IMPACT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) POLICIES ON ECD PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN BUHERA DISTRICT PRIMARY SCHOOLS, MANICALAND PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The research was based on a qualitative case study to evaluate the impact of Early Childhood Development (ECD) policies on ECD programme implementation in Buhera District primary schools, Manicaland, Zimbabwe. Statistics from Buhera district offices in 2018 showed that 142 registered primary schools in the district managed to attach both ECD-A and ECD-B classes to primary schools as per Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations and the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004. The study sample consisted of 17 participants who were purposively sampled from 142 primary schools and these included 5 school heads, 5 ECD teachers, 5 parents/SDC and 2 NGOs, representatives. The researchers employed auxiliary instruments namely; in-depth interview guides, observation checklists and ECD documents. The study revealed that the establishment of ECD programmes after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 was welcomed by the majority of parents since most children could not access ECD services due to discriminatory colonial policies. However, it was found that the ECD policies were poorly disseminated to the user system, lacked clarity on inclusive education, roles and responsibilities of school heads, ECD teachers and parents which impacted negatively on infrastructure development, curriculum development, material resources provision and ECD staff performance. The study recommended the government to come up with comprehensive ECD policies that provide adequate and effective leadership, coordinated planning, efficient funding and implementation, monitoring of progress and on-going improvements in order to enhance effective ECD policy implementation.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development (ECD), ECD policies, Primary Schools, Curriculum, Resources (human, material, financial, time), parents.

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

History reveals that education policies are of paramount importance as they influence the day to day running of institutions. In 1980, meaningful early childhood education in Zimbabwe was accessed by a few privileged families, mainly in urban areas (Zvobgo, 1986, 1997; Nziramasanga Commission, 1999). The advent of Zimbabwe's independence led the government to revisit the education policies in a bid to correct the colonial imbalances in governance and quality in the provision of ECD education in Zimbabwe.

The Nziramasanga Commission of Enquiry (1999) spearheaded the reforms on ECD policies for educational growth, development and social welfare. Through the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004, all primary schools were called upon to attach two ECD-A (3-4-year-olds) and ECD-B classes (4-5-year-olds) as a way of facilitating children's access to ECD by the majority of the children (Makuwaza and Gatsi, 2014). Fullan (2007) in Mangwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2016) asserts that the introduction of the ECD policies and programmes was a new development to Zimbabwe primary schools hence meant that new structures, goals, and roles had to be developed. It is on account of this background that the study sought to evaluate the impact of ECD policies on ECD programme implementation in Buhera District primary schools, Manicaland, Zimbabwe.

1.1 Concept of Early Childhood Development (ECD)

ECD can be described as a process on all the aspects of growth and development in children namely; physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral, creative, health, safety and all the social changes that occur during childhood (Keenan and Evans, 2009; Bruce and Meggit, 2002). Historic figures on early childhood development include Socrates (470-399 BC); Comenius (1592-1670); Rousseau (1712-1778); Robert Owen (1771-1858); Froebel (1782-1882); Dewey (1859-1952); Montessori (1870-1952); Piaget (1896-1980) and Vygotsky (1978) to mention just a few (Martin, 2017). The contemporary philosophers advocated for children's growth and development in natural and harmonious settings. They emphasized the holistic development of children and how they could provide a conducive environment for this development. Functionalists like Emile Durkheim (Haralambos, 2000) believe that children's development sought to meet specific, immediate and distinct functional goals in society and the world at large. Nyandiya-Bandy (2000) in Makuwaza and Gatsi (2014) confirms that in traditional African life, the family members played a key role in helping the young children to acquire basic skills by encouraging, supporting and offering the necessary reinforcement. Young children especially in the rural areas played mahumbwe/malware and listened to folk stories by their grandparents and this enhanced their physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral development.

As ECD education is recognized as the backbone of most formal education systems internationally, the success or failure of any education system can be attributed to policies that are put in place on how ECD programmes are organized and managed. Prior to this background, the researchers sought to evaluate the impact of ECD policies on ECD programme implementation in Buhera primary schools.

1.2 History of ECD

Worldwide, various schools of thought advocate for the best start for children in order to develop to their full potential in life. Examples include: the NOVA SCOTIA in Canada; the Monitorial system used by the Spanish, French and English people. Froebel in Martin (2017) initiated an education system for young children that placed the importance of play in children's holistic development and learning and was most popular in Germany, Europe and America. Pence, Amponsah, Chalamanda, Habtom, Kameka and Nankunda (2004) confirm the support for ECD services provided by Bernard Van Leer Foundation in Africa in the early 1970s.

Mangwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2016) assert that the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Zimbabwe can be traced from the early 1970s (Ministry of Education, 1989) with centres having nursery schools, pre-school education and crashes. ECE services were provided in line with Statutory Instruments and Education Acts which portrayed bias, racial discrimination and segregation. According to Zvobgo (2007), the pre-independence era only provided ECE services in different urban areas. Rural areas had no such provision which showed a sign of discrimination.

In the 1980s, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres were established and these were manned by the Ministry of Community Services and Social Welfare and Women's Affairs (launched 1981-1982). These ECEC centres were established all around Zimbabwe including the rural, mining and farming communities. Children would assemble at community halls, church sites and schools for play activities and feeding. NGOs like UNICEF, Red Cross and others provided the food for children. Parents from the community assisted with the cooking and feeding of children.

An Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme was a Zimbabwean post-independence initiative by the government and was introduced in 2005, following the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations. What is significant to note is that ECD programmes were established in an endeavour to consciously promote a child's development and education, and to empower all children regardless of colour, social status and religious orientation (Dyanda etal, 2005; Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004; CIET, 1999; Zvobgo, 1997). The ECD programme encompasses community and parental involvement, borrowing its philosophy from the Judge Commission (1962) and contemporary philosophers that, the community and the parents play a pivotal role in motivating and managing development in their schools.

1.3 History of ECD policies

It is recognized internationally that states have an obligation to protect, respect and promote the right of the child and this is governed by international, African and national policies that include;

- The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Assembly, 1979
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN's CRC 1989
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), African Union, 1999

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDG), UN General Assembly, 2000
- UNESCO's Education for All, UNESCO World Education Forum, 2000
- The UN's General Comment No. 7: Implementing the Child's Rights in Early Childhood (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).

Zimbabwe made reforms in the area of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a way of meeting the obligations. These policies were meant to place education in the category of basic human rights, ensuring that every child has an opportunity to develop her/his physical and emotional facilities (The 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children). The United Nations General Assembly, General Comment No. 7, 2005 clearly stipulates that state parties are required to render appropriate assistance to parents, legal guardians and extended families in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities (article 18.2 and 18.3), including assisting parents in providing living conditions necessary for the child's development (article 27.2) and ensuring that children receive necessary protection and care (article 3.2). This agrees very well with Pence et al (2004) who contend that polices are influenced by the contexts in which they develop like, historical, cultural, social, economic and diverse conceptual dimensions operating at international, regional, country and local levels.

In the early 90s national ECD policies were transformed through the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations in order to follow standards and practices on the international platform. ECD policies in the form of circulars and statutory instruments came into being providing guidelines for the implementation of ECD programmes in Zimbabwe. These include;

- The Education Act 1999 as Amended 2006- stipulates that every child in Zimbabwe should not be refused admission to any school or discriminated in education, including gender and physical incapacity, thus, recognizing the child's fundamental right to education within an inclusive context.
- The Children's Protection and Adoption Act (CPAA) 2001- the emphasis is on respect of the rights of children to experience family life, be protected from abuse and have an identity among other rights as stated in the 1989 CRC.
- The Secretary's Circular No. 14 0f 2004- called for all primary schools to attach two ECD classes, that is, ECD-A (3-4-year-olds) and ECD-B (4-5-year-olds). Followed guidelines from the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations.
- Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005- provision of regulations on the operation of ECD classes; registration, curriculum, ECD staff, age of attendance and teacher/pupil ratio, health and safety, ECD centre staff and duties of the head.
- Director's Circular No. 12 of 2005- The major emphasis is to operationalize the provisions of the Circular No. 14 of 2004, thus, provision of ECD in the primary schools in two phases, that is, 4-5-year-olds from 2005 to 2010 then 3-4-year-olds from 2011 to 2015. Stipulations include; preliminaries, the ECD level, supervision, resources and methodology. The policy clarifies the type of staff to be employed, teacher-pupil ratio, the involvement of the community through School Development Committees/Associations. Emphasis is put on children to learn through play.

- Director's Circular Minute No. 41 of 2006- emphasis is on considering children's rights in accordance to the C.R.C (1989) and the millennium goals, networking and creating child- friendly schools, thus, making schools centres of care and support for children. ECD centres were expected to provide quality programmes aimed at ensuring that children grow up healthy, well-nourished and protected from harm.

- Director's Circular No 48 of 2007- Aspects resemble those in Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 and Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 on preliminaries, attachment, registration, enrolment, curriculum, resources, supervision and nutrition with particular emphasis on the establishment of ECD-A classes in primary schools. Caters for children below the age of three showing that it recognizes and provides for increased access and equity to ECD children.

- Director's Circular No. 12 of 2003 as Amended 2007- The policy gives guidelines for the establishment of ECD classes for learners with disabilities in special schools, thus providing inclusive education in ECD programmes. Stipulations include aspects namely; attachment and placement, operations, administration/management and curriculum. The circular also aimed to identify the pre-learning gaps in children with severe and profound disabilities and map out appropriate intervention strategies.

- Director's Circular No. 74 of 2007- Provides explanation on child labour and abuse in schools and communities. Stipulations contained in the circular include; child labour, risk factors, non-child labour activities and child abuse ethics.

- Principal Director's Circular No. 46 of 2010 - handling of disciplinary cases involving child abuse and infusing victim-friendly facets in the education ministry procedures and processes.

- Principal Director's Circular No. 49 of 2010- The circular informs all concerned stakeholders (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education personnel and other stakeholders) about the provision of ECD-A classes in primary schools, operations of ECD- A classes. Aspects looked at include; CIET (1999) recommendations, ECD-A Curriculum, phases of the establishment of ECD programme in Zimbabwe, regulations on operations of ECD-A classes, placement, manpower, teacher-pupil ratio and management of ECD centres in schools.

- Principal Director's Circular No. 20 of 2011- The circular deals with how to curb with mushrooming of unregistered ECD centres, specifications to register a centre, that is; indoor and outdoor space area, toilet closets, washbasins, teacher-pupil ratio and other aspects contained in the circular include; phases of ECD programme establishment, statistics of primary schools and primary schools with ECD-A and ECD-B classes and recommendations.

- Secretary's Circular Minute No. 2 of 2014- to fully implement the 1999 CIET recommendations through the New Curriculum Framework 2015-2022.

By 2005, the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations through the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 were implemented in Zimbabwe primary schools and later primary teachers' colleges embarked on ECD teacher education programmes. The establishment of ECD classes was done in phases, that is, ECD-B classes were established from 2005 to 2010 and ECD-A classes from 2011 to 2015. The restructuring of ECD policies brought about a lot of challenges on policy implementation. Prior to this background, the researchers selected

Buhera District primary schools to evaluate the impact of ECD policies on ECD programmes in progress.

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1.4 Statement of the problem

The researchers observed that ECD policies that came into being through the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations had an impact on ECD programme implementation in Buhera District primary schools, Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. This activated the researchers to carry out a qualitative case study to evaluate the impact of ECD policies on ECD programme implementation in the various school contexts of Buhera District.

1.5 Research questions

The research was guided by the following research questions;

- How are ECD programmes organized and managed in Buhera District primary schools?
- To what extent do ECD policies impact on the growth and development of ECD programmes in Buhera District?
- How best can ECD policies be effectively implemented in Buhera District to promote growth and development?

1.6 Research Objectives

The study desired to achieve the following;

-To evaluate the impact of ECD policies on ECD programme implementation in Buhera District primary schools, Manicaland, Zimbabwe, in terms of organization and management of resources
-Ensure adequate and effective leadership, coordinated planning, funding, implementation, monitoring of progress and on-going quality improvements in realizing the ECD vision, goals and objectives
-To come up with strategies that enhance effective ECD policies and ECD programme implementation.

1.7 Purpose of the study

The study sought to evaluate the impact of ECD policies that were put in place by the Zimbabwe Government and the implementation of the ECD innovation in Buhera District primary schools. The study also sought to come up with strategies that could be applied to come up with effective ECD policies and ECD programme implementation.

1.8 Significance of the study

In this study, policymakers would be assisted to design ECD policies that are effective in ECD policy implementation. The findings drawn from the study would provide various stakeholders (educationists, parents, researchers, NGOs and business people) with

information to clearly understand ECD policies and ECD policy implementation. The findings would also suggest ways of aligning instructional processes with government policies of developing the child holistically. The researchers, therefore, hoped that adequate and effective leadership, coordinated planning, funding, implementation, monitoring of progress and on-going improvements in ECD programmes be looked into by the government and other significant stakeholders to enhance effective ECD policy implementation.

1.9 Delimitations of the study

The study looked at three main aspects under delimitations namely; geographical scope, conceptual scope and methodological scope. The study was confined to five rural primary schools in Buhera District which were purposively selected. Seventeen participants in the study ranged from school heads, ECD teachers, parents, community members, business people and representatives of Non- Governmental Organizations. The study was limited to an evaluation on the impact of ECD policies the organization and management of ECD programmes in Buhera District primary schools.

1.10 Limitations of the study

During the research, the following limitations were experienced. Firstly, diversity in backgrounds brought about conflicting perspectives on the development of ECD policies that were established in Zimbabwe on the strength of the Nziramasanga Commission.s (1999) recommendations. Secondly, the researchers encountered resistance to information sourcing, for example, provision of documents which had either inadequate or incomplete information leading to misunderstanding and distortions by the school heads and ECD teachers. The issue of time factor and provision of resources posed another problem which resulted in participants giving superficial data. The research instruments (in-depth interviews, observations and documents) had a lot of aspects to look at, which took a long time to gather data. As a way of mitigation, the researchers were diplomatic in approaching the participants in order to come up with credible, dependable, transferable and conformable findings. Trustworthiness was achieved through prolonged engagement on sites, making thick descriptions during data gathering and member checking during the research process. According to Ary, Jacobs and Razaveh (1996), the use of the triangulation method (multiple sources of data) enhanced the probability of credible findings.

1.11 Design and Methodology

The researchers chose to carry out a qualitative case study on the impact of Early Childhood Development policies on ECD programmes in Buhera District primary schools. A case study design was employed in order to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (ECD policies) as advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994) that case studies are extremely useful for understanding a particular and unique problem in an in-depth way. The research was limited to data gathering, presentation, interpretation and analysis on Early Childhood Development policies and their impact on ECD programme implementation. During the process, the researchers used multiple methods/auxiliary instruments namely; in-depth interviews, observations, ECD documents, the researchers being the main instruments in the study. The employment of these instruments was useful for triangulation purposes. Prolonged

engagement, thick descriptions and member checking were contributing elements in data generation as well as assisting the researchers in coming up with credible, dependable, transferable and conformable results (Chisaka, 2007; Chisaka etal, 2017).

Purposive sampling was most ideal in this study because participants were selected based on their knowledge, ability and richness of lived experiences with the phenomenon. The sample consisted of five school administrators (heads, deputy heads, T.I.Cs), five ECD teachers, one parent from each school and two NGO representatives who were purposively selected and these participants worked directly with primary schools. The researchers used pseudonyms in the study to maintain confidentiality in gathering data.

1.12 Presentation of Findings and Discussions

The study evaluated the impact of ECD policies on ECD programmes in Buhera District primary schools. Interviewees included administrators (School heads/Deputy heads/Teachers - In-Charge), ECD teachers and parents).

Number of participants in the study

Participants	Names/Sex (psuedynms)	Age	Work Experience	Qualifications	Total No. of Participants
Administrators: school heads/Deputy heads/TICs	Mhuka (M)	55	30	M.ED	5
	Mhere (M)	52	26	B.ED	
	Zororo (M)	60	35	B.ED	
	Hatina (F)	58	34	M.ED	
	Chidza (F)	56	32	M.ED	
ECD teachers	Mhangara(M)	32	8	Dip in Educ.	5
	Mhou (F)	42	10	Dip in Educ.	
	Zengeni (F)	30	6	Dip in Educ.	
	Hakata (F)	45	12	Dip in Educ.	
	Chiriga(F)	43	12	Paraprofessional	
Parents/Community	Mhepo (M)	45	-	Peasant farmer	5
	Mate (M)	50	-	Self employed	
	Ziso (M)	58	3	SDC member	
	Hono (F)	48	-	Housewife	
	Chidziva (F)	58	5	SDC member	
NGOs	Duri (M)	44	6	NGO-Field	2

				officer	
	Mamvura (M)	38	4	NGO-Field officer	
Grand Total					17

A summary of the participants' biography assisted the researchers to know the kind of participants they were working with during the study period.

Interview guides consisted of the following questions;

Interviewees	Guiding questions
Administrators	*1. How is the ECD programme at the school organized and managed?* *2. To what extent do ECD policies contribute to the day to day running of the ECD programmes? (Highlight success stories and challenges)* *3. May you share your views about ECD policies and policy implementation in Buhera District primary schools?*
ECD Teachers	*1. How are you organizing and managing ECD programmes at the school?* *2. To what extent have you met/achieved the requirements and stipulations in the ECD policies? (May you please highlight success stories and challenges that have influenced or not influenced you in decision making)* *3. What are your views on ECD policies and policy implementation in Buhera District primary schools?*
Parents	*1. How do you feel about the establishment of the ECD programme at the school?* *2. How are you contributing to the development of the ECD programme at the school as per ECD policy stipulations?* *3. How best can we enhance better growth and development of ECD in Buhera District?*

Document Analysis: Coding Form

The following information was accessed from the coding form

Documents selected	Data analyzed
ECD Policies	*Availability/Accessibility, clarity, applicability-age, distance to and from*

	school, resource provision, involvement of significant stakeholders etc.
ECD syllabus	*Linkage with policy stipulations/requirements, environmental/societal expectations, developments coverage, that is; physical, social, intellectual, emotional, health and safety.*
Admission registers and class records	*Meeting policy requirements like; availability, content coverage, age, distance from school, attendance, social background of children.*

Source: Shylate Muzilikazi 2018

The documents analysed provided an excellent source of data for the construction of answers as advocated by (Chisaka, 2007). The data generated from the documents formed a base for the observation and interview methods to follow and this enriched the study with more information. Document analysis also assisted the researchers to see whether all documents were available and applicable in ECD education. These documents enlightened the researchers on some issues that puzzled them during observations and interviews. This enhanced the triangulation process and produced findings which allowed the researcher to look at patterns in them. This is in line with Denzin's (1997) ideas of improving the degree of trustworthiness and consistency during document analysis. The information obtained from the documents assisted the researchers to answer questions on who, when, why, what and how aspects.

2.0 OBSERVATIONS

Observations were done on areas as stipulated in the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 and Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 like; distances travelled by children to and from school, infrastructure development at the five schools (classrooms, toilets, play areas and play equipment) and other ECD activities at the schools. Observation checklists/coding forms were used to observe a pattern on the data gathered and also enhance the credibility of information (Chisaka 2007). The researchers assured the participants that they would value ethical and legal considerations during the study. Field notes were made considering the suitability, availability/accessibility, durability and applicability of different aspects in the ECD policies. Lesson observations enabled the researchers to link with ECD policy guidelines. The researchers took photographs on certain points of interest which evidenced the researchers' presence on sites. The observation process enabled the researchers to link with the document analysis and process of interviewing.

2.1 The observation checklist

School and areas of observation	Remarks (Availability, adequacy, durabity, suitability, applicability

Classrooms	
Toilets	
Sanitation	
Indoor environment/equipment	
Outdoor environment/equipment	

Source: Shylate Muzilikazi, 2018

Data were presented, interpreted, analyzed and discussed under the following themes;

- Organization and Management of ECD programmes in Buhera District primary schools- resources provision (human, material, financial and time resources)
- Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Schools and
- Participation of parents in ECD activities

2.2 Organization and Management of ECD Programmes in Buhera District.

The Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 came into being in an effort to implement the Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET, 1999) recommendations. From the interview data, observations and documents at the schools, findings revealed that the majority of ECD personnel did not receive the above policy and other ECD policies, an indication of poor dissemination processes to the user system. Only two school heads indicated that they received a circular on the establishment of ECD-B classes in the primary schools. Not even one ECD teacher was provided with any ECD policy document and this limited them in executing their roles with regards to ECD policy implementation. The following views were aired by the school heads. Mr Zororai: I do not have most ECD policies because at times they were not adequate during distribution at meetings and sometimes I failed to attend meetings called for. We ended up relying on 2nd hand information. We need more workshops and training to enhance our knowledge and skills. Ms Chidza: We do not have ECD policies because of certain reasons. We need them in order to execute our duties properly. We end up distorting information leading to inefficiency in conducting our duties.

The other school heads expressed the same sentiments that the ECD policies were poorly disseminated, thus, the ECD policies were not availed to the user system. This implies that policymakers did not put in place formal strategies to disseminate the contents of the ECD policies to the user system. Poor dissemination processes resulted in unavailability of ECD policies and misunderstanding of information which automatically led to a distortion of what the policy planners intended to achieve. In support, Carl (1995) cited in Mawere (2017) argues that it is during the dissemination stage that the climate for the envisaged change is created and all users are prepared for it. According to Mawere (2017) effective dissemination is not only a requirement for effective policy implementation but also institutionalization determines how the policy is received. It was found out that Buhera District primary schools faced challenges with ECD policy dissemination and accessibility. The schools require the

definition of strategies, proper communication channels and provision of responsibilities as advocated by Oduol, 2006.

Furthermore, ECD policies lacked clarity, which resulted in less understanding, proper organization and management of ECD activities as provided in the ECD policy guidelines and regulations. This is what the school heads and ECD teachers had to say; Mr Mhere (School head): When ECD was established, I did not know my responsibilities as head, the ECD teachers' and other stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. The ECD policies lacked detail on the expectations, for example, staffing, classrooms, community participation and curriculum to be used. The TIC now has a better understanding of ECD issues than before.

Mr Mhuka (School head): --- At times the information took longer to get to the implementers because of the channels followed, for example, workshops held at the provincial, district and then cluster levels. As it got to schools, it might be distorted and might not be as strong as before, affecting the implementation process. Ms Chiriga (ECD teacher): We need copies so that we understand better and constantly revisit the ECD policy stipulations and requirements for effective implementation. The information I got is not enough to enable me to implement the policy effectively. Ms Zengeni (ECD teacher): We are not quite aware of all the ECD policy stipulations and regulations. I am using the knowledge and skills that I gained from college.

The researchers also noted that parents and community members complained of their responsibilities of which were not clearly laid down in the ECD policies. Mangwaya etal (2016) also confirm that educational planners did not take into consideration that the ECD policies introduced by the MoPSE had insufficient information on ECD policy implementation. The participants did not have computers and electricity to access more information on ECD issues. However, according to Oduol (2006), the mere existence of policies does not guarantee their effective implementation as shown above.

We can conclusively say that not all ECD policies reached their destinations, and those that reached their destinations lacked clarity which resulted in ineffective ECD policy implementation. The sentiments shared by school heads and teachers agree with Excell and Linington (2011:10) who clearly stipulate that familiarity with ECD policies led to clarity on the guidelines regarding the ECD curriculum. A more comprehensive ECD policy needs to be developed as observed by Makokoro (2017) that there was no comprehensive ECD policy in the country.

According to the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 and other ECD policies, provisions for ECD services was supposed to be the responsibility of the school, community and other significant stakeholders. The policy clearly stipulates that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) with the help of other significant stakeholders would provide training to ECD personnel, infrastructure, play equipment and others. The introduction of ECD programmes was a good innovation though it created challenges for policy implementers (school heads, TICs and ECD teachers) in Buhera District. The policy implementers were confronted with a new system of organization, management and implementation of ECD policies without training for the new development. Thus, the ECD

curriculum (content and timetables), infrastructure, enrolments, ECD equipment and staffing were areas of concern during this development. School heads interviewed had this to say;

Ms Chidza (School head): Government's effort to attach ECD classes to primary schools is greatly appreciated. However, we do not have appropriate infrastructure, indoor and outdoor play equipment and children's literature. We are two para-professionals without a qualified ECD teacher manning the ECD children. We have large enrolments. ECD-A class has 66 children and ECD-B has 88 children in such a classroom and inadequate play equipment. Mr Mhuka (School head): It was a good move to introduce ECD programmes in schools but up to now very little was done by the government to improve the welfare of ECD children. We only have one qualified ECD teacher manning 60 children and one Para-professional manning 89 children and these caregivers do not have books to refer to including literature for children. We do not have adequate child-sized furniture, toilets and play equipment. We cannot operate effectively unless something is done. Mr Mhere: The ECD class started in an old building. After getting a government plan the school built one big classroom but we cannot meet ECD policy stipulations because the enrolment is overwhelming. ECD-A class has an enrolment of 41 children and ECD-B has 54 children. We do not have child-sized furniture, appropriate toilets and adequate play equipment to implement the ECD policies effectively because the parents' source of income for most parents is very low. Nobody is coming forward to assist.

The study revealed that schools had inadequate resources to implement ECD policies effectively like; child-sized classrooms and furniture, toilets, furniture, indoor and outdoor play equipment. Also noted was that policymakers and planners ignored the issue of school diversity. They did not take into consideration the differences that existed among schools that include previously disadvantaged rural schools and their demographic stance. This is supported by Rogan and Grayson (2003) in Mangwaya etal (2016) who strongly point out that not all schools have the capacity to implement the ECD policies to the same extent. This is also confirmed by Taruvinga, Mushoriwa, Hannah and Muzenda (2011) in Mawere (2017) who found out that a number of schools lacked qualified personnel, knowledge and skills in handling ECD issues and that most school heads were negative about the introduction of ECD programmes in primary schools. The school heads and ECD teachers were expected to make adjustments on personal habits, learn new skills and perform new roles. Mangwaya etal (2016) pointed out that the change was a directive which seemed revolutionary rather than evolutionary for the school heads and ECD teachers. The current researchers' opinions are consistent with previous research findings by Atmore (2012) that many ECD facilities function without basic infrastructure, running water, access to electricity or suitable sanitation. This is also reflected in a study by Tshabalala and Mapolisa (2012) that all the schools in the Gomadoda cluster, Nkayi district in Zimbabwe did not have adequate learning and teaching resources for ECD.

Mawere (2017) in her study on the integration of ECD programmes in the primary schools also pointed out that most ECD centres lacked suitable facilities in accordance to the ECD policies. Mawere (2017) concluded that the access of ECD heavily relied on the availability of resources. Mawere (2017) posits that the quality ECD policy implementation depends on the nature of the infrastructure, teachers, supervisors, play equipment and communities at ECD centres and the state of preparedness among the various stakeholders. The current

researchers' opinions are also consistent with previous research recommendations by Chiparange (2013) that ECD policies should be developed in the context of comprehensive public expectations and provide programmes that effectively support child development. The ECD policies did not specifically cover all that contributes to the total development of 3-5-year-olds as specified in the Statutory Instrument No. 106 of 2005.

This is supported by Chikutuma and Mawere (2013) whose research found that ECD inclusion in the primary schools was not quite viable as it failed to cater for the holistic development of learners, for example, age-appropriateness, child-sized equipment was not available and appropriate activities (curriculum) were not administered properly. More ideas of philosophers such as Dewey, Froebel, Robert Owen, Montessori and psychologists like Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky should be included in the ECD curriculum. The school environment was found not conducive to the age groups' needs of learning through play. Stufflebeam (2003) proposes for a context evaluation by policy planners to get to the context in which the policy would be implemented and that the goals and actions of the ECD programme are defined within the known culture and environment in which the policy will be implemented. In support, the researchers propose a realistic ECD policy which meets the needs, interest and culture of the people. The researchers also advocate for consultation measures with various stakeholders as advocated by Mawere (2017) that consultation is the most ideal thing to do in policy planning. The researchers concluded that ECD policies impacted negatively on ECD policy implementation and recommended for adequate funding at different levels of ECD.

It was also found that the ECD curriculum was not consistent and lacked survival skills to children as they grow and develop in different contexts. The first ECD curriculum was disseminated after the inception of the Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004 policy. The researchers observed that there was an abrupt review of the CIET, 1999 recommendations on ECD to the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022. This posed problems of interpretation of the new curriculum and its implementation. The introduction of the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015- 2022, with computers taken on board at ECD level became and is still a challenge to the Buhera District primary schools. The researchers felt that the curriculum should promote participatory learning and advocate for adequate resources for the children to manipulate, make choices and discuss what they do to enhance the holistic development of children and promote parental involvement in the education of their children.

School heads, ECD teachers and parents felt they were not fully consulted on curriculum changes and implementation. If they were well informed, this would shape the nature and direction of the change that is perceived to be desirable and the implementers would feel a sense of ownership. The parents could not afford to buy some basic necessities like computers, play equipment and books. School heads and ECD teachers from the primary schools had this to say; Mr Mhere: …The new curriculum (CFPSE 2015-2022) is difficult to follow. The timetable is congested with a lot of activities, unlike the previous curriculum. We were now well versed with the old curriculum. We need more time to adjust to the new curriculum. Ms Chidza: The new curriculum (CFPSE 2015-2022) is too much for ECD children and we need more staff development in order to conceptualize the content. New developments are confusing the children as well as ECD staff. Mr Mhangara: …With the

introduction the CFPSE 2015-2022), where will we get computers and appropriate literature in order to implement the new curriculum effectively. Right now, we do not have adequate play equipment

2.3 Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Schools

Director's Circular No. 12 of 2003 as Amended in 2007 provides guidelines on inclusive education in schools as it realized in the CRC (1989), article 5 of 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All and the Millennium goals on the rights of the children's rights. However, the policy could not be implemented fully because of the following reasons raised by school heads and ECD teachers. Ms Hatina: We once enrolled a speech-impaired child but she later withdrew because she could not communicate well with the teacher and other children. The ECD teacher lacked the knowledge and skills to assist her. We could not continue to enrol children with such challenges because of a lack of appropriate resources. Mr Zororai: I turned down children who had a severe disability because we did not have proper facilities for the disabled. It is very difficult for the ECD teacher to handle such cases without knowledge and skills. Ms Mhou: We had a physically challenged child. She did not have a wheelchair. The family provided someone who spent the whole day at the school assisting the child to go to the toilet and carry her to and from school. It was really a challenge for me and she ended up not coming to school.

The integration prepares the children for further stages in the educational process to ensure that basic foundation skills are acquired and mastered in accordance with the child's mental and physical development. However, the above statements reflected on inclusivity in ECD centres is an area of concern in Buhera district. There are lots of children in the district who are physically challenged and are not attending ECD programmes. Many of these children are left unnoticed, contradicting the Education Act 1999 as amended 2006 and CRC (1989) which recognize the child's fundamental right to education. The unavailability of proper resources like infrastructure and equipment for use by disabled children in Buhera District affect these children in their development. The researchers observed that the schools visited did not have special equipment and classrooms specifically meant for special needs children, for example, ramps, wheelchairs, braille. The above responses suggest that while all the children have the right to education, certain considerations should be made before policies are implemented. A World Bank Report (2012) submits that ECD policies should establish programmes in all essential sectors to ensure high degrees of coverage and reach the entire population equitably, especially in most disadvantaged communities.

2.4 Participation of parents in ECD activities

Director Circular No. 12 of 2005 puts emphasis on the involvement of the community through the School Development Associations/Committees (SDA/SDC. However, the study revealed that parents and the community were less involved in the provision of ECD services. Most parents cited that they lacked resources due to the current adverse economic environment. They were also unaware of what exactly they were supposed to contribute to ECD services. Parents' views on involvement; Ms Chidza: We are trying our best to do whatever is asked by the school. However, our source of income is low. We rely on subsistence farming and our product is very low because this place is very dry. If the head

asks us to do any work at the school we are cooperative. Ms Hono: We have our daily chores too so the school should take note of that. We need to raise money for the family in this harsh economic environment. Mr Ziso: We cannot meet the school's expectations because of commitments and lack of funds. The demands of the school are too much. We are not specialized in ECD issues, schools should do it.

In this scenario, parents' roles and responsibilities were not fully addressed on the ECD policy stipulations resulting in complications and challenges at the policy implementation stage. The parents had complaints of economic hardships and being burdened by the school activities. Most parents found it difficult to be fully involved in ECD activities due to their work schedules. As a result, such parents lacked understanding of their children's need for social and physical contact, language and cognitive development. In support, Tshabalala and Mapolisa (2012) indicate that parents are not willing to invest in preschool education for various reasons. Parents felt that the responsibilities given to them were for ECD specialists so they did not want to be involved since they were not specialists in the area of ECD. Therefore, the parents felt there was a need for clarifications from school heads and ECD teachers or through the media.

Most parents who were involved in ECD activities were women. UNICEF (2006), Smith (2003) concur that women's involvement in children's education promotes children's nutrition's status and results in the improvement of children's survival and school attendance. Parents are advised, therefore, to attend conferences, workshops, interact with ECD teachers on the welfare of their children and be involved in volunteer services to create positive relationships within schools as advocated by Ackerman and Barnett (2009). Bassant and Moti (2000) cited in Mawere (2017) advocates for awareness campaigns before the policies are formulated. This goes very well with Hyde and Kabiru's (2003) study on Tanzanian policy implementation which revealed that the government recognized the importance of community participation in the provision of ECD services. The current researchers' opinions coincide with Hyde and Kabiru's (2003:56) findings that the involvement of the parents and community in the provision of ECD services led to partnership and collaboration among the community, religious organizations, individuals and the Ministry of Education.

The researchers can conclusively say that there exists a discrepancy between the policymakers' and the parents' expectations on ECD activities. They found that there is limited management capacity creating confusion and disharmony amongst government policies and pieces of legislation, educational administration and the perennial conflicts within government machinery. Barnett (2008) suggests that policy development or change should not be a top-down process, resting solely in the hands of the lawmakers and Ministry officials. UNICEF and UN (2007) recommend that parents, schools, community leaders or concerned citizens be involved in decision making for effective policy implementation. In order to harmonize ECD activities and utilize resources more effectively, partnerships at community, intermediate and national levels are encouraged. Thus, ECD require a multi-sector approach where various significant stakeholders are actively involved.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study evaluated the impact of ECD policies on ECD programme implementation in Buhera District primary schools. The researchers noted the following achievements with regards to ECD policies put in place;

-There was a notable improvement on accessibility and equity in ECD programmes, thus, there was the promotion of child growth and development through the establishment of ECD programmes
-There was an improvement in the quality of ECD services in the district under study, enrolments rocketed showing a positive response towards the introduction of ECD programmes
-The Government tried to fulfil some commitments in the CRC, ACRWC CEDAW and other national constitutions.
-Establishment of ECD in schools enhanced professional linkages among ECD personnel and those in the formal system in that they shared ideas concerning the education of young children

The study would be of significance in that policy-makers and implementers would improve their way of doing things and promote the growth and development of ECD programmes in Buhera District and the country as a whole. It can be concluded that for the success of ECD, centrally regulated reforms, pressure and support are necessary. This can be aligned to Hyde and Kabiru's (2003) statement that policy specifications, structures and processes should be adhered to, for effective policies and implementation.

The researchers had the following recommendations based on the results of this study:

3.1 Organization and Management of ECD Programmes in Buhera District Primary Schools.

The government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) should improve on ECD policy dissemination processes to the user system, to enable all ECD personnel to access ECD policy documents. If possible, every ECD personnel should be availed with copies of ECD policies. The MoPSE should ensure adequate distribution of ECD policies to primary schools and that more workshops and meetings are held to enlighten school heads, TICs, ECD teachers and parents on the stipulations/regulations and responsibilities for effective ECD policy implementation.

It is also recommended that clarity measures on ECD policies be put in place to avoid distortions and misunderstanding. The ECD policies need detailed and well-defined information which enable the school heads, ECD teachers and other significant stakeholders to carry out their duties properly, knowing exactly their roles and responsibilities. Clearly laid down structures, operations and expected effectiveness should not be left out. This can be achieved if the government organizes intensive staff development workshops and meetings which are developmentally oriented. This develops confidence and competence in the school heads, ECD teachers, parents and other significant stakeholders.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) need to continuously monitor and evaluate ECD policies and programmes to see whether stipulated guidelines and

regulations in ECD policies are being followed, for example; space, teacher-pupil ratio, toilets and methodology. The MoPSE may carry out the implementation, monitoring and evaluation exercises with school heads, ECD teachers and parents considering their prior knowledge, attitudes, experiences, beliefs, norms and values. Future decisions on the form, retention, composition, obligations and responsibilities should be guided by concrete or empirical evidence generated through research so that policy planners come up with effective ECD policies.

The researchers recommend proper planning and actual provision of resources to enhance primary schools chances of effective ECD policies and their implementation. The researchers recommend that financial, material and human resources provision be improved. More classrooms, indoor and outdoor play equipment, toilets, qualified personnel should be put in place to enable ECD programmes to grow and develop in accordance with the ECD policy stipulations and regulations. More funding and involvement of different stakeholders is necessary for this ECD development.

The issue of ECD policy changes also needs urgent consideration in terms of consistency and whether it responds to current demographic situations. Thus, if ECD is to have meaning and relevance to Buhera District, the ECD policies should seek to articulate, interrogate and address the concrete existential conditions and circumstances of Buhera District. The study also recommends curriculum planners and implementers to take intervention measures of creating conditions that enable primary schools to be ready to implement ECD policies. The MoPSE could liaise with school heads for they are the ones who interact more with other ECD policy implementers. A more comprehensive ECD policy should be designed to accommodate all salient issues raised by the researchers.

3.2 Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Schools

The researchers recommend the strengthening of the Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly Policies through the Psychological Services and Special Needs personnel by providing educational psychologists in Buhera District primary schools. The educational psychologists would assess children for appropriate ECD placement. They would also look for pre-learning gaps in children with severe and profound disabilities that exist then find appropriate intervention strategies. The Police also need to improve its activities of providing services that promote child-friendly environments free of child abuse in the district.

3.3 Participation of parents in ECD activities

The researchers recommend the involvement of different stakeholders in ECD activities and address the shortage of funds to train parents and community members so that they gain knowledge and skills in organizing and managing ECD activities. Awareness campaigns on significant stakeholders are also recommended to enlighten them on the ECD policies, their responsibilities and participation in ECD activities. A training programme for strengthening the financial management of schools as proposed by Simkins and Williams (1991) would be most ideal in this situation. There is also a need to make the community appreciate the establishment of ECD programmes, their contributions in bringing the children to school, paying for levies and being involved in school development projects.

Overall, policymakers, service providers and communities must ensure access to all resources (human, organizational and financial) to sufficiently address the gap between policy adoption and implementation. Rights-based, non-discriminatory, multi-disciplinary and multi-sector ECD policies should be developed. Thus, if ECD policies are to have any meaning and relevance, they should seek to articulate, interrogate and address the essential conditions and circumstances of Buhera District primary schools including all rural primary schools in Zimbabwe.

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