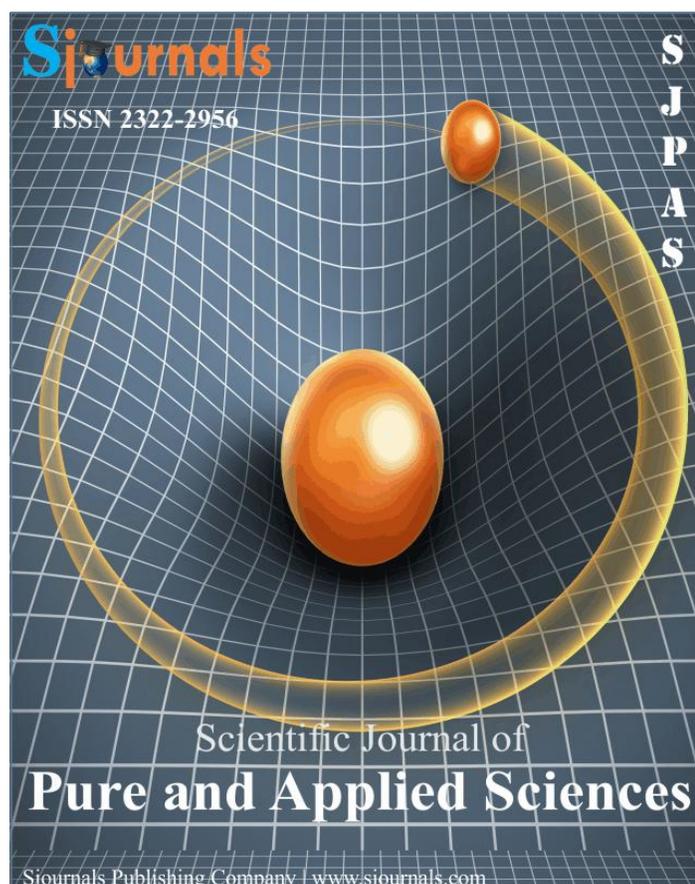


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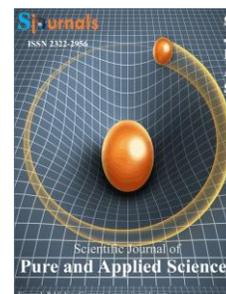
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### Original article

## Situation analysis of the early childhood development (ECD) programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

Early childhood development (ECD) programmes the world over have been found to be central in the successful holistic development and positive future socioeconomic outcomes for young children. In Africa in general and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, these programmes have been punctuated by overwhelming challenges related to poor funding and paucity of resources as well as vague policy models. The purpose of this study was to undertake a situation analysis of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study, which was premised on the positivist philosophy was therefore quantitative and utilized the descriptive survey design. A sample of 100 teachers was generated across 10 districts in 5 of the rural provinces of Zimbabwe using two stage sampling comprising purposive and randomization strategies in that order. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit data and was in certain instances, triangulated with observation. The study revealed that there was either constrained or total lack of funding of the ECD programme in rural schools in Zimbabwe, lack of government support and that the programme was not overly accessible to all children more so to those with disabilities. Meanwhile, policy guidelines were either unavailable in the rural primary schools or not religiously adhered to. The study then concluded that the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe was greatly compromised casting doubt on its quality and effectiveness. It was also concluded that the programme might

have excluded many poor and disabled children in rural settings. On these bases the study recommended increased funding, resourcing and capacity building and advocated for policy review to ensure accommodation of the needs of children with disabilities and adoption of firmer enforcement procedures. In the ultimate, the study recommended further studies of national dimension, which should target mostly at rural settings.

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## 1. Introduction

Early childhood development (ECD) education has of late been adopted as an essential foundation for many contemporary education systems the world over. This has resulted in marked increased in the enrolment of ECD children and a concomitant increase in the ECD workforce (Sun et al., 2015). According to the authors, there are however concerns that this increase in quantity of services should not be positively correlated with a decrease in quality. Myers (1982) in Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) observes that international recognition of ECD is however relatively new particularly in less developed countries. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2015) of Zimbabwe notes that ECD has been embraced by virtually all nations as a necessary educational experience in the lives of young children. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, ECD is an entitlement and the aim is to provide a creative, playful environment free from the pressure to learn to read and write (Penn, 2004). Nevertheless, in Zimbabwe ECD is envisaged to prepare young children for literacy, numeracy and technological skills, develop some awareness of personal and national identity and demonstrate foundational skills for lifelong learning through self-learning and problem solving (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015). The World Bank, WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO have all stressed the importance of ECD in improving physical and psychosocial wellbeing and in promoting cognitive gains in young children and in combating poverty and have promoted its expansion in developing countries (Freeman and Faure, 2003; Penn, 2004; Mangwaya et al., 2016). Consequent to these regards, the world summit for children held in New York in 1990 gave the highest level of endorsement to the rights of a child based on the endorsement and ratification of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child by more countries and quicker than any previous human rights instrument (UNICEF, 2001). This gave rise to a rapid proliferation of ECD programmes around the world, including Africa (Mangwaya et al., 2016). The authors hitherto, further opionate that the support received from the aforesaid international organisations and other multilateral and bilateral entities and non-governmental organisations is to a lesser extent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Newman and Devercell (2012) add that despite the rapid growth in national ECD policies in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is still much to be done to ensure that young children's holistic developmental needs are met. Further in-depth background literature on the situation of ECD in the region, particularly in Zimbabwe is pursued in successive sections.

## 2. Background to the study

As has already been highlighted, the rapid impetus for ECD education in Africa can safely be traced to the ratification and adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1989, the World Conference on Education for All (UNESCO, 2004; 2006), the Millennium Development Goals and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016). For instance, the Dakar Millennium Development Goal number 1 relates to the promotion of ECD for vulnerable children (Penn, 2004). UNICEF (2008) also reflects on goal number 2 as also supportive of ECD. In effect, UNICEF has placed ECD high on its agenda and is committed to supporting improvements in the physical environment, curriculum reform and caregiver and teacher competencies (UNICEF, 2008). However, in many African countries, the expansion of ECD programmes has only benefited urban, easier to reach populations more than those in poor and rural areas (Sun et al., 2015). Nevertheless, other African countries, for example South Africa and Kenya have made efforts to reach out to the disadvantaged populations. According to Atmore et al. (2012) the South African government has identified the need to increase access to ECD and to enhance the quality of programmes and services especially for children from

disadvantaged groups. In Kenya, children from marginalized groups, usually in arid and semi-arid regions are targeted and are considered for special attention (Nganga, 2009).

Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe the history of ECD dates back to the pre-independence era. Provision of ECD services was however variously modeled along ethnical proclivities. For instance, under the Child Protection and Adoption Act of 1972 for black African children, ECD services in form of crèches were provided under the ambit of the department of social welfare, had no educational dimension since it was not guided by a curriculum of some nature and only served a pediatric function (Mangwaya et al., 2016). These authors report that, on the contrary, the 1973 Nursery School Regulations for the white children provided for nursery education under the auspices of the Ministry of Education suggesting that ECD in those regards served a pedagogic function by providing a foundation for future development of the white children. Unfortunately, it was not until two years after the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe that ECD education which was then known as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was universalized in principle, but policies and strategies relating to access and provision were limited (Nziramasanga, 1999). Up until 1988 ECEC was provided as a community initiative without much direct support from the government. The ECEC programme operated under the Ministry of Community Development and Women as it was seen as a relief strategy for mothers who had taken heed of the socioeconomic tide which saw many mothers taking up employment then. Samkange (2016) reports that ECEC centres were adopted as community-based programmes in which the communities had to build and furnish the centres, pay the teachers, provide equipment and contribute toward infrastructural development. In 1988, the programme was moved to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, but still operated without a syllabus. In other words, ECD education operated informally until 2011 when an ECD syllabus was adopted owing to the recommendations of the popular Nziramasanga (1999) Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training.

The Nziramasanga (1999) Commission recommended that all children should receive early childhood education and care at least one year before attending school. The idea was to provide a special bridging programme between the home and school. According to the Commission, ECD is to serve as a foundation upon which the basic principles and philosophy of Zimbabwe would be laid. As such, policy should therefore consider ECD as a priority for the sake of a positive future for all Zimbabwean children. For Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) quality ECD programmes help improve all aspects of education. As earlier intimated, Zimbabwe acknowledged that ECD was an integral part of education by placing it under the purview of the education ministry in 1988. Consequently, ECD was declared a basic human right in Zimbabwe (Mangwaya et al., 2016). This was of course not operationalized until the enactment of relevant policies that regulate the contemporary ECD programme in the country today. It therefore became relevant that in reflecting on these and related factors concerning ECD, this study set out to undertake a situation analysis of the government regulated ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. Penn (2004) implores, '... it is important to insist on more rigorous, systematic and context sensitive evaluation of current ECD initiatives'. In order to provide a solid foundation to the study, further literature regarding ECD policy guidelines, funding and resourcing and accessibility of ECD programmes is further examined in the successive section.

### **3. Policies for the implementation of ECD programmes**

Effective ECD programmes are those that are bench marked on comprehensive policies regulating the conditions and provisions toward efficacious services. Sun et al. (2015) explain that effective government policies have to be context sensitive. In response, many countries, including Zimbabwe have set forth ECD policies to operationalize and regulate processes and operations of ECD programmes. These policies should be sensitive to the needs of all young children, including those living with disabilities. According to Neuman et al. (2012) national ECD policies, typically are comprised of a policy statement covering the vision, goals and key strategies as well as a description of institutional structures. In Kenya, for example, the ECD policy guidelines address issues related to children's needs in meeting their holistic development, safe guarding the rights of children and child-centered programming among others (Koech and Njenga, 2006). In addition, the Kenyan policies pay special attention to the needs of marginalized children and those with additional needs (Nganga, 2009). In Zimbabwe, after the Nziramasanga (1999) Commission's recommendation for ECD policy transformation, a number of policies were promulgated to operationalize the ECD programme in the country. Secretary's Circular Minute Number 14 of 2004 offered guidelines on the implementation of the current model of ECD services as recommended by the Commission. Sibanda (2014) enunciates that the 2004 ECD policy in Zimbabwe, which is also known as the National

Early Childhood Development (NECD) programme is thus regulated by Secretary's Circular Minute Number 14 of 2004, S.I 106 of 2005 and Circular Minute Number 12 of 2005. The policy specified that ECD was to be part of the formal primary education making it mandatory for public primary schools to attach at least one ECD-B class for children aged between 4 and 5 years starting 2005. The policy also mandated the schools to attach an additional class, that is, ECD-A for the cohort of children aged between 3 and 4 years beginning 2006. Dyanda et al. (2005) elaborate that the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, then instituted each government primary school in Zimbabwe to attach at least two ECD classes for children in the 3 to 5 years' age group. This meant that the primary school period in Zimbabwe was extended to 9 from the previous 7 years.

To regularize the implementation and operations of the ECD programme in Zimbabwe, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 specifies regulations and requirements relating to registration of ECD centres, age of attendance, state of facilities including infrastructure, ablutions and amenities, play centres and space. It is also specified that ECD classes should be manned by appropriately qualified teachers. According to Samkange (2016), realizing the need for qualified teachers at ECD level, the two ministries of education in Zimbabwe collectively responded by making a commitment to train 10,000 teachers for the ECD programme while imploring universities to offer both pre- and in-service training programmes for teachers. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) strongly acknowledge that early childhood educators with appropriate training and qualifications provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing and responsive education and care for young children. A study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in conjunction with the Early Child Care Research Network in 2002 also established that teachers who were first degree holders in ECD provided higher quality learning experiences to young children than their less qualified counterparts (Boyd, 2013). For this reason, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) assert that the teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise- including ECD. As submitted by Jibril (2007), whatever input can be made into an educational programme, it will be of little benefit if the teacher is unskilled, poorly trained or even ignorant. Unfortunately, some of the challenges of ECD programmes in developing countries like Zimbabwe relate to lack of ability to attract and retain motivated and qualified teachers to work in rural and remote areas (Sun et al., 2015). According to these authors, ECD educators have typically been perceived as substitute mothers and therefore not in need of professional training. UNESCO (2008) reports that data collected from 50 developing countries between 2002 and 2004 showed that the percentage of trained ECD teachers fluctuated between less than 25% and more than 95%. Similar studies have confirmed a dearth of qualified ECD teachers, particularly in rural areas. On the whole, ECD teachers have lower educational and professional qualifications and hence receive lower salaries than primary school teachers, both in developing and developed countries (Sun et al., 2015). Often ECD children are taught by para-professionals. On these bases, Mangwaya et al. (2016) imply that one of the most cited reason for failure of implementation of many educational innovations, including ECD programmes is lack of adequately and appropriately trained staff.

Policy S.I 106 of 2005 in Zimbabwe regulates a teacher pupil ratio of one teacher to 20 children. It is also categorically stated in the annual statistical report of the ministry of primary and secondary education (2012) that at each ECD centre there must be 1 teacher to 20 children. Relating to the teacher pupil ratio, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) argue that higher teacher-pupil ratios (referring to smaller numbers of children per teacher) are found to enhance high quality of ECD services and better development outcomes for children. This tends to improve teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions resulting in better cognitive and linguistic performances among the children (Huntsman, 2008). On the contrary, a lower teacher- teacher pupil- ratio (referring to higher numbers of children to one teacher) result in teachers paying less attention to individual children and therefore in children feeling neglected (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Ankirotimi and Olowe, 2016). Children at ECD level require individual and undivided attention if they are to be kept focused on educational tasks or formal play activities. Large classes sway the teacher's attention fueling chaotic behaviours among the young children. In the ultimate, this would result in compromised quality and effectiveness of the ECD services. Previous studies on the implementation of ECD in Zimbabwe (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Samkange, 2016; Bukaliya and Mubika, 2012; Moyo et al., 2012) complain of large or multi-grade classes and overcrowded classrooms hence low teacher- pupil ratios (i.e. large numbers of children to one teacher). Mohiuddin (2008) noted over-crowded classrooms with disproportionate teacher-pupil ratio and multi-grade settings to be counterproductive to quality one to one relationships recommended between teacher and child at ECD level. These anomalies can be linked to issues of limited funding and lack of resources.

#### 4. Funding and resources

Funding and resources are key to effective implementation of quality ECD programmes. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) opine that when funding and resources are available for ECD education, teachers are able to nurture and support the development of young children and to successfully implement the ECD curriculum. The authors also emphasise the need for funding since learning resources and materials, training and staff development of teachers, programme enrichment, feeding and monitoring and evaluation of ECD programmes all need money if the programmes are to succeed. Generally, funding of ECD programmes in Africa is poor if not absent due to inadequate financial resources. Thus the quantity and quality of resources available for ECD will determine the school system's capacity to implement the programme (Chukwbikem, 2013). Several studies (Magwaya et al., 2016; Samkange, 2016; Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Moyo et al., 2012) that have been conducted in Zimbabwe bemoan lack of resources as responsible for stalling the progress toward the successful implementation of the ECD programme. This is despite Nziramasanga (1999) Commission's recommendation for cooperation of the government and community in providing facilities and resources for the payment and retention of qualified ECD teachers for instance. Zimbabwe Vision 2020 also explicitly refer to a strategy that is to be implemented for providing resources such as infrastructure for ECD especially in rural areas (UNICEF, 2010). Disappointingly, in the 2018 budget statement, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development announced, as one of the austerity measures, a cut on ECD funding, particularly with regards to recruitment and remuneration of teachers (Ndlovu, 2017). UNICEF (2010) admits that absence of materials and resources, minimal funding and poor ablution facilities are some of the major obstacles to successful implementation of ECD programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) posit, 'In the absence of resources, ECD is bound to face challenges'. Availability or not of the resources has implications for accessibility of the ECD programme to the children.

#### 5. Accessibility of ECD programmes

Accessibility of the ECD programme in this study entails ability of all young children, including the poor and those with disabilities to reach for the programme in terms of infrastructural and environmental setup, appropriateness of equipment and furniture and affordability of cost, distance travelled, individual attention from the teachers (teacher-pupil ratio), curriculum relevance and social acceptance (social attitudes in the school). According to WHO (2012) access to ECD and transition to the first grades of primary school are essential to establishing the foundation for continual learning and development. WHO (2012) further notes that, for disabled children, they require access to additional learning opportunities and/or specialized services. In many countries, however, many such programmes and services targeting young children are often inadequate to meet their developmental needs and when they are available, they are often costly, not inclusive and only located in urban centres. From the findings of the Nziramasanga (1999) Commission, it was apparent then that the majority of young children in Zimbabwe, particularly those in rural, remote and poor areas could not access ECD services as a function of some of the factors mentioned in the definition of accessibility. In terms of distance for example, a primary school child should not walk more than 5km to school (Director's Circular Minute Number 12, 2005; Annual Statistical Report, 2012). Walking 5km is still punitive and unbearable for children aged 3 years for instance. However, a study by Chikwiri and Musiyiwa (2017) revealed that many ECD children in rural areas of Zimbabwe walk far longer distances than the stipulated 5km. Some walk distances ranging between 6km and 20km one way. Turning to the cost, Ewen et al. (2002) in Yelovina (2003) note that affordable, high quality ECD programmes remain unavailable to children from poor families in Africa. These results are corroborated by Chikwiri and Musiyiwa's (2017) study, which revealed that the cost of school fees was one of the greatest hindrances to access to ECD programmes by children from poor families in Zimbabwe. These are the issues that motivated this researcher to undertake a situation analysis of the ECD programme in rural schools of Zimbabwe.

#### 6. Materials and methods

The study was premised on the philosophy of positivism and therefore predominantly quantitative and utilized the descriptive survey design. A sample of 100 teachers was chosen from 10 districts in 5 rural provinces of Zimbabwe using two-stage sampling. Firstly, the teachers were purposively sampled for their typicality as being directly involved in ECD. Secondly, they were chosen using simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire

was used to elicit data and in particular circumstances, observations were used to corroborate and to authenticate quantitative responses. Such triangulation of data was necessary to obtain and maintain quality results of the study.

## 7. Results

The following results were generated through inquiring into the qualifications and experiences of the teachers, funding and resources for EDC, the accessibility and the policy underpinnings of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe.

**Table 1**

Teacher qualification and experience (n=100).

Highest qualification	%	Experience	%
'O' Level (Paraprofessional)	15	Less than 5 years	64
Certificate/Diploma (ECD)	15	5 to 9 years	9
Certificate/Diploma (General)	37	10 to 14 years	9
Undergraduate degree (ECD)	12	15 to 19 years	9
Undergraduate degree (General)	18	20 years or more	9
Postgraduate degree (ECD)	0		
Postgraduate degree (Other)	3		
Total	100	Total	100

The picture portrayed in Table 1 is that 15% of the ECD teachers in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe held 'O' Level as their highest qualification and were paraprofessionals. Fifteen percent of these teachers held a highest qualification of a Certificate or Diploma in ECD, while 37% were holders of a general Certificate or Diploma in education. Further, 12% of the teachers had Undergraduate degrees in ECD while 18% had Undergraduate degrees in general education. None of the teachers had Postgraduate degrees in ECD, but 3% had other Postgraduate degrees that were not in the area of ECD. On the whole, the majority of the ECD teachers in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe only held a general education Certificate or Diploma and had less than 5 years' experience at ECD level. This was not a favorable situation for positive ECD outcomes. For instance, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) strongly acknowledge that early childhood educators with appropriate training and qualifications provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing and responsive education and care for young children. A study conducted by the national institute of child health and human development in conjunction with the Early Child Care Research Network in 2002 also established that teachers who were first degree holders in ECD provided higher quality learning experiences to young children than their less qualified counterparts (Boyd, 2013).

It was also established from the results that the average teacher pupil-ratio stood at 1:56 against the recommended 1:20. Actually the teacher pupil-ratio ranged from 1:27 to 1:83. This result is worrisome and suggest that the teachers were overwhelmed by these high numbers of children per teacher. In effect, the results corroborate other studies conducted in Zimbabwe (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Magwaya et al., 2016; Samkange, 2016; Moyo et al., 2012) which suggested that the actual teacher pupil ratios compromised quality ECD education in Zimbabwe. From observation, the situation was exacerbated by multi-grade settings in limited cases, where one teacher manned both ECD-A and ECD-B classes. Commenting on the implications of teacher pupil ratio, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) posited that higher teacher-pupil ratios (referring to smaller numbers of children per teacher) have been found to enhance high quality of ECD services and better development outcomes for children. Mohiuddin (2008) had also, earlier on argued that over-crowded classrooms with disproportionate teacher-pupil ratio and multi-grade settings are counterproductive to quality one to one relationship recommended between teacher and child at ECD level.

From Table 2, the major results show that 91% of the teachers disagreed that their school had enough money for ECD and that there were adequate ECD teachers in the schools. Thirty-six percent of the teachers thought that the ECD teachers were appropriately trained or qualified, while 43% disagreed with this assertion. Meanwhile, a significant number of teachers (21%) were uncertain with regards the appropriateness of their training or qualification in early childhood development (ECD) education. The table also reflects that 85% of the teachers

disagreed that their schools had adequate infrastructure for the ECD programme, while 79% also disagreed that their schools had enough teaching and learning materials for the ECD programme. Generally, there was constrained funding and lack of human, infrastructural and material resources for ECD in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. This situation is similar to the scenario that was portrayed in the studies by Ankinrotimi and Olowe (2016), Chukwbikem (2013) and UNICEF (2010). From their study in Nigeria, Ankinrotimi and Olowe (2016) concluded that, when funding and resources are available for ECD education, teachers are able to nurture and support the development of young children and to successfully implement the ECD curriculum. Chukwbikem earlier concluded that the quantity and quality of resources available for ECD will determine the school system's capacity to implement the programme. Meanwhile, UNICEF in their survey of ECD programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa admitted that absence of materials and resources, minimal funding and poor ablution facilities were some of the major obstacles to successful implementation of the programmes. Previous studies in Zimbabwe (Magwaya et al., 2016; Samkange, 2016; Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Moyo et al., 2012) have attested to lack of resources as having been responsible for stalling the progress in the implementation of the ECD programme.

Of note, the table further illustrates that 88% of the teachers agreed that their schools possessed the ECD syllabus, 9% were uncertain, while 3% disagreed to this realization. Coming to the support the ECD programme receives from stakeholders, 64% of the teachers agreed that school development committees (SDCs) were supportive, while 33% also agreed that the government was supportive of the ECD programme. Twenty-one percent of the teachers were uncertain if either the SDCs or government supported the programme yet 15% disagreed that SDCs and 46% that government was supportive of the ECD programme in rural schools in Zimbabwe. The result shows that the majority of teachers acknowledged the existence of the ECD government regulated syllabus is encouraging although Moyo et al. (2012) in their study were concerned that ECD teachers had challenges in interpreting that syllabus. However, the result showing that there were teachers who were either uncertain or totally disagreed that their schools had the syllabus has significant implications in that some rural primary schools in Zimbabwe could be operating ECD programmes without the official syllabus. On the issue of support from SDCs and the government, there is evidence that, while SDCs seem to be supportive of ECD, the government is seen by teachers as lacking. The minister of finance and economic development's 2018 budget speech, which advocated for communities to fund the remuneration of teachers to relieve government expenditure bears testimony to the government's questionable commitment to the funding and resourcing of the ECD programme.

**Table 2**  
Resources for ECD.

Aspect	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
There is enough money for ECD	0	9	91
The school has adequate ECD teachers	3	6	91
The ECD teachers are appropriately trained/qualified	36	21	43
The school has adequate infrastructure for ECD	12	3	85
The school has enough teaching and learning materials for ECD	12	9	79
The school has the ECD syllabus	88	9	3
The SDC fully supports the ECD programme	64	21	15
The government fully supports the ECD programme	33	21	46

**Table 3**  
Accessibility of the ECD programme.

Aspect	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Parents can afford the fees and levies for ECD	21	30	49
Parents can provide the required materials for ECD	15	12	73
The school is relatively close to children's homes	48	6	46
There are adequate places for all children in the area	42	9	49
The teacher-pupil ratio enables individual attention	12	9	79
Even disabled children can access the ECD programme	42	18	40

The study also inquired into the accessibility of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe in terms of cost, provision, distance, individualization and disability friendliness. On the basis of cost, 49% of the teachers disagreed that parents could afford fees and levies for ECD, while 21% agreed and 30% were uncertain about this scenario. More interestingly, 73% of the teachers disagreed that parents could provide the required learning materials for their children and 15% and 12% agreed and were uncertain respectively. The general picture is that the cost of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe is not overly affordable to parents. In these regards, Ewen et al. (2002) in Yelovina (2003) note that affordable, high quality ECD programmes remain unavailable to children from poor families in Africa. These results are by and large corroborated by Chikwiri and Musiyiwa's (2017) study, which revealed that the cost of school fees was one of the greatest hindrances to access to ECD programmes by children from poor families in Zimbabwe.

On distance, 48% of the teachers thought that the schools were relatively close to children's homes, but 46% disagreed and 6% were uncertain. While, more teachers believed that the rural primary schools in Zimbabwe are relatively accessible in terms of distance travelled by the children, there is overwhelming evidence from the results that equally many children walk unbearably long distances to school. A similar state of affairs was reported by Chikwiri and Musiyiwa (2017) who revealed in another study that many ECD children in rural areas of Zimbabwe walked very longer distances, which in some instances ranged up to 20km yet (Director's Circular Minute Number 12, 2005) stipulates that no primary school child should walk more than 5km. For that matter, 5km is still not comfortable for a 3-year-old toddler after all.

Equally notable from Table 3 is that 42% of the teachers indicated that there were adequate places for all ECD children in the rural primary schools in Zimbabwe yet 49% disagreed and 9% were uncertain. This is expositive that some children in rural areas of Zimbabwe are not attending the ECD classes due to limited resources or space. From the results it is further clear that 79% of the teachers disagreed that the obtaining teacher-pupil ratio enabled them to pay individual attention to the children and the other 9% were uncertain about this situation. This result further confirms the statistics presented elsewhere in this paper. In effect, a lower teacher- teacher pupil-ratio (referring to higher numbers of children to one teacher) result in teachers paying less attention to individual children and therefore in children feeling neglected (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; Ankirotimi and Olowe, 2016). On disability friendliness of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe, 42% of the teachers agreed that even disabled children could access the programme, but 40% disagreed while 18% were uncertain. What these results reveal is that the ECD programmes in rural schools in Zimbabwe were not overly accessible to disabled children. However, to be certain, there is need to carry out an in-depth study in these regards. In many countries, however, many ECD programmes and services targeting young disabled children are often inadequate to meet their developmental needs and when they are available, they are often costly, not inclusive and only located in urban centres (WHO, 2012).

**Table 4**  
Policy guidelines on ECD.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Uncertain (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>
The school has the government regulated ECD policies	55	39	6
The school has both ECD-A and ECD-B classes	97	0	3
The school follows the government regulated ECD syllabus	94	6	0
The age group of the ECD pupils is 3-5 years	76	6	18
The classroom space and design of the play centres are as per policy	64	9	27
Sanitary facilities meet government stipulated conditions	40	5	55

The ECD programme in Zimbabwe is regulated through a number of fundamental policies that spell out guidelines for conditions and for programme efficacy. Table 4 indicates that 55% of the teachers agreed that their schools had government regulated policies yet 39% were uncertain and 6% disagreed. While, it may appear that the schools were in possession of the ECD government regulated policies, it is clear that many other schools could have been operating without these policies and therefore administrators may have had no policy reference point or may have been ignorant of the policy provisions some of which are analysed and discussed in the successive paragraph.

Ninety-seven percent of the teachers indicated that the rural primary schools in Zimbabwe had both ECD-A and ECD-B classes and the remaining 3% disagreed that this was the situation in their schools. Similarly, 94% of the teachers were of the opinion that the rural primary schools in Zimbabwe followed the government regulated ECD syllabus, but the other 6% were uncertain. On the issue of age, which is explicitly regulated by policy, 76% of the teachers agreed that the age group of the ECD children was indeed 3-5 years, but 18% disagreed and 6% were uncertain. On policy provisions for attaching two ECD classes beginning 2006 (Secretary Circular Minute N<sup>o</sup> 14, 2004); following the regulated ECD syllabus and limiting the ECD programme to the 3-5-year age group (Government of Zimbabwe, 2011), the picture portrayed by the results is that the rural primary schools were generally in compliance. However, a more critical analysis suggests that a significant number of the schools may have been violating the provisions of those policies probably due to lack of exposure to or ignorance of the policy guidelines. The result on a few schools not having the other class may be linked to lack of resources. Meanwhile, the result on not adhering to the enrollment of 3-5-year age group could be linked to delayed start by children due to distance and that of the syllabus to lack of a syllabus copy at the said schools. Furthermore, 64% of the teachers perceived that the classroom space and design of the play centres were as per policy, while 9% were uncertain and 27% refuted that this was so. Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 specifies that a child should be allowed at least 2.25m<sup>2</sup> of in-door and 5.5m<sup>2</sup> of out-door playing space. From observation, while outdoor space was generally adequate some classrooms were too crowded to allow for even half the regulated space. Finally, 40% of the teachers agreed that sanitary facilities at the schools met government stipulated conditions, but 55% disagreed and 5% were uncertain about this claim. Clearly standards of sanitary facilities in many schools were deplorable. Even water conditions and adequacy of toilets for example were a far cry from the requirements of the law. Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 also stipulates that flush water closets or Blair toilets should be provided at the ratio 1:12 and prefers provision of running or water from protected sources. Many rural primary schools in Zimbabwe had neither running nor protected water and had far fewer toilet holes for ECD children than required by policy.

## 8. Conclusion

On the bases of these findings, the study drew the following conclusions:

- ✓ The implementation of the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe was seriously compromised due to constrained funding and resourcing. As a result, it was doubtful if the schools were providing quality ECD services necessary for the holistic development of the children, for bridging the gap between home and school experiences and for preparing the children for grade one.
- ✓ While the teachers were highly experienced in handling ECD level children, many of them were under-qualified yet the majority were inappropriately qualified for ECD provision. This meant that the children did not gain the quality services envisaged by government and expected by the parents.
- ✓ Because of low teacher-pupil ratios (many children to one teacher), teachers could not exercise individualized instruction suggesting that the children attending the ECD programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe were deprived of quality education.
- ✓ Many children walked unbearably long distances to and from school and could have been exposed to several environmental dangers on the way. As a result of this and of lack of places at times, some children had to start the programme when they were over-age.
- ✓ Many poor and disabled children might have been excluded from the programme yet it is in effect their fundamental human right.
- ✓ ECD policies were either not fully implemented or enforced.

## Recommendation

In order to address many of the gaps in the ECD programme in rural primary schools:

- ✓ The ministries of primary and secondary education and that of tertiary education, science and technology development should accelerate the training and deployment of ECD teachers. Rural schools should be prioritised in these regards.

- ✓ Government should increase funding of ECD and rescind the decision to wean off the funding of some of the ECD staff remuneration. In addition, government should consider subsidizing ECD fees and levies paid by parents in rural schools. In these regards, the government should review its commitment and be practically supportive of the ECD programme at school level and desist from paying lip service through political rhetoric.
- ✓ Capacity building should be premised on partnership of all stakeholders in ECD and should be the focus of all resourcing initiatives.
- ✓ To cut on distances travelled by ECD children, government should invest in building satellite ECD centres using the same model it has adopted for satellite schools.
- ✓ All ECD provisions should be sensitive to the existence and needs of disabled children. Policies should be reviewed to accommodate this recommendation.
- ✓ Existing policies should bear enforcement procedures to ensure total adherence.
- ✓ Availability of relevant ECD policy frameworks and the ECD syllabus should be prominent requirement for all schools as a matter of policy. Policy should regulate that each and every ECD staff member should avail as a first priority, these important documents as part of the supervision and monitoring processes.
- ✓ A more in-depth and wide ranging study of a national dimension should be conducted and regular evaluation studies undertaken of which these should prioritise rural settings where the majority of poor educational conditions are likely to be more intense.

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