

Implementation of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework - 2013 at Early Childhood Education: A case of selected Primary Schools in Western Province, Zambia

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Abstract: The study investigated the implementation of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF) - 2013 at Early Childhood Education (ECE) level in selected primary schools of Western Province, Zambia. The Objectives were to explore how the ZECF - 2013 was being implemented at ECE level and to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the ZECF - 2013 at ECE level in the Primary Schools. The study was a descriptive case study within qualitative school of thought. It targeted the ECE teachers, Head teachers and Education Standards Officers. Sampling was done purposively. The type of purposive sampling used for all the target population was stakeholder sampling. The sample size was 61. The distribution of the sample was 26 ECE teachers, 26 head teachers and 09 Education Standard Officers. Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from Head teachers and Education Standards Officers. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the ECE teachers. Document analysis used teachers teaching files, school time tables, learner assessment records, classroom inventories etc. Data analysis made use of themes arising from the data. Findings were that few teachers had minimum qualifications for ECE teachers. Implementation was in situation of inadequate classroom space, teaching staff and teaching and learning materials. The recommended Assessment tool was not used. The use of the familiar language as medium of instruction was adhered to. Child Play was not emphasized. Integrated approach to teaching and planning to teach was not familiar to teachers and not used. Conclusion was that demands of ZECF 2013 were not fully adhered to. Inadequate classroom space meant that aspects of ECE learning and routine suffered. Areas of child development and establishment of development patterns in children suffered due to improper assessment. Language development & Primary Literacy Program is bound to succeed. Holistic Child development was undermined. The study recommends that satellite ECE centers under the management of the nearest primary schools be constituted using cheap and local materials so as to decongest the primary schools grappling with inadequate resources. Rigorous CPD programs should be instituted to align the teachers with the demands of ECE teaching and the ZECF – 2013.

Keywords: Child Play, Integrated Approach, Assessment, Early Childhood Education

I. INTRODUCTION

At the birth of the new Republic of Zambia in 1964, there was a shift from a colonially designed education system to a system that was subtended on equality. The color bar that punctuated colonial education was consequently broken. Certain policy pronouncements and undertakings had to be taken and put in place. The Education Act of 1966 overhauled the whole Education system of the country to meet the aspirations of the newly independent country. The primary and secondary school curriculum was diversified and standardized while the secondary school curriculum was aligned with the demands of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, it is noted that at that time, Early Childhood Education, which was offered within the mainstream education as Substandard A and B was removed (CDC, 2013). ECE was to be offered at the discretion of Social Welfare Departments by local authorities, local communities, and non-governmental organizations.

In 1977 the country had the Educational Reforms (MOE, 1977) that came in with more changes to the education system. As regards ECE, the Education Reforms emphasized that ECE was intended for children below the age of seven who normally will not have started full time education. However, and most importantly, the Education Reforms stated that ECE was not going to be available to every child for a long time to come (MOE, 1977: 8). The National Education policy; *Educating our Future* (MOE, 1996), reiterated the significance of ECE in the development of the child. Again, there was admission that only a small minority of Zambian children were able to benefit from the education at that level. Furthermore, the Education Policy document re-emphasized that the provision and funding of Early Childhood and Pre-school Education would be the responsibility of councils, local communities, non-governmental organizations, private individuals and families (MOE, 1996).

Save for a few policy pronouncements and declarations, the milestone document in the education provision in the recent past was the *Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013*

(CDC, 2013). The outcome of that move was that Pre-school education which was since independence decentralized and that each local government had to design and develop its own system of providing ECE was to fall directly under the Ministry of General Education. Consequently, there was to be a standardization of what had for a long time been an uncoordinated, fragmented and substandard ECE. Additionally, the ZECF - 2013 dictated that newly introduced ECE, like lower primary school grades, was to make use of the local language as a medium of instruction. Contrary to the spirit of Education Reforms of 1977 which indicated that Preschool teachers would not be employed by the Ministry of General Education but by the Local Authority or the proprietors of the pre-school (MOE, 1977: 75; UNESCO, 2006), the ZECF - 2013 provided for the employment of ECE teachers in the Ministry of Education.

Pursuant of the aspiration as contained in the ZECF - 2013 (CDC, 2013) each primary school was to have an ECE section and that more ECE teachers were to be trained and deployed into the mainstream education system. Almost a decade after the implementation of the ZECF - 2013 (CDC, 2013), there was need to study the implementation of the said ZECF - 2013 in selected Primary schools of Western Province.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

From independence, ECE fell under the Ministry of Local Government and each local authority had its own curricula. ECE was not available to all the children in the country (MOE, 1977; MOE, 1996). In response to the MOE Strategic Plan 2003 – 2007, the Fifth National Development Plan 2006 – 2010 and the National Educational Policy Document 1996, the government, in 2013, produced a document of the review of the curriculum which was titled the ZECF - 2013. The Framework came with new dictates among them the introduction of ECE into the mainstream Ministry of Education. The roadmap for the implementation of the New Curriculum as reflected in the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 (CDC, 2013: 61) show that its implementation for ECE started in 2014.

At that time, the education system in Zambia had been grappling with various problems. The problems included inadequate staff, high pupil teacher ratio with teachers working under double or triple shift system (UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF 2008). The ZECF - 2013 was adding new responsibilities onto a system that was already asphyxiated especially in the rural areas. Thomas and Thomas (2009: 10) writing on the ECE implementation dream in Zambia stated that “*It was actually difficult to imagine that quality instruction and, therefore, cognitively challenging instruction, will occur in these dire educational environments.*” Given the dire educational environments as graphically described by Thomas and Thomas (2009) and almost a decade after the commencement of the implementation of the ZECF - 2013 at ECE level, one could not help asking how the implementation of the ZECF – 2013 was being done at that level.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

- To explore the implementation of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 at Early Childhood Education level.
- To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 at Early Childhood Education level.

IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

ECE and Primary School Dichotomous setup and Management

In the study by Kilgallon, et al (2008), it was revealed that the dichotomy in some schools of Australia where primary schools and ECE existed within one institution, line managers did not give enough support in coping with the daily demands of ECE. Given that the ZECF - 2013 provides for the inclusion of ECE within the existing primary school setup; which is actually the dichotomy that is stated the study by Kilgallon, et al (2008), there was need to explore the manner the ZECF - 2013 was being implemented.

Mafora and Phorabatho (2013: 117) did a study on the capability of the principals of school in Moretele Area of North West Province; South Africa in implementing the National Curriculum Statement. The findings of the study indicated that principals of schools struggled with the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement as a curriculum Change. The study revealed that they had inadequate knowledge about managing a complex curriculum and that the situation was worsened by lack of resources like infrastructure to accommodate the learners. This was to the extent that Mafora and Phorabatho (2013) recommended that principals of schools be subjected to professional training on how to manage the curriculum. Talking about the lack of resources, it is a common trend in African countries but mindful of creativity on the part of the different managers of learning institutions, the picture so created in the study by Mafora and Phorabatho (2013) need to be verified by more studies like in Zambia which Thomas & Thomas (2009) described to be a *dire situation*.

Shikwasha (2014) and Sakambuta et al (2016) did studies on the implementation of ECE and the ZECF respectively. Though the studies acknowledged the inclusion of ECE in main schools and various inadequacies that came with it, they did not delve into the aspect of ECE primary schools dichotomous set up and management

Quality of Teachers

The NAEYC (2009) confirms that in the United States of America it has been noted that teachers are adopting excessive lecturing to the whole group, fragmented teaching of discrete objectives, and rigid tightly paced schedules. However, the study does not show how the lecturing manifests in an ECE

situation considering that ECE teaching and learning is predominantly child play. If that could be found in the United States of America where there are adequate facilities for training teachers and for teaching and learning, there was need to find out what was obtaining in the Zambian schools as regards the ZECF - 2013.

In another study in South Africa, Brynard and Netshkhopani (2011: 61) found that teachers were not properly trained so as to be able to implement the National Curriculum Statement in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. Actually the South African arrangement is such that it has had repeated revision of the curriculum without adequately attending to its implementation such that teaching and learning became compromised (Guthrie, 2012). Consequently, educators become tired of change and implementation becomes increasingly fraught with politically embedded challenges located ownership of the curriculum as well as adequate teacher training for implementation (Molapo and Pillay, 2018: 2). Similarly, the introduction of ECE in the primary schools in Zambia is a new project in which implementers are tasked to carry out a new exercise. The views of the educators need to be studied so as to adequately gauge the implementation of the ZECF - 2013. Sakambuta et al (2016) bemoaned the lack of competencies by the teachers to implement the ZECF – 2013 at primary school level. However the study did not deal with the ECE teachers.

The Zambian situation on ECE

One of the oldest studies done on curriculum in Zambia concluded that the centralized nature of curriculum development leads to a wide gap between the educational leaders on the one hand and the local community, teachers and students on the other (Mukoboto, 1982: 58). It is this very gap that makes it very necessary carry out studies on the curriculum after every review and/or reform to see how the curriculum implementation is fairing. Furthermore, the study was done in secondary schools leaving out the primary schools which are the object of attention by this study. The need for the study is also amplified by the fact that it is for the first time in independent Zambia that the primary public schools have ECE as part of the system.

A study was conducted on the implementation of localized curriculum in selected basic schools in Zambia (Kalimaposo and Mulubale, 2015). The study did not undertake to have a holistic look at the curriculum but looked at the localized curriculum. From this point of view there is need to carry out a study that will give a picture of how the implementation of the curriculum is fairing.

There has been an understanding that Early Childhood Education has had an array of challenges mostly arising from policy vacuum in the delivery of ECE services (Matafwali, Munsaka, Mweemba and Muleya, 2013). Other studies confirmed that there was diverse and uncoordinated ECE practices; fragmented and non-standardized curriculum; lack of standards in monitoring and supervision; and lack of

financing (Matafwali and Munsaka, 2011: 117; Matafwali et al., 2013). Following the promulgation of the ZECF - 2013 which paved way for the standardization of the ECE practices, there was need to study the implementation of the ECE curriculum in the primary schools.

Munsaka and Matafwali (2011) hails the government of Zambia on the efforts to raise the targets for ECE through recruiting qualified teachers, increasing the number of teachers' education colleges offering ECE teachers qualifications among others. However, Munsaka and Matafwali (2011: 111) bemoans the concentration of the energies on the justification of the ECE programs in the stead of focusing on the what is to be taught (content), the context in which the teaching is to be done and the manner of implementation. Therefore, the need to find out how the ZECF - 2013 is being implemented stands justified.

The MOE Strategic Plan 2003 – 2007 (MOE, 2003), the Fifth National Development Plan 2006 – 2010 (MFNP, 2006) and the National Educational Policy Document 1996 (MOE, 1996) indicated that every learner should have access to Early Childhood Care, Education and Development facilities by 2012 or there should at least be one caregiver to ten early learners by 2020. The ZECF – 2013 was produced to pave way for those plans and dreams. As at 2006, the education system in Zambia had been grappling with various problems. The system has had a problem of inadequate staff, high pupil teacher ratio with teachers working under double or triple shift system (UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF 2008). Other problems included inadequate infrastructure and lack of teaching and learning resources. This was confirmed by the Zambia Demographic Health Survey (2013 – 2014). The framework was adding new responsibilities onto a system that is already asphyxiated especially in the rural areas. Thomas and Thomas (2009: 10) writing on the ECE implementation dream in Zambia stated that “*It was actually difficult to imagine that quality instruction and, therefore, cognitively challenging instruction, will occur in these dire educational environments.*” There is a gap in terms of empirical information as regards the fears expressed by Thomas and Thomas (2009: 10) thus the need to carry out studies like this one.

In a study conducted in Kabompo district of the North Western Province of Zambia, it was revealed that schools had a challenges of inadequate infrastructure, teaching staff and teaching and learning materials (Shikwasha, 2014: 58). The study brought out the challenges but did not deal with challenges as they related to the implementation to the ZECF – 2013. In terms of quality the study reported 12 trained ECE teachers against 40 primary schools and 09 community schools yet no Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities had been done (p. 61). This was to the extent that the stakeholders did not have a clear idea of what really was required for quality ECE to be provided. Shikwasha (2014: 72) actually found that some school managers had no idea of the requirements of an ECE center inclusive of the play park

and its significance. That ECE should have 60% child play and 40% academic (CDC, 2013) learning was unheard-of.

Another study done on the implementation of the ZECF – 2013 was done in the North Western Province of Zambia (Sakambuta et al, 2018). Although the study did not concentrate on ECE but the primary school in general, it found that the teachers did not have the rightful competencies for implementing of the ZECF – 2013.

The roadmap for the implementation of the New Curriculum as reflected in the ZECF - 2013 (CDC, 2013: 61) show that its implementation for ECE started in 2014. Given the dire educational environments as graphically presented by Thomas and Thomas (2009) and that ECE went on to be offered in the mainstream Ministry of Education (CDC, 2013), the quality of instruction needs to be checked. Thus, almost half a decade after the commencement of the implementation of the ZECF - 2013 at ECE Level, there is need to study the implementation of the curriculum framework at that level.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in approach. It was qualitative because it was to bring out subjective experiences and views of frontline stakeholders. The research design was a descriptive case study. The research was conducted in Western Province of Zambia. The Province has sixteen (16) districts. The target population included the school head teachers, ECE class teachers in the public primary schools and Education Standards Officers. The number of districts that participated in the study was nine (09). The sample size for the study was 61. The distribution of the sample was 26 ECE teachers, 26 head teachers and 09 Education Standard Officers.

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Convenience sampling was the type of purposive sampling used to sample the schools in the districts because there was likelihood that not all the public primary schools were running ECE. In that respect, the researcher relied on the District Education Board Secretaries offices to identify the schools where the study would be conducted. Not more than 05 schools in each district were sampled. The 09 districts were also sampled by the researcher based on the assignments at the place of work of the researcher. Stakeholder sampling was the purposive sampling used to sample the respondents; Education Standard officers, the head teachers and the class teachers.

Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from the head teachers and Education Standards Officers. Questionnaires were used on class teachers. Data for document analysis was derived from school records like teachers teaching files, school time tables, learner assessment records, classroom inventories etc.

Data was analyzed by looking for emerging themes to develop generalizations on the implementation of the ZECF - 2013 at ECE in the province. The themes of analysis were in line with matters articulated in the ZECF - 2013; teachers'

qualifications, contact time at ECE section, assessment of learners, subject integration and language of instruction. The quantitative data was deductively analyzed using simple descriptive statistics

VI. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

a. *Qualifications of the respondents*

Out of the 26 teachers handling ECE that were sampled 10 had ECE teachers certificate, 09 had ECE teachers Diploma while 07 had Primary Teachers Qualifications. None of the teachers sampled had teachers' degree in ECE nor was there a secondary school teacher or untrained in any teaching handling ECE. All the teachers that were qualified at ECE Teachers' Certificate level were trained prior to the production of the ZECF – 2013 and before the standardization of Diploma as the lowest qualification in teaching.

This means that nine (09) out of the twenty six (26) teachers were qualified to teach at ECE having been in possession of ECE teachers diploma. The ten (10) teachers with ECE teachers' certificates were trained before the ZECF – 2013. The likelihood of the teachers not being very conversant with the teaching methodologies like subject integrated teaching which was adopted by the Ministry of General Education is very high. Those that could be considered to be ECE trained; ECE teachers certificate holders, were trained at the time confirmed by other studies (Matafwali and Munsaka, 2011: 117; Matafwali et al., 2013) that there was diverse and uncoordinated Early Childhood Education practices; fragmented and non-standardized curriculum; lack of standards in monitoring and supervision.

This finding is in tandem with findings of some other studies done which found that teachers that were the primary stakeholders in the implementation of the curriculum were not properly trained in that curriculum (Brynard & Netshkhopani, 2011; Molapo & Pillay, 2018). When teachers are not properly trained in the curriculum implementation they are bound to employ inappropriate methodologies to teach as found in the study by NAEYC (2009).

b. *Size of the schools*

Of the schools sampled, none of them was just an ECE center without other grades. None ran from ECE to grade 4. Only 01 school ran from ECE to Grade 7. 20 of the schools were running from ECE to Grade 9 and 05 of the schools were running from ECE to Grade 12.

All the head teachers were agreeing on the fact that ECE has its own style of classroom arrangement and teaching methodologies.

It requires classrooms specific for ECE and adjacent environment for child play activities. The introduction of ECE into the existing primary and secondary schools has a toll in the infrastructure

classroom accommodation and availability of in the schools (Head teachers)

This was explained to be as a result of limited classroom space following the introduction of ECE in the mainstream Ministry of General Education. This has resulted in the same classroom being used by the ECE learners and being used by one or more other Grades per day.

Most school managers indicated that they have had to reduce the contact hours for the ECE learners.

Given the inadequate classroom space, we are forced to reduce the contact hours for the ECE learners so that the elderly learners in primary and secondary sectors can make use of the room (Head teacher 5)

The teachers and the administrators explained that the lack of specific classroom for ECE as a result of sharing the classroom space with other grades had a negative impact on the adherence to requirements like teaching corners and durability of teaching and learning aids. It was difficult to have the ECE classrooms have a display and arrangement that was synonymous with ECE demands; display of charts and pictures, presence of sleeping area, mats for sharing time etc.

You will find that the classroom arrangement always has to be altered when the other grades come to use them. ECE we have corners that are not made use in other grades like home corner, market corner, sleeping/ resting place etc. All these will have to be disturbed (ESO 9)

Because of lack of resources, the ECE centers opened within the bigger schools had the learners using toilets that were also used by the big boys and girls. Except for the schools that had the involvement of donors or had a large revenue collection base from sections that did not fall under free education or had productive means of raising financial resources, infrastructure used for ECE left much to be desired (ESO 07).

There is perceived lack of prioritization of ECE in the schools as much attention was concentrated to sections above the ECE (ECE Teacher 20). The fact that ECE was being run at the same school with other grades fits into the ECE & Primary school dichotomous set up and management illustrated by Kilgallon et al, (2008). This is where primary schools and ECE existed within one institution; line managers did not give enough support in coping with the daily demands of ECE. This was found to be due to inadequate funding especially that ECE fell under the free education bracket.

c. Assessment of ECE learners

Only 19 teachers in the sample indicated that the type of assessment they offered to the learners was self set. 05 teachers indicated they used an Assessment Tool provided by the Ministry of General Education; the Child Development Assessment Tool for Zambia (CDATZ). Only 02 of the teachers indicated that they never offered any form of assessment to the learners.

The noted trend indicated that the prescribed method of assessment was not adhered to which meant that the desired progression of the learners in the ECE section was not closely monitored. The fact that teachers assessed the learners using the inappropriate method may lead to inability of attaining the desired goals of ECE centers being the transition centers for the learners from home into grade school.

If the learners are assessed using methods akin with the grade one and going up, it means that the learning process is no longer full of social interaction and play but purely academic.

Only 02 of the sampled teachers indicated that they assessed the learners continuously, in spite of the ZECF – 2013 indicating that assessment should be continuous. Much as 08 teachers indicated that they had seen the CDATZ before and 18 having had not seen the instrument before, only 06 had used it before.

The head teachers; on the other hand, had no idea of how the learners at ECE were to be assessed apart from acknowledging that they were aware of an assessment specially designed for ECE learners.

Yes I am aware that there is a way in which the ECE learners are supposed to be assessed which is not the same as the way we assess the grade school learners but I have never seen the instruction of how the assessment should be conducted (Head teacher 14)

d. Language of Instruction

The study found that all the 26 teachers in the schools that fell within the sample used local language as the medium of instruction at ECE level. The common local language that was used as the medium of instruction was Silozi. Silozi language is also the Regional Official Language in the Western Province. The teachers were able to use the local language for instruction with 15 being very conversant, 07 rated as being conversant while 04 were found to be only a bit conversant. None of the teachers in the sample was found not to be conversant with the local language at all.

Some schools located in places where the learners did not pick Silozi as their Mother Tongue had learners coming to school at ECE level with Luchazi, Chokwe, Nkoya, Nyengo or Mashi as L1. Though they spoke other languages as their mother tongue, they were able to use Silozi communicatively.

The head teachers and ESOs indicated a success on the use of the local language as a medium of instruction at ECE. The only contraindication arose in places where there were many private ECE schools where the learners received instruction in English language. The problem was said to arise when the learners were brought to public schools for grade levels. The transition from ECE to grade school was difficult for the learners because the ZECF 2013 further indicates that medium of instruction should be local language from ECE to Grade 4. Such learners find it difficult to switch to local language after doing ECE in English.

e. Integrated Approach to teaching ECE

It was found that 22 of the sampled 26 teachers indicated that they taught the subjects / or learning areas taught at ECE as individual subjects. Each subject or learning area was said to be taught individually. In many of the classes in the sampled schools there was indication on the chalkboard that the teacher was teaching Mathematics with writings on the board reading “LIPALO” meaning mathematics as well as other subject areas.

Only 04 indicated that they made use of integrated approach when handling the ECE subjects. The teachers found it difficult how the many subjects could be combined within the same lesson without the subjects coming out distinctively.

Some of the teachers could not figure out how many subjects could be taught in lesson:

that is where we do not understand this ECE, just how do you teach all the subjects in one lesson? Our teachers are failing to do that (Head teacher 3).

This was also confirmed by the head teachers and ESOs as most of the teachers and managers in the schools have had no exposure to the manner of handling ECE especially integrated teaching. Due to lack of teaching staff, we have asked primary teachers to handle ECE classes up until qualified ECE teachers are deployed.

The primary school teachers are trained and used to teaching subjects separately.

It becomes a problem when you ask them to teach more than one subject in one lesson (ESO 1).

The teachers helping to handle ECE were not subjected to adequate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities to make them abreast with the demands of the section they are teaching just like in the study done in Kabompo in Zambia (Shikwasha, 2014). In this instance, the problem of the implementers not being trained in the manner of curriculum implementation at ECE level in this regard still comes up as put in the reviewed studies (Mafora & Phorabatho, 2013; Brynard & Netshkhopani, 2011; Molapo & Pillay, 2018).

f. Contact hours for ECE section

The number of hours that were used for a session was collected from the school and class time tables as well as teachers’ files. In terms of the number of hours spent on teaching the ECE classes, 04 teachers indicated that they spent two hours thirty minutes per day. 07 of them spent three hours per day. 03 teachers had three hours thirty minutes of contact hours with the learners. 04 teachers had more than three hours thirty minutes of contact hours with the learners.

The schools where less than three hours per day were used for the learning and teaching of ECE explained that there was not enough classroom space because the classrooms had to be

used by other senior grades. Furthermore, 08 questionnaires had the aspect of duration of a learning session not answered.

The ZECF 2013 indicates that the total time allocation per week for ECE level is 15 hours (CDC, 2013: 28). Given that school attendance occurs from Monday to Friday means that each learning day makes use of 03 hours per day. From the findings only 03 teachers/ schools in the study of the 26 adhered to 03 hours as indicated in the ZECF 2013. The school head teachers and ESOs could not articulate the aspect of time allocation at ECE. This finding was in tandem with the finding of the study by Mafora and Phorabatho (2013) which revealed that the principals of schools in Marotele area of North West Province of South Africa had inadequate knowledge about managing a complex curriculum and that the situation was worsened by lack of resources like infrastructure to accommodate the learners

g. Sessions/ categories of ECE

The ZECF 2013 shows that ECE is divided into Nursery (3 to 4 years) and reception (5 to 6 years) of age (CDC, 2013: 27). The categories that were found in the sampled schools were Nursery and reception. In some instances, nursery and reception were combined within one session. Combining of nursery and reception classes within one room and session was explained as being a consequence of lack of classroom space.

The ESOs indicated that they have been advising most of the school managers to consider concentrating on reception (5 to 6) years due to inadequate staff and classroom space. It came out that much as they would have wanted to have all the levels of ECE taught in our schools, the realization that most of the teachers are not trained to handle ECE constrain sit all. The youngest of the ages for ECE is nursery; (3 to 4 years) of age. In view of that, most schools did not have nursery stage. The dire situation mentioned in Thomas and Thomas (2009) when it was said that “*It was actually difficult to imagine that quality instruction and, therefore, cognitively challenging instruction, will occur in these dire educational environments.*” is evident in this instance. In this regard it is also in line with the findings in which Brynard and Netshkhopani (2011: 61) found that teachers were not properly trained so as to be able to implement the National Curriculum Statement in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

h. Inclusion of Child Play

The aspect of child play was not very much emphasized as a serious component of ECE. The learners were made to undergo teaching and learning akin to early primary school. When time was given for the learners to play, it was not coordinated and not within the learning time. It was only after the regular teaching hours that the teacher would ask the learners to go and play in readiness to knock off and go home

Child play was actually considered as a separate activity outside learning time. At one ECE center it was reported that

the learners were considered to be disturbing the elderly pupils.

the head teacher would many times tell me to send the children home because they were making noise for upper grades and causing disorder. (ECE teacher 4)

Most of the child play activities were found to be done in school play parks though the play parks were in deplorable state. This is in line with the finding in the study done in schools of Kabompo district (Shikwasha, 2014)

VII. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions were based on the research objectives as follows:

Implementation of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013

The study revealed that the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 was being implemented with the following successes pointing to adherence:

In spite of the challenge of inadequate staff, the schools found a teacher or teachers to stand in and handle the ECE though unqualified to handle the section. It was better than someone untrained at all.

The schools managed to squeeze the opening of ECE centers within a situation of inadequate infrastructure and learning and teaching materials so as to allow ECE to have a footing and run.

The use of local language as a medium of instruction at ECE section was found to be adhered to. This was enhanced by the fact that all the teachers were conversant with the use of the local language.

Except for a few instances, the schools made use of an average of three hours of contact and learning time with the ECE learners. This is in line with the requirement indicated in the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013.

Few of the schools had the two categories of ECEDCE that are recommended for the Zambian public schools operational. These were Nursery and Reception.

Challenges faced in implementing the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 at Early Childhood Education

Qualifications of the respondents

All the teachers that were qualified at ECE teachers' certificate level were trained prior to the production of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 and before the standardization of the lowest teachers' qualification as a Diploma. The teachers were not very conversant with the teaching methodologies like integrated teaching which was adopted by the Ministry. The other teachers; primary school teachers, did not only have the necessary qualification to teach the level but; like the ECE teachers certificate holders, had not

received appropriate and adequate orientation even within CPD platforms.

Size of the schools

The schools were running from ECE to higher grades. ECE was not given the necessary prioritization as compared to higher grades. With inadequate infrastructure the teachers could not manage to create an atmosphere conducive for ECE learning in the classrooms. The teaching and learning materials had to be shifted, packed and repacked most parts of the day which compromised durability of the materials as well as compromising the teaching and learning.

Assessment of ECE learners

Assessment was not being done accordingly as the locally set tests that the teachers administered are not in line with the dictates and spirit of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 (CDC, 2013) and the Early Childhood Education Syllabi (CDC, 2013: xiv). The Child Development Assessment Tool for Zambia (CDATZ) was not a familiar document to large number of teachers of ECE in the sampled schools and the head teachers alike.

Language of instruction

Though teaching using the local language as a medium of instruction was going on well, the teachers and head teachers in schools in places where there were privately owned ECE centers registered the challenge of parents within the communities preferring to send their children to private ECE centers where the medium of instruction is English. The consequence arises when the same learners are brought to the public school to register for Grade 1 where they have to learn in a local language.

Integrated Approach to teaching ECE

The teachers were not vested with the skill of how many subjects could be taught within one lesson. They instead taught the subjects separately.

Session/ categories of ECE

The categories of ECE were all visible in most schools except that the learners of different ages were learning together in the same class. Learners whose age was supposed for Nursery were learning in the same class with those that were supposed to be in Reception class. One contributing factor was that some parents, for an array of reasons did not bring their children for ECE and only brought them to register into Grade 1. School administrators had no option but to redirect such children to ECE. That meant such children would be in the same class with children by far younger than them.

Inclusion of child Play

It was found that Child play was not considered a significant aspect of ECE teaching and learning. Child Play was considered as an activity that the children were made to engage in after formal learning had come to an end; an

activity outside learning time. Child play was actually considered as distractive and a disruption of the school serenity and orderliness in some schools.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualifications of the ECE teachers

That the number of appropriately trained teachers is very small shows that ECE teaching and learning was not being done according to the demands of the ZECF - 2013 and the Early Childhood Education Syllabi. The teachers that were trained before the ECE was brought into the mainstream Ministry of General Education and before the production of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 applied the approaches that were different from the demands of the Curriculum Framework 2013. This poses a negative threat on the realization of the ECE dream.

Recommendation

This study recommends that more appropriately trained teachers be deployed into the schools. All the teachers that were qualified at ECE teachers' certificate level should be encouraged to upgrade to the qualification of ECE Teachers Diploma. The Office of the Provincial Education Officer should work in collaboration with the Public Teacher Education College in the province to design and run a rigorous CPD program aimed at aligning the teaching staff at ECE level in the districts with the teaching approaches as well as the dictates of the ZECF - 2013 and the Early Childhood Education Syllabi.

Size of the schools

Addition of ECE section to the schools that had been grappling with inadequate classroom space resulted in the rooms used for ECE being used by other grades before or after an ECE session. This means that materials had to be shifted from place to place as well as being fixed and un-fixed. It frustrates that the delivery of lessons with the use of learning and teaching aids.

Recommendation

Let there be expedited efforts to create satellite centers of ECE within a particular catchment area of each primary school as that would decongest the existing primary schools. For as long as the satellite centers report to the mother school within the catchment area, the administrative aspect would be taken care of by the mother school. The satellite centers would be staffed within the community schools staffing criteria and revitalized through rigorous CPD.

The learners would attend ECE at the satellite centers that are administratively connected to the already established primary schools. With the help of the community, cheap local materials would be used to create shelter and play equipment for the learners to use. That would decongest the main primary schools. The inertia supposedly arising from the

dichotomous management setup within one school as noted in Kilgallon, et al (2008) would be lessened.

Assessment of ECE learners

The assessment that was being administered was not the appropriate one and did not take into consideration the identification of the possible areas of child development nor would it guide the establishment of development patterns in children.

Recommendations

The Office of the Provincial Education Officer should work in collaboration with the Public Teacher Education College to design and run a rigorous CPD program aimed at aligning the teaching staff at ECE level in the districts with the teaching approaches as well; as the dictates of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 and the Early Childhood Education Syllabi. It should also orient the teachers on the assessment aspects as they relate to ECE and the use of the Child Development Assessment Tool for Zambia (CDATZ).

Language of instruction

The ability of the teachers to use the local language as a medium of instruction shows that the aspect of transition management for the learners from home to school is well managed. The ground for literacy is laid down and the Primary Literacy Program is poised to succeed as the candidates that get into primary school will have passed through ECE that emphasize familiar language as a medium of instruction.

The private ECE schools that use English as a medium of instruction make the learners find it difficult to transit into Grade 1. This happens when the learners that did ECE at the private school get into public school for the primary education.

Recommendation

The office of the Provincial Education Officer working with the offices of District Education Board Secretaries should work to ensure that the private schools in the districts make use of familiar language as a medium of instruction.

Integrated Approach to teaching ECE

The teaching of the learning areas/ subjects as individual subjects result in a disjointed Fragmented arrangement of handling materials that the learners are supposed to be subjected to. The ECE learners are supposed to be taught using integrated approach. Teaching the ECE learners in a disjointed way undermines the holistic development of the child.

Recommendation

The Office of the Provincial Education Officer should work in collaboration with the Public Teacher Education College to design and run a rigorous CPD program aimed at aligning the teaching staff at ECE level in the districts with the teaching

approaches as well; as the dictates of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013 and the Early Childhood Education Syllabi. Involvement of the District Teachers Resource Center Coordinators (DRCCs) would make it easy for the skills of planning for integrated teaching and delivery of integrated lessons to be disseminated to all the teachers at ECE.

Inclusion of child Play

Non-inclusion of child play within the lesson delivery denies the children the most important component of child development and social interaction. It also undermines the significance of holistic child development through which the developmental areas like physical development; social emotional, spiritual and moral development can be achieved. Other developmental areas that suffer due to the non-inclusion of child play are language development, aesthetic development and cognitive intellectual development.

Recommendation

Whereas this study encourages the establishment of play parks in schools it is hereby noted that play parks without teacher knowledge of how to integrate child play within the learning a process may still not deliver on the implementation of the ZECF – 2013. Therefore, the establishment of play parks should go along with orientation on how child play is integrated within the learning process. The CPD mentioned earlier should take child play on board.

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