implementation as well. This means that for the officially designed curriculum to be fully implemented as planned, the Government or the Ministry of Education should supply schools with adequate resource materials such as textbooks, teaching aids and stationery in order to enable teachers and learners to play their role satisfactorily in the curriculum implementation process. Ntumi (2016) maintains that the central government needs to provide physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries and sports fields in order to create an enabling environment in which the implementation can take place. The availability and quality of resource materials and the availability of appropriate facilities has a great influence on curriculum implementation.

V. Parental Involvement

There is need for a good co-relation between the home and school. This can only be done if the school and the parents work together. Thus, we expect parental involvement in their children's education as it has a direct bearing on their children's performance (Webb et al., 2015). Parental involvement in ECD programmes is one of the crucial aspects which lead to its success. Kirrian, (2012) says that if both parents and classroom practitioners understand and value each other's contribution, it will lead to the successful implementation of the programmes. It is in this regard that parental involvement is a crucial component in ECD programmes. Parents engage in income generating projects such as poultry rearing, nutrition garden, piggery and toy making, to mention only a few. Thus, the produce and profits from the projects will be channeled towards the improvement and developing of ECD centres. The parents, through their representatives, the School Development Committee (SDC) improve the infrastructure and facilities in schools. Director's Circular 12 (2005) states that the role of SDC is to develop and promote the ECD programmes by contributing towards the construction and furnishing of centres and classrooms. Hence, it is the mandate of communities to ensure that the ECD centres have adequate and relevant infrastructure and facilities such as the classrooms, sanitation facilities, play centre and play materials, just to highlight a few. Positive parental involvement leads to positive curriculum implementation.

Parents have a crucial role to play to ensure early childhood development in their children. Involved parents can make a positive and lasting impact on their children's learning ability. Spreeuwenberg (2015) asserts that children who are properly stimulated from birth to age five by their parents tend to perform better than other children in the long run. What this entails is that these children are more likely to complete their schooling, perform better academically and lead healthier and more productive lives as adults. On the ground this stimulation takes the form of being ready to attending pre-school and having parents who are aware of the school curriculum. Spreeuwenberg (2015) postulates that during the first five years of life, the brain's synaptic networks are still in the process of forming. This is the time when children's development is particularly receptive to human contact. How parents interact with their children and engage them in cognitive, social and emotional developmental activities in these years defines their future selves. Parental involvement in ECD education can extend the experience that a child has inside the classroom to actual activities that happen at home. Parents who are in tune with the ECD curriculum and keep themselves updated with what is happening in their children's learning are better able to establish a connection between home and school. This in turn leads to the effective implementation of the ECD curriculum.

VI. Appropriately Qualified Staff

Lack of appropriately qualified teachers is a hindrance to the effective implementation of a programme or curriculum. One of the guidelines of the Statutory Instrument 106 (2005) on the implementation of ECD is that ECD classes shall be manned by appropriately qualified staff. This was in an effort to ensure that the programme is implemented by personnel who are knowledgeable in ECD matters. Hence, in this essence trained and well informed teachers are of paramount importance in curriculum implementation. Arthur and Athanasius (2017) allude to that when teachers and facilitators of the curriculum do not have the required skill level to teach correctly in accordance with the growing technology, then the students cannot learn. This therefore renders the curriculum useless.

The quality and quantity of teaching staff to meet the expectations of the learners and the society is of great importance in curriculum implementation. A sufficient supply of appropriately qualified personnel is therefore needed if the implementation of the curriculum is to be effective. Mkandawire (2010) maintains that

the quality of education is as good as the quality of the teachers. What it means therefore, is that the quality of the teacher will determine the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

Teachers who have expertise knowledge on how young children learn and develop are equipped with relevant skills and effective ways of teaching them. Moreover, it is the teacher who is in the classroom everyday with children. Gonzalez-Mena (2008) asserts that to a very large extent how teachers approach the education of young children depends on what they believe children are like and how they act and behave in life. Often, the curriculum for ECD is structured around some underlying assumptions about the nature of children. For instance, the idea that children learn actively by exploring their environment would result in a different type of early childhood curriculum than one based on the idea that children learn passively by being taught specific information and skills.

However, it must be said that many teachers themselves may lack the current knowledge and skills needed to provide high quality care and education to young children, at least in some components of the curriculum. Therefore, curriculum implementation is adversely affected. Thomas (2012) postulates that the teaching experience of teachers can also be problematic in the implementation of the ECD curriculum practically. It may also be maintained that teachers view their role in curriculum implementation as an autonomous one. That is they select and decide what to teach from the prescribed syllabus or curriculum. Since implementation takes place through the interaction of the learner and the planned learning opportunities, the role and influence of the teacher in the process is indisputable.

Furthermore, the teacher's past experiences have an impact on the curriculum implementation. Goodman and Brand (2009) are of the view that teachers are social beings and as they are coming from different backgrounds, they bring their past experiences into the classroom practice to influence the curriculum. Thus, teachers who are characterised as motivated, responsible and organized as well as open to new learning opportunities, are more likely to be high curriculum implementers compared to teachers described as unmotivated and not receptive to changes. Kern, Kruse and Roehring (2007) allude to that as teachers bring their past experiences into classroom settings; their perceptions regarding how young children learn and develop affect the quality of ECD curriculum implementation. This entails that the teachers' perception about teaching and learning are strongly influencing the implementation of the ECD curriculum. In this regard, if teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented, then the performance of ECD teachers in the real classroom settings is affected positively during implementation.

VII. Infrastructure

Relevant and adequate infrastructure is one key component vital in the implementation of ECD programme. Mohiuddin (2008) states that challenges observed after visiting primary schools as placement of inexperienced teachers, overcrowded classes with disproportional teacher -pupil ratio. Thus centres with inadequate infrastructure are at a dilemma in effectively implementing the curriculum.

Unavailability of school facilities and equipment hinders the implementation of curriculum. The fact the education sector is underfunded by the government in most developing countries means that the availability and quality of facilities in schools is affected negatively. According to Sitwe cited in Mkandawire (2010) most government schools in Zambia with the exception of the newly built, infrastructure is in a deplorable condition. Mkandawire (2010) alludes to that in certain instances, some schools have inadequate accommodation, which give rise to double or triple shift in order to give all eligible children an opportunity to learn. It is in this regard that infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the implementation of a curriculum. Therefore it is of paramount importance that the infrastructure such as the indoor play area, outdoor play area as well as the water and sanitation facilities in ECD centres meets the stipulated guidelines in the Statutory Instrument (SI) 106 (2005). According to the SI 106 (2005) the indoor play area shall be forty two square metres and the outdoor space shall be sufficient enough to allow at least five comma five square metres for each child. This is to ensure that ECD learners are provided with adequate space that will facilitate easy access to all play areas in the classroom without compromising the health of learners. Classrooms which do not meet the stipulated guidelines in-line with the centre's enrolment pose a risk to the children's health and safety and compromise the learning process. Thus, the learners are likely to triple over play materials as they move from play area to another due to inadequate space. According to Azzi-Lessing (2009) in education infrastructure provides basis for the rest. Once the deficiencies related to infrastructure occur, this may trigger other problems as well. A research by Ntumi (2016) indicates that one of the sources problems relating to pre-school curriculum implementation is facilities available in the schools. In most ECD centres classrooms are overcrowded and learners are made to share whatever little stock of material and furniture available. In such situations, teacher effectiveness is hampered and it becomes almost impossible for the teacher to render individual attention to learners. This is exacerbated by large numbers in classes. The learner-teacher ratio is very high in the majority of centres. In most ECD centres one teacher- learner ratio is 1:40. This is far above the stipulated ratio of 1:20 (SI 106, 2005). In this

essence, the learners' free movement is hindered and this hampers on their learning and development. In this aspect, effective implementation of the ECD curriculum is hindered.

VIII. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methodology in form of a case study design. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2010) the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics on an individual child, clique or a community. Hence, a case study design enabled the researchers to emphasise on the value of looking on variables in their natural setting where they are commonly found. For the purpose of this study, schools were selected using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a specific non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are easily available to participate in the study (Leedy & Omrod, 2010). Thus the schools were sampled according to their geographical location. Nine ECD teachers, three school heads and six parents were selected. Teachers were selected according to the classes they taught namely, an ECD "A" and "B" class teacher in the school. Parents were selected on the criterion that that have ECD children at the selected schools. Data were collected using questionnaires, observation and interviews.

Questionnaires for the heads of the schools, teachers and parents were designed. Leedy and Omrod (2010) defines a questionnaire as a series of carefully planned and appropriately worded questions or items on a specific subject where respondents can fill in answers themselves or select answers by putting a mark on the appropriate spaces provided. The questionnaire had both closed and open ended questions.

Interviews were also used to collect data in this study as they interviews allow the researcher to discover how individuals think and feel about a topic and why they hold certain opinions. Through the use of interviews, a high rate of response is usually achieved. Also, ambiguities can be clarified and incomplete answers followed up. Connaway and Powel (2010) allude that in order to understand other person's construction of reality; we should ask them and ask them in a way that allows them to tell us in sufficient depth and in their terms about the rich context which is the substance of their meaning. In this study an interview was conducted in an effort to seek clarification on some issues that emerged in observation and questionnaire responses. Interviews were conducted with the parents at a time most convenient to them. In an effort to uphold ethics, permission was sought from relevant offices and research participants. Thus, participation was both voluntary and invitational. Participants were also assured of confidentiality. In this study observation was also used to collect data. Observation was used as a supportive technique to complement data obtained from interviews and questionnaires. Field notes were recorded. Cohen et al (2010) state that field notes are the observer's records of what has been observed, descriptions of the individual's setting and what happened, recapulating the conversation and other interaction as completely as possible. Observation is a more natural way of collecting data. Thus, people can be observed as they express themselves in various situations and activities. Through observation, the researchers observed factors that hinder the effective implementation of the ECD curriculum.

IX. FINDINGS

Data collected were analysed in themes. These themes were Influence of Infrastructure on Curriculum Implementation, Materials and Resources, Appropriately qualified staff and Parental Involvement.

Influence of Infrastructure on Curriculum Implementation

The study sought to establish the influence of infrastructure on the implementation of the ECD curriculum. To this end observations were made to assess the infrastructure in schools such as the size of classrooms, ventilation, outdoor play centre, sanitation facilities such as toilets and wash basins in relation to the enrolment.

X. Classrooms

The size of ECD classrooms differed from school to school. The findings indicated that the classrooms did not meet the stipulated guidelines in the SI 106 (2005) which stipulates that the total indoor space shall be forty two square metres or the total space to allow for at least two comma two five square metres for each child. Table 1 shows the findings on classroom sizes.

Table 2: Classroom Sizes

Total indoor space	Number of classrooms	Percentage %
Less than forty two square metres	4	66.7%
Forty two square metres	2	33.3%
More than forty two square metres	0	0%
Total	6	100%

Findings indicate that 66.7% of the ECD classrooms were below the stipulated guidelines in the SI 106 (2005). Only 33.3% of the classrooms met the stipulated guidelines. As such, it was noted that size of classrooms hampered children's learning and development due to overcrowding. It was also noted that classrooms which were spacious in relation to the centre's enrolment enabled learners free movement as they moved from one play area to another. It was also observed that classrooms with inadequate space hindered the free choice of activities compared to where space was adequate. Further to note was that non-spacious classrooms posed a risk to children's health and safety. Learners were more likely to trip over furniture and play materials and get injured as a result. The researcher also observed that only one ECD centre had child sized furniture and the other two, learners had their feet dangling in the air. This therefore is detrimental to children's physical development. Montessori cited in Ornstein, Levine and Gutek (2011) advocated for child sized furniture. This contributes enormously to the children's physical development and it also enables children to be free.

XI. Sanitation Facilities

The ratio of toilets and wash basins to the number of children at the centre affect the curriculum implementation, either positively or negatively.

The study established that the toilets were inadequate in relation to the enrolment in all the centres. The SI 106 (2005) stipulates that the ratio of toilets shall be one squat hole or water closet to twelve learners. The researchers observed that all the centres did not meet the stipulated guidelines on this aspect. As such more time was spent during toilet time as learners had to queue for their turn to use the toilets. This adversely affected learners who were subjected to loose toilet training at their homes as they soiled themselves during the long waiting. On the other hand some learners were made to control their bowels thereby exposing them to strict toilet training. According to Slavin (2012) Freud asserts that children exposed to strict toilet training and get fixation develop retentive personality. Such individuals develop an obsession with organization or become stingy because they are used to withdrawing their bowels. Hence, in this vein such children are more likely to lack cooperation and sharing skills.

Table 4: Ratio of Wash Basins

School	Number of wash basins	Enrolment	Ratio
School A	1	84	1:84
School B	1	80	1: 80
School C	1	64	1: 64

Furthermore, the study established that the wash basins were inadequate in line with the enrolment in all the centres. It was observed that some learners did not wash their hands after using the toilet due to impatience of waiting in the queue for their turn. As such, in this vein children's health is highly compromised. Learners are mostly likely to suffer from diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery. Tassoni (2014) postulates that washing hands after using the toilet with running water is a good measure to eradicate diseases and promote health of children. It was observed that the teachers had challenges in maintaining order as well as assisting learners during toilet time due to higher learner-teacher ratio. The teacher had to assist learners to use the toilet especially ECD "A", thus the 3-4 year olds. At the same time ensure the washing of hands; hence some learners had to go without washing their hands unnoticed.

XII. Outdoor Play Area

The study established that all the centres had outdoor play areas that facilitated a child's physical growth through the development of gross and fine motor skills. Santrock (2004) asserts that as children climb up and down the ladders, get in and out of tyres as well as running around in the outdoor play centre, their physical competencies is enhanced. However, it was observed that centres lacked bulky of psychomotor equipment such as merry go round, ladders and swings. Ironically, this fostered the sharing and cooperation skills in learners as they waited for their turn. Furthermore, it was observed that the outdoor play area in all the centres for this study posed a risk to children's safety. The outdoor play areas were not fenced or protected with traditional barriers. This led to learners to wonder beyond the outdoor play area. According to Santer and Griffiths (2007) the outdoor play area should be fenced and gated. This is to ensure that learners do not sneak out unnoticed and get exposed to accidents and dangers of getting lost.

XIII. Materials and Resources

The research study also sought to answer the question on the availability of relevant and adequacy of teaching-learning materials and resources in schools. These include developmental appropriate play materials such as dolls, blocks, puzzles, picture books, ICT tools, to mention just a few. The study established that play

materials were inadequate compared with the enrolment in the centres. The respondents indicated that their centres were incapacitated to procure materials and resources to facilitate learning and holistic child development. The researchers observed that during free flow play children scrambled for the few play materials available in the indoor play areas. Montessori cited in Santer and Griffiths (2007) argues that ECD children should be exposed to a prepared environment. This entails that the environment should be conducive to children's learning with age appropriate, stimulating and adequate play materials. Provision of appealing and stimulating materials provoke and entice learners to manipulate, explore and construct own knowledge (Cherry, 2012). Hence, the play materials should be adequate so as to meet individual needs, interests and capabilities. In this essence, it was noted that inadequate materials adversely affected children's holistic development, thereby hampering the implementation of the curriculum.

Furthermore, the researchers investigated on the use of ICT tools in the teaching and learning process in ECD. The respondents indicated that they faced challenges in using ICT tools due to non-availability of the tools and source of power. It was observed that only non-functioning ICT tools were displayed in the ICT play area. This therefore, entails that learners are exposed to materials which are of no use. Santer and Griffiths (2007) posit that Montessori was against the idea of pretend play, rather she advocated for children to do the actual activity. For instance, the children should not pretend clay modeling but should do the actual modeling. As such, learners should not pretend to use ICT tools, rather they should practice on real and functioning computers. Respondents further indicated lack of power sources such as electricity to power ICT tools. Financial constraints hindered schools to procure own power sources such as solar panels and generators. It was further established that the teachers were computer illiterate. The teachers' competencies on the use of ICTs further exacerbated the non-use of ICT tools in the curriculum implementation. Therefore, this entails that lack of resources and relevant knowledge by teachers affects implementation of the curriculum adversely.

XIV. Appropriately qualified staff

The third objective of the research study was to establish the availability of appropriately qualified personnel to implement the ECD curriculum. The study established that the professional qualifications of ECD teachers and administrators in the schools for this study affected curriculum implementation negatively. The findings indicated that 33.3% of the ECD teachers did not have any professional qualifications and were hired on the basis of keeping ECD learners occupied. 50% of the ECD teachers were Para-professionals and the other 16.7% were holders of Diploma in Secondary Education. In this vein, it can be noted that the personnel manning ECD classes have little or no knowledge on ECD issues. According SI 106 (2005) ECD classes shall be manned by appropriately qualified personnel. This is to ensure that ECD classes are manned by highly skilled personnel with expertise knowledge and vast understanding of child development issues. Thus, one will be in a position to understand ECD pedagogy and developmental appropriate activities in line with the children's diverse needs and interests. Follari (2010) argues that teacher's pedagogy, classroom management strategies and interactions with students at classroom level can determine how much is learned. However, in this essence it can be significantly noted that the SI does not specifically state the exact qualification of the ECD teachers. Hence, these classes are manned by personnel with varied professional qualifications such as para-professionals, Diploma in Secondary Education and those without any professional qualifications.

Furthermore, the study established that the administrators' professional qualification were not in line with ECD. The results indicated that 66.7 % of the TICs held Diploma in Education (Primary) and 33.3% of them held a Diploma in Secondary Education. 100% of the school Heads were holders of Bachelor of Education Degree in Primary Education. Taking into cognisance the findings, it can be noted that none of the administrators had expert knowledge in ECD issues. In this regard, it can be noted that lack of expert knowledge in ECD issues is a hindrance to the implementation of the curriculum. For instance, the ECD teachers indicated that the administrators had higher expectations such as formal reading and writing in ECD learners. Contrary, the ECD curriculum is play based. As such play has an important role in the child's learning and development (Sawyer, 2010). In the same vein, Child Health (2006) states that play reinforce the child's growth and development. Play positively facilitates positive development in the physical, emotional, cognitive, social and moral domains. The Zimbabwe ECD curriculum also adopted the play based philosophy. SI106 (2005) stipulates that no instruction shall be in formal reading, writing or number work. The right to play is also recognised for all children in the CRC (1989).

XV. Parental Involvement

One of the study's objectives was to establish the effectiveness of parental involvement in curriculum implementation. Respondents indicated that there is minimal parental involvement. In one the schools it was established that the school had to hire manpower to construct the ECD outdoor play centre due to lack of parental involvement. Kirrian (2012) asserts that parental involvement is vital in the success of ECD centres. This entails that centres with a high rate of parental involvement are more likely to succeed in the

implementation of the curriculum compared to those with little parental involvement. The parents' concept of parental involvement was the payment of levies, which is also not executed fully. The results of the study indicated that all the schools for the study had slightly above 50% of parents paying levies for their children timeously and the other percentage failed to pay due to economic hardships. In this regard, centres are put in a dire situation when it comes to the procurement of resources and materials as well as the payment of the SDC hired staffs not on government payroll. Lack of financial stability negatively affects the implementation of the curriculum.

It was further established that communities are not knowledgeable on the benefits of ECD programmes, hence the negative attitude towards being involved. Interviews conducted with selected parents revealed that parents and communities at large are not well versed with the ECD curriculum and the holistic development of a child. Further to note was that the play oriented curriculum was looked down upon by the majority of the interviewees. No meaningful value was attached to the play based curriculum. Rather, the interviews indicated that they preferred their children to do formal reading and writing. Chittom (2012) proclaim that lack of practical approaches to inform the parents and lack of the Ministry of Education's funding and implementation initiatives further complicates the provision of ECD education. However, some interviewees acknowledged and appreciated some notable changes in their children who attend ECD. Some applauded skills acquired by their children such as tying shoe laces, buttoning shirts as well as language acquisition and development to mention just but a few.

XVI. Discussion on Findings

The study noted that inadequate infrastructure such as classrooms, sanitation facilities and outdoor play area is affecting the implementation of the ECD curriculum in schools. Lack of adequate and relevant infrastructure has a negative impact on curriculum implementation. Ntumi (2016) concurs when stating that one of the source problems relating to pre-school curriculum implementation is facilities available in the schools. Non-spacious classrooms affected the choice of methodologies and activities done by children. Due to overcrowding, learners' initiative skills were hampered and in turn negatively affecting learning. It was also noted that lack of infrastructure such as toilets and wash basins posed a risk on children's health. Santrock (2009) asserts that holistic development also entails good health of a child. The ECD curriculum aims at developing a child holistically. Therefore if some developmental domains are not catered for then development is negatively affected.

The study revealed that schools lacked adequate and relevant resources and materials. Schools lacked ICT tools, source of power, developmental appropriate play materials such as blocks, dolls, puzzles, picture books, to highlight only a few. Goodman and Brand (2009) allude that no meaningful learning can take place without the provision of adequate resources. In the same vein Ornstein (2011) propounds that Montessori believed that child's work is his or her play and this can only be achieved with the provision of concrete materials. According to Montessori children need to be exposed to self-corrective concrete play materials. Santrock (2009) argues that a child development curriculum is grounded in Piaget's (1970) persuasive rationale for the learning value of children's play and child initiated activities. As children manipulate and interact with concrete and real play materials they develop cognitively as well as socially. Freud cited in Follari (2011) views play as catharsis. This entails that as children learn the play-way, they release pent up emotions. Hence, taking into account that ECD curriculum is play oriented; it can be strongly argued that lack of play materials hampers learning.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there is lack of parental involvement in ECD programmes. The study noted that lack of parental involvement might be affecting learning in ECD Bulilima District. Tassoni (2014) proclaim that positive parental involvement is of paramount importance to the success of ECD programmes. Parental involvement entails initiating and implementing projects such as nutrition garden, toy making, providing labour in the construction of the outdoor play centre, payment of levies which can be channeled towards the improvement of infrastructure and purchasing of furniture and other play materials. Kirrian (2012) asserts that parents who are in tune with the ECD curriculum and keep themselves updated with the learning and development of their child play a crucial role in the success of teaching and learning. This entails that these children are most likely to complete their schooling, perform better academically and lead healthier and more productive lives. However, the situation prevailing on the ground is that there is minimal parental involvement in the schools studied. Therefore, this has a negative impact on ECD learning.

Furthermore, the administrators lacked sound background on young children's development and learning. Gonzalez-Mena (2008) is of the notion that to a very large extent how we approach the education of young children depends on what we believe children are like and how they act and behave in life. It is therefore of paramount importance that ECD administrators have sound knowledge on ECD curriculum and developmental appropriate practices.

It was also established that teachers were not involved in decision making concerning curriculum development yet they are the ones implementing it. Arthur and Athanasius (2017) are of the view that when teachers are not actively involved in the planning of the curriculum, a problem builds up as it is these teachers that interact with learners, know what they need and in what proportion and actually make use of the curriculum. Non-involvement of teachers in curriculum planning and decision making might be another impediment in the implementation of the curriculum.

The research also established that policies and guidelines on the implementation of the curriculum were adhered to only to a fraction. This is exacerbated by lack of relevant skills and expertise knowledge on ECD issues by both the school administrators and the ECD teachers. Therefore, this might be another factor the negatively affects the implementation of the ECD curriculum.

Recommendations of the study

On the basis of the findings gathered in the study, the researchers recommend for cross sectorial convergence and coordination for ECD curriculum to be effectively implemented. Each sector could plan for ECD within its mandate and contribute to the coordinated plan. It is also imperative for the responsibility of ECD to be allocated to a higher administrative level that will ensure uniformity in implementing the curriculum. While planning and monitoring of the curriculum needs to be coordinated, implementation must be sector specific with the required expertise. In-service training of staff is also recommended so as to equip them with relevant knowledge on ECD issues. To produce learners who will fit well in the ever-changing world of technology, the teachers need to be computer literate, and hence workshops and in-service training can be used as mitigation strategies. The study also recommends the electrification of all schools in order to facilitate the use of ICT tools in the curriculum implementation.

It is also recommended for quality control check prior to the hiring and deployment of teachers by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. This will facilitate identification of staffing needs in schools. Thus, this will ensure that ECD specialists are hired to man the ECD classes so as to avoid compromising the learning and development of learners. It is imperative to note that challenges are largely exacerbated by vertical administrative structures that tend to operate in isolation and lack of outcome-oriented as well as comprehensive planning of service delivery.

Outreach programmes for parent education and the demonstration of good ECD practice are imperative. These will equip communities at large and parents in particular on the benefits of ECD programmes as well as the importance of parental involvement to enhance success in ECD programmes.

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