



An Investigation on the Implementation of Early Childhood Education: A Case Study of Selected Schools in Petauke District

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the implementation of early childhood education among schools in Petauke District. Despite a high enrolment rate, the children entering primary school have low levels of reading and writing skills. The study considered the benefits of ECE; the associated challenges and alternative approaches for effective implementation. Using the mixed research design, the study drew a sample of 90 respondents from 10 schools which included teachers, school administrators and parents. Data was collected by means of semi-structured questionnaires, an interview guide and focus group discussions. A combination of statistical descriptive analysis and thematic analysis was adequate for data analysis. The study found that ECE was beneficial for development of reading and writing skills; acquisition of knowledge and continuity of education to higher levels. The major challenges in ECE implementation were poor teachers' understanding of ECE curriculum; negative attitude of parents towards ECE; poor water and sanitation; lack of ECE trained staff; poor infrastructure for ECE centres; and lack of teaching and learning materials. The alternative measures put in place included: parental sensitization and school feeding program. The overall conclusion is that the challenges and inadequacies faced by primary schools to implement ECE arise from the gaps in policy implementation and extend to institutional and domestic factors. The study contributes to the understanding that the rolling out of ECE in rural areas lags behind and that much can be done by involving the local communities and utilising available materials.

Keywords:

Early Childhood Education; implementation, benefits and challenges

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Zambian Ministry of Education (1996) policy document provides a definition of early childhood education as the provision of education to children of the ages three to six years in a formal and organised manner. This level of education falls within the framework of education theory concerned with the provision of education to children during their early years of life up to the time they attain six years of age. The focus is on establishing and providing formal education at the earliest possible age.

Child development is a process that can be enhanced by the provision of quality education which is possible through early childhood education. Children with a background of early

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childhood education are more likely to complete their secondary education and pursue higher education, having mastered skills in vast areas of academics and personal development such as language, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, problem solving, reasoning and better social skills. These skills position the learners to achieve greater success than their counterparts without early childhood education. During the course of education, children with early childhood education are unlikely to repeat grades and drop out of school (Bertram et al 2002).

Early childhood education is not a new phenomenon in Zambia, drawing from 1957 when regulation was passed to allow for the registration of such schools. Since 1977, early childhood education has been recognised to be a part of the Zambian education system and was up to 1992 under the Ministry of Local Government with various other companies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and local community providers taking the lead. The private sector was the main provider of early childhood education through nursery schools. Liberalisation

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still allowed for the private sector to provide education beyond nursery school level (MOE 1996).

Since 1997, the Ministry of Education has taken full control of the ECE; training teachers; monitoring ECE institutions and providing appropriate guidelines. The ministry focused on growing the provision of ECE in rural areas and among vulnerable urban groups where access was largely constrained. This required the incorporation of other ministries, local authorities, NGO, FBOs, companies, local communities, families and individuals to provide ECE in areas of various jurisdiction. This led to an increase in the numbers of learners, teachers and institutions under ECE. This increased the access rate to 17 per cent of children eligible for ECE around the country. This still fell short of the entire number of children who could access ECE (OECD, 2006).

Eastern Province presents a particular area of interest for research. It is apparent that the private institutions are the major providers of ECE in Zambia. A few public schools have since 2014 started providing ECE. However, the programme has not been adopted by most primary schools in the district which creates a need to investigate the factors that describe the prevailing phenomenon. This is regardless of the fact that Eastern Province is amongst the provinces with the highest enrolments (11,546), according to MOGE, (2017). It is against this background that the study was conducted within Lusaka District.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2014, Zambia rolled out the provision of ECE in Government schools. The majority of eligible children in Zambia cannot access ECE and enrol into grade one inadequate reading and writing skills. The Eastern Province has a high enrolment at ECE, ranking third in the country. I The Ministry of Education is responsible for implementation of ECE with training of pre-school teachers, monitoring, curriculum formulation, design of materials and support for the development of policy guidelines. Despite having a strong ECE policy framework, the rates of access to such services remains extremely low in rural areas. There is a lapse in the literature that explain the reasons for the poor implementation of the ECE policy in local rural areas, particularly Nyamphande chiefdom hence the need to undertake this research.

OBJECTIVES

- i. To establish the benefits of implementing ECE in the Eastern Zone of Petauke District.
- ii. To determine the challenges associated with the implementation of ECE in selected schools of Eastern Zone of Petauke District.
- iii. To explore the alternatives that can be put in place to implement early childhood education

to the existing interventions in Eastern Zone of Petauke District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ECE emerged as a distinct education system in the 1800s. At the turn of the 19th Century, one influential scholar was Johann Pestalozzi who initiated the concept of ECE (Houston 1980). In the coming years, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel is known to have opened the first ever kindergarten in Germany in the year 1837. Both Froebel and Pestalozzi acclaimed that children were emotional beings needing to be harnessed to develop their individual senses, capabilities and interests through an organised curriculum that would relate well to children's experiences. Play was considered a very important activity in child development. In America, the first kindergarten was opened in 1855 by Mrs Carl Schurz of Watertown. Coming into the 21st Century, Maria Montessori was an influential medical practitioner who had great interest in how children learned. Although ECE started long before, most African countries did not adopt the practice until later in the 20th century. (Munyika, 2011).

Education is as part of the basic human rights and a fundamental human right at declared at the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien 1990) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1990). Through quality provision of education, many people have made better decisions and contributed to solving some of the world's problems as they participate in transformation of their communities. Thus nurturing young children through ECE allows for them to grow as healthy, alert and secure individuals, able to learn individually and in groups to develop into responsible and more productive citizens than they would have been without an education (Cornwell 2000). Rolnick and Grunewald, (2003) submit that significant investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) yields extraordinary returns that far exceeds the returns on most investments either private or public. Early child development refers to the combination of physical, mental, and social development in the early years of life—those dimensions that are commonly addressed by integrated programs of ECD (Young, 1997). Education has been widely recognized as a prerequisite to sound national development (Pramling, 2008). Through ECD, learners receive psychosocial support and health care. Children who have undergone ECD develop higher intelligence; better reasoning; better motor skills; can read and write better and have advanced speech abilities. At a higher level, children develop unwavering interest in education and reduces drop out chances, ensuring good progressing to higher levels (Barnett, 1995; Psacharopoulos, 1994). Wadsworth and Kuh (1997) and Hertzman, (2000) support the view that an adult's physical, social and mental health is highly the result of early childhood experiences and health. Infant malnutrition; low birthweight; early childhood infections and child negligence have been directly linked to

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adult diseases and conditions which make sufferers less productive.

Social capital explains how young children acquire essential skills for co-existence in social groups. It is postulated that children who have been through ECE acquire better behavioral characteristics such as cooperation, less aggression, team work, and following instructions. In adulthood, these characteristics are helpful in professional and social matters. (Schweinhart, et al, 1993). Coleman, (1990) argues that social capital can be regarded differently at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, it refers to informal institutional arrangements, trust, ethnic social networks, nonlegal market arrangements and other related phenomena (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993).

ECE is bound to yield significant economic benefits as the learners will grow to lead more productive lives. According to Myers, (1999) quality ECE prepares children to grow into leaders and citizens capable of contributing significantly to economic development. Similarly, Young & Enrique (2002:8) posit that ECE interventions can help many to escape the poverty web which is a cycle transmitted through generations. According to Van der Gaag (2002) investing in ECE is a way of building social capital, enhancing equity and progress while reducing poverty. In his economic theory on ECE, Heckman, (2010) proposes governments to intervene in ECE programs; to engage a wide variety of private and public stakeholders to help facilitate for resources to effectively manage the provision of ECE. The key is to replace ineffective ECE programs with high quality ones that also ease burden on government resources. Thus the engagement of economic entities in the private sector is important just as having community, religious, philanthropic and other institutions on board (Heckman 2011; World Vision, 2002; Young 2002; Myers, 1999).

Various countries across the globe have ECE systems and programs which according To UNESCO (2009) work to develop equitable educational provision for all children. In Kenya, a study by Kimosop, (2019) found that majority of pre-school teachers in the county were not well prepared in the implementation of early childhood education development curriculum in the country. Teachers are not involved when the KICD and MOE are preparing the curriculum for they are the key implementers. Further, government agencies did not provide the guidelines before the implementation of new curriculum for schools to prepare the necessary materials and facilities required and equip the teachers so that they do not use the previous syllabus.

In Zimbabwe, Mangwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2016) established that, while classroom teachers were adequately qualified to implement early childhood education, teachers-in-charge were not. Secondly, school heads received limited induction for the introduction and implementation of early childhood education.

In Ghana, Ntumi (2016) examined the challenges that were encountered in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum; exploring teaching methods employed by pre-schools teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The study found that pre-school teachers were faced with many challenges in implementing the early childhood curriculum. Notable among them are that most pre-school teachers do not understand the early childhood curriculum, pre-school teachers do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help them implement the Early childhood curriculum.

Zambia has since adopted ECE in its educational framework of which the 1996 Educating Our Future recognises the importance of ECE (MoE, 1996). Various challenges have impeded the successful implementation of ECE in Zambia due to a fragmented curriculum, lack of standards, lack of a monitoring and supervision framework and the exclusion of ECE from mainstream education system (Kammerman, 2006). Since the 2003-2007 Ministry of Education Strategic Plan, ECE has been incorporated as a part of the country's basic education system, allowing FBOs, local authorities, private enterprises, NGOs and individuals to engage in ECE. This has seen a mushrooming of ECE institutions owned by various stakeholders. In its early stages the ECE curriculum was not structured (UNESCO, 2006). Namonje, (2018) submits that ECCDE it was not until 2004 that the ECCDE Ministerial mandate shifted from the Ministry of Local Government and Housing to the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE). In 2011, the Government integrated early childhood education into the Zambian Education System. In 2013, the Ministry of General Education recruited 1000 early childhood teachers. In 2014 the first intake of pupils were enrolled in Government early childhood centres (Namonje, 2018).

Since 2014, the government has rolled out the ECE programme to public primary schools. The strategy is that the Ministry will provide professional services to pre-school education by: training teachers for pre-schools; developing curriculum materials for use in pre-schools, and monitoring standards at pre-schools. The Ministry will further collaborate with providers, partner ministries and others to develop policy guidelines for pre-school and early childhood education (MoGE, 2014; ZANEC, 2019). The major policies associated with ECE in Zambia include the National Child Policy (NCP); National Child Health Policy (NCHP); the National Policy on Education (NPE); Early Childhood Education Policy (ECEP); the School Health and Nutrition Policy (SHNP); the National Disability Policy (NDP); the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) and the National Nutrition Policy (NNP). The application of these policies will be important for the successful implementation of ECE in Zambia (Kasanda, 2006).

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METHOD AND DESIGN

The Mixed research design was used with qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach was used allow for the collection of data about the implementation of ECE in the study area of Western Zone schools within Petauke District. By the qualitative research design, data collection was focused on the perceptions, opinions, experiences and behaviours of the respondents (Hopkins, 2000; Thomas, 2003; Macqueen and Knussen, 2003).

FINDINGS

Benefits of Early Childhood Education

The study assessed what benefits were derived from ECE within the study area. Basing on the questionnaires, frequencies and percentages were derived to show proportions of responses on each variable assessed.

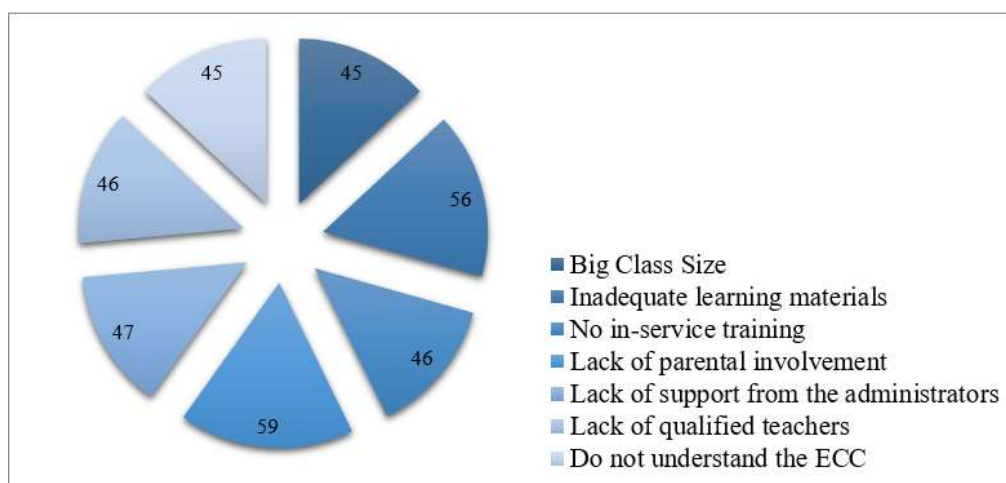
Table 6.1: Frequency Distribution on the Benefits of Early Childhood Education

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
Communication skills	9	13
Sense of team work	13	19
Socialization	10	44.2
Good habits	5	7.1
Good performance	11	15.7
Literacy skills	12	17.1
Cognitive development	10	44.2
TOTAL	70	100

Challenges Teachers Face in the Implementation of the Early Childhood Education

The study inquired to establish what challenges were faced in the implementation of ECE within the study area. Drawing

from the responses of 62 teachers who identified particular challenges (8 did not), the findings are represented in a figure.



Challenges faced by Government and Parents in Implementing ECE in Schools

The study obtained responses from the administrators and parents to establish the challenges faced by Government and

Parents in Implementing ECE in Schools. These findings are presented in a summarised table below.

Table 6.2: Challenges faced by Government and Parents in Implementing ECE in Schools

Challenges Faced by Government	Frequency	Percent	Data Bar
Transport to reach remote school	19	95	[Bar]
Deployment of qualified ECE teachers	18	90	[Bar]
Finances to construct suitable ECE centres	17	85	[Bar]
Provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials	14	70	[Bar]
Welfare of caregivers is not being addressed	12	60	[Bar]
Sensitization of communities about ECE provisions	9	45	[Bar]
Challenges Faced by Parents			
Daily provision of food	10	100	[Bar]
Unavailability of medical support at the clinic	9	90	[Bar]
Poverty in some homes	8	80	[Bar]
Long distances from homes/villages to ECE centres	7	70	[Bar]
Poor road network	6	60	[Bar]

The interviews and focus group discussions revealed further that the aspect of food was a significant one. In this regard one of the parents (PR4) said:

This results in some parents not going for farming, as one parent lamented:

“If we send our children to school every day, we shall have no one to work in the fields. We are old and rarely go to the fields. Unless the government provides transport so that our children can come home early, we cannot allow them to travel long distances alone and hungry.”

Another parent (PR2) noted that even the children were less willing to go to school:

“These children do not want to attend school, especially during bad weather.

They cry all the way if we escort them. When they go alone, they change direction or stay and play in the nearby places.”

A parent (PR7) said that the children could not attend school because of poor clothes:

“Our children do not have nice clothes to wear for going to school...they want the nice uniforms they admire of others. They want new clothes and uniforms which we cannot afford.”

Measures put in place to encourage parents to take their children to ECE Centres

The study inquired with the school administrators as to what measures they had employed to encourage participation of parents in taking their children to ECE.

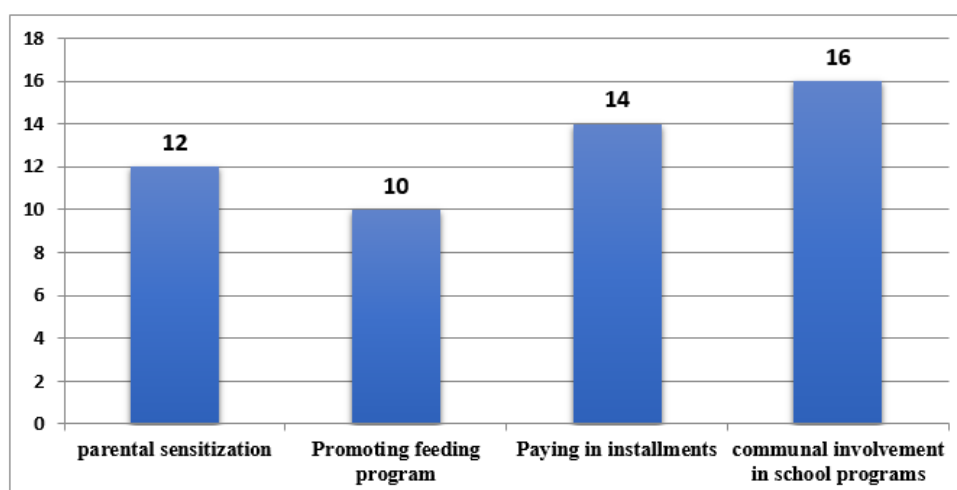


Figure 6.1: Measures put in place to encourage parents to take their children to ECE Centres

Basing on the twenty administrator (N=20), Figure 2 is a graphical presentation of the measures put in place to encourage parents to take their children to the ECE centres. The main strategies were involving the community in school

programs (16 or 80%); allowing parents to pay in instalments (14 or 70%); engaging in parental sensitization (12 or 60%); and promoting feeding programs (10 or 40%).

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This study was undertaken to investigate the implementation of early childhood education. a case study of selected schools in Petauke district of Eastern Province. ECE is the foundation of formal education towards the development of an individual's physical, cognitive, emotional and social aspects during the primary years of life, from birth to about six years. If not well implemented, ECE would not achieve the intended long-term objective of bringing up children with capabilities to contribute significantly to the society. The study demonstrates ECE has significant benefits for rural based Zambians as the case is for the study area. Despite the challenges faced by teachers, government and parents in the implementation of ECE, it remains an indispensable component of the education sector. That the Zambian government has streamlined ECE into the main national curriculum implies that it contributed to the entire system up to tertiary level. The challenges of inadequate teaching and learning materials; inadequately trained teachers, poor parental involvement; inadequate teachers' knowledge of the ECC curriculum indicate areas that need to be addressed in order to make the ECE work positively in rural areas.

This study brings to the fore that the provision of ECE among public schools in Petauke District has not yet achieved the envisioned levels of effectiveness. The extent to which primary schools have been constrained in the quest to implement the ECE curriculum indicates that schools on their own will fail to put in place the requisite infrastructure, instructional materials, human resource, furniture and equipment, management structures and sustainable financing. It would be expected that external stakeholders would take opportunity to assist primary schools effectively provide ECE in Petauke District. However, the findings of the study show that there has not been strong effort to create partnerships among government, communities, schools and other institutions that would support the emerging public ECE centres around the city.

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