



**THE READINESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THE
NEW CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE AT ECD (A) LEVEL:
A CASE STUDY OF BANDURA URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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Abstract:

In a bid to align the Zimbabwe education and training sub-sectors to the evolving needs of the nation, the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) put forward several recommendations. One of the recommendations was that the state should increase access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) by coming up with a formal primary school based ECD curriculum (*CIET: 1992*). Technocrats in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) translated the CIET recommendations into an actionable curriculum policy. Between 2014 and 2016, the MoPSE designed a new curriculum and prepared the relevant teaching-learning inputs (*Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education: 2015-2022 (CFPSE: 2015-2022)*). The MoPSE said, schools were ready to implement the new curriculum with effect from January 2017(*CFPSE: 2015-2022*). On the contrary, some sectors of the society doubted that schools were prepared. The Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), alleged teachers and parents were not consulted and schools were ill prepared (*News Day Zimbabwe: 09/01/17*). A pre-research research established that 16 private ECD centers dotted around Bindura urban had a combined enrolment of 1200 children which was almost 50% of the ECD market share. This background motivated the researchers to find out if primary schools were prepared to implement the ECD curriculum.

Keywords: readiness, primary schools, curriculum, Zimbabwe

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1. Major Research Question

To what extent are primary schools in Zimbabwe prepared to implement the new curriculum at ECD A level?

2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent do teachers possess the requisite craft competence needed to implement the new curriculum at ECD A level?
- To what extent do primary schools in Zimbabwe have the teaching-learning media relevant to the new ECD curriculum?
- How adequate is the primary school infrastructure for the implementation of the new ECD curriculum?

3. Literature Review

3.1 The ECD Curriculum before the CIET Recommendations

The distribution of the education service in Zimbabwe is highly centralized. In such a context, the word curriculum can be defined as, an officially planned and selected teaching-learning program for schools spelling out the; intended learning outcomes, learning areas, teaching-learning methods, infrastructural requirements, and evaluation procedures (*Gwarinda: 2002*).

Before the implementation of the CIET recommendations, ECD programs and centers did not exist in the form and shape they have today. ECD programs were coordinated by two government ministries namely, Health and Child Welfare and Community Development and Women's Affairs (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*). The centers were more of Child Supplementary feeding points than ECD Centers as they are understood currently (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*). They were community based programs usually located outside school premises and administrative authority. They were manned by para-professionals or community caregivers, without a clear curriculum template and the standards were generally poor (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*).

3.2 The Current ECD Curriculum

ECD programs now fall directly under the MoPSE. It is now compulsory for every primary school to be an ECD center. The ECD program is a two year cycle made up of two grades, ECD (A) and ECD (B). ECD (A) is for 3 to 4 year olds whereas ECD (B) is

for 4 to 5 year olds. Under the current phase of the new curriculum implementation, the ECD (A) grade is the one doing the new curriculum.

The new current curriculum clearly spells out the; intended learning outcomes, learning areas, teaching-learning methods, infrastructural requirements, assessment and evaluation procedures. The broad aim of the two year ECD program is to develop an educational foundation for the learning of concepts from grade 1 and beyond (CFPSE: 2015 – 2022). There are seven learning areas for ECD learners namely:

- Languages (with indigenous language as the medium of instruction),
- Visual and Performing Arts,
- Physical Education,
- Mass Displays,
- Mathematics and Science,
- Family and Heritage and
- Information Communication Technology (ICT) (CFPSE: 2015 – 2022).

The ECD syllabus recommends the use of hands on, participative and discovery teaching-learning methods (CFPSE: 2015 – 2022). Continuous assessment is the recommended assessment model (CFPSE: 2015 – 2022).

The ECD curriculum in its current form added two more grades to make them nine at primary school level. The curriculum added to more years to the primary school cycle to make it nine years. These changes had far reaching implications as far the provision of the human and the material teaching-learning inputs are concerned. This motivated the researchers to find out the extent to which primary schools are ready to implement the ECD curriculum at ECD (A) level.

3.3 The Teaching-learning Inputs for the New ECD Curriculum

A good curriculum policy may suffer a still birth if the resources that are needed to implement it are not sufficiently supplied (Mkpa: 2005). Prepared primary schools must have the relevant human resources, media, infrastructure and funds in adequate quantities and qualities.

3.4 Human Resources

Teachers are the back bone in the implementation of the ECD curriculum at shop floor level. The teachers should be supplied in adequate numbers and qualities. The official teacher to pupil ratio at ECD level is 1 teacher to 20 pupils (Chikutuma et al: 2013). The teachers must have the relevant content knowledge otherwise, they may do more harm than good to the learners (Chivore: 1994). They must be able to correctly interpret the ECD syllabi, use the recommended learner-centred methods and the continuous

assessment model. Obtaining knowledge and skills gaps should be rectified through interventions like staff development (*Makunja: 2016*).

Teacher motivation is one of the variables that should be taken seriously by policy makers. They should motivate teachers by involving them in the policy making process as well as making the conditions of service favorable. Provision of the necessary teaching-learning inputs also motivates them a great deal (*Hawes: 1979*). According to the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development, the new ECD curriculum created a need for an additional 11 000 ECD teachers (*ZBC News: May 14, 2017*). The study was meant to find out if the government supplied enough of the required human resources.

3.5 Non Projected Media

Non projected media is defined by (*Shumbayaonda et al: 2000*) as two dimensional aids which tell their implications with words or pictorially or both. For ECD teachers, these are the teaching-learning inputs like: syllabi, textbooks, charts, posters (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*). The non-projected media to a great extent constitutes the subject matter content that should be taught in ECD centers. Subject content is a central component of what ECD teachers need to effectively implement the curriculum. According to (*Hawes: 1979*) the production and distribution of the subject matter materials to all corners of the country should be done on time.

3.6 Instructional Media and Technology

The vocational technical skills thrust of the new ECD curriculum resulted in a sharp increase in the demand for instructional media and technology. Instructional media and technology is herein conceptualized as the equipment an ECD teacher needs to concretize abstract concepts. Since ECD learners learn mainly through play, they need toys to help them understand their world (*Matwere: 2010*). To teach subjects like ICT, projected media like computers, video tapes, slides, projectors, tablets, etc are needed (*Shumbayaonda et al: 2000*). Realia like balls and music instruments are needed to teach subjects like Physical Education and Mass Displays respectively. Teaching and learning become multi-sensory, participative and interesting to the learners (*Dewey: 1979*). The migration from a predominantly theoretical (predecessor) curriculum to the current vocational technical skills development curriculum is difficult if not impossible without the provision of the relevant instructional media and technology.

3.7 Physical Infrastructure

Knowledge is never passively received but is developed as learners interact with their social and physical environment (*Rousseau (1974)*). Structures like, classrooms and ICT labs constitute the physical infrastructure. The infrastructure should be child friendly (*Ivowi: 2004*). It should be in tandem with the ECD learners' ages, physical, psychological and sociological stages of development. Buildings should be protective and large enough to give each child space to move and explore (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*). Each learner should be accorded an indoor space of 2.25m². The furniture should be child sized (*Chikutuma et al.: 2013*). The outdoor playing space should allow each child at least 5.5m². Each center is expected to have basic outdoor play equipment like, a climber or a swing. Ablution facilities should be provided at a ratio of one water closet or squat hole to 12 children (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*). Clean and safe water must be provided for drinking and washing of hands.

3.8 Feeding Programs

ECD centers are expected to have planned feeding schemes for the learners. Local communities should be mobilized to assist in providing food and feeding the children (*Chikutuma et al: 2013*).

3.9 Funding

The (*CIET: 1999*) qualified its recommendations as demanding because they huge funding implications. All of the above mentioned resources need funding to procure them. Limited funding may lower down the quality of an otherwise good curriculum (*Adebanjo: 2008*). The study was carried out to establish if primary schools had the resources and the funding needed to implement the new curriculum at ECD A level.

4. Research Methodology and Design

The study used the quantitative and qualitative paradigms because they were both needed to answer the research major question. A case study design was used. The design made it possible to single out a specified geographical area, (Bindura urban) and a level of study (ECD A) for an in-depth study thus making it cost effective (*Creswell: 2012*). The design's compatibility with the use of the interview and observation instruments was an advantage as well (*Creswell: 2012*).

The 17 member target population was made up of ECD, supervisors and teachers who were 7 and 10 respectively. The 17 were found to be the data rich sources and were drawn into the sample using purposeful sampling. The permission to conduct the study

was secured from the Bindura education offices. Quantitative data was analyzed in frequency tables. Respondents' qualitative responses were coded into categories and results were listed according to the responses given.

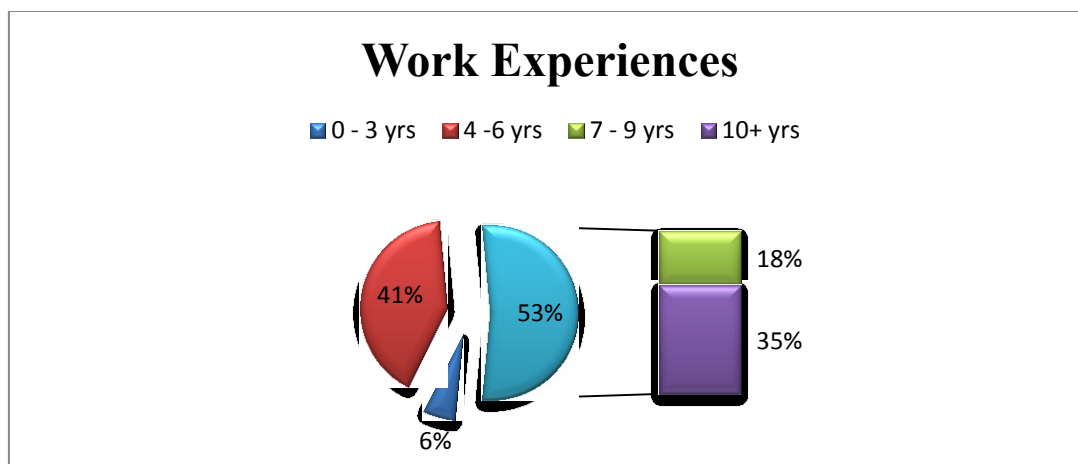
4.1 Ethical Considerations

Participants' rights were observed by explaining to them the purpose and procedures of the study. Their safety and security were ensured by observing their rights to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation or withdrawal at any time without any penalty to them (*Neuman: 2003*).

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Distribution of Respondents According to Work Experience (N = 17)

Yrs Of Exp	Frequency	%
0 – 3	1	5.9%
4 – 6	7	41.2%
7 – 9	3	17.6%
10+	6	35.3%
Totals	17	100



94% of the sample had at least 4 years of working experience as teachers. Therefore 94% of the ECD A teachers and supervisors combined had good exposure to curriculum implementation and could tell the challenges encountered in the implementation of the new curriculum at ECD A level.

5.2 Distribution of Respondents According to Professional Qualifications to Teach ECD A (N = 17)

100% of the respondents were professionally qualified to teach ECD A. This implied that the respondents were qualified enough to tell the challenges faced in the implementation of the new curriculum at ECD A level.

5.3 Distribution of Respondents According to Subject Content Mastery (N = 17 (per subject))

Learning Areas / Subjects	Acceptable (Good to Very Good Mastery)		Unacceptable (Weak Mastery)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
1. English	17	100%	0	0%
2. Mathematics & Science	17	100%	0	0%
3. Indigenous Languages (Shona, Chewa, Ndebele)	14	82.4%	3	17.6%
4. ICT	13	76.5%	4	23.5%
5. Family and Heritage Studies	13	76.5%	4	23.5%
6. Physical Education	8	47.1%	9	52.9%
7. Visual and Performing Arts	8	47.1%	9	52.9%
8. Mass Displays	6	35.3%	11	64.7%

Teacher content mastery was acceptable in 5 out of 8 subjects constituting 62.5%. Teacher content mastery was weak in 3 out of 8 subjects constituting 37.5%. The explanations for the weak mastery were as follows:

- Local languages syllabus is written in English and interpretations may differ from one teacher to the other,
- Local languages like Chewa and Ndebele are minority languages in Bindura, most teachers are not fluent in them,
- Content not covered at school and tertiary levels,
- The staff development received was below teachers' needs and
- The new curriculum requires teachers to research but there are no textbooks and the internet to research from.

5.4 Distribution of Respondents According to Abilities to Implement the New Curriculum (N = 17)

Hwande Esau, John Mpofu
 THE READINESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE
 AT ECD (A) LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF BANDURA URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Teacher Abilities to:	Acceptable (Good To Very Good)		Unacceptable (Weak)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
1. Interpret the syllabi	14	82.4%	3	17.6%
2. Use continuous assessment	14	82.4%	3	17.6%
3. Use child centred methods	8	47.1%	9	52.9%
4. Tr motivation	7	41.2%	10	58.8%

Generally, teachers were able to interpret the syllabi and to use the continuous assessment model. Weaknesses were reported in teacher use of child centred methods and motivation. The weaknesses were explained as follows:

- The scarcity of teaching-learning input resources made the use of child centered methods difficulty,
- High teacher to pupil ratios and
- Poor working conditions.

5.5 Distribution of Teachers According to Syllabi Possession

N = 10

100% supply. Every subject had a syllabus.

The Adequacy of Ecd A Teachers across Bindura Urban Primary Schools

N = 10 (ECD A classes in Bindura)

1 teacher to 20 pupils

Acceptable		Unacceptable	
Freq	%	Freq	%
2	20%	8	80%

The teacher to pupil ratio was acceptable 20% and unacceptable 80%. This implied that ECD A teachers were inadequate. Explanations for the shortfall were as follows:

- ECD teachers were in short supply and
- Schools were finding it difficult to pay the para-professions teaching CED classes because they were not on the government payroll.

5.6 Provision of Textbooks

N = 10 (10 ECD A classes per subject)

Textbook to pupil ratio 1: 3

Hwande Esau, John Mpfu
 THE READINESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE
 AT ECD (A) LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF BANDURA URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Learning Areas (Subjects)	Acceptable % (Shared at a ratio of 1 textbook to 3 pupils or better)		Unacceptable % (More than 3 pupils to a textbook)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
English	6	60%	4	40%
Mathematics and Science	6	60%	4	40%
Physical Education	5	50%	5	50%
Family and Heritage	4	40%	6	60%
Visual and Performing Arts	3	30%	7	70%
ICT	3	30%	7	70%
Mass Displays	2	20%	8	80%
Indigenous Languages	2	20%	8	80%

The provision of textbooks was acceptable in 3 out of 8 subjects which constituted 37.5%. Textbook provision was unacceptable in 5 out of 8 subjects that constituted 62.5%.

5.7 Provision of Infrastructural Requirements

N = 7 Primary Schools

Infrastructure	Schools In Possession		Schools Without	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Electricity	7	100%	0	0%
Outdoor Space (5.5m ² Per Child)	7	100%	0	0%
Ablution Facilities (1 Water Closet / 1 Squat Hole / Child)	7	100%	0	0%
Indoor Space (2.25m ² Per Child)	2	28.6%	5	71.4%
Indoor Games (Facilities)	1	14.3%	6	85.7%
ICT Equipment	1	14.3%	6	85.7%
Computer Lab	1	14.3%	6	85.7%
Standby Generator	1	14.3%	6	85.7%
Feeding Programs	0	0%	7	100%

100% of the schools were electrified and had enough outdoor space and ablution facilities. The following were poorly provided for: ICT equipment, computer lab, indoor spaces, indoor games, standby generators and feeding programs. The explanation was insufficient funding.

5.8 Funding

Save for the syllabi, government did not provide the essentials needed to implement the new curriculum. Donors are not aiding schools. Respondents argued schools were aiding the government by:

- Providing money to staff develop ECD teachers and
- Paying the para-professionals teaching ECD classes.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that teacher subject content mastery was good in subjects that were inherited from the predecessor curriculum but weak in new subjects like Mass Displays. Schools had enough outdoor spaces and ablution facilities for children. Nevertheless, other input essentials like teachers, classrooms, textbooks, ICT equipment, indoor games facilities and funding were insufficient. Primary schools were failing to absorb all the ECD children in their catchment areas. The shortages were negatively affecting teacher motivation. The study put forward the following recommendations:

1. Government should promote stakeholder awareness, moral and financial support for the new curriculum.
2. Government should improve the conditions of service for para-professionals by taking them on board as civil servants not school employees.
3. Other researchers should find out the extent to which rural primary schools and private ECD centers in towns are meeting the expected standards.
4. There is need for parents to get involved in the provision of materials used by teachers in ECD so that parents associations complement what is provided by government.

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Hwande Esau, John Mpofu
THE READINESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE
AT ECD (A) LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF BANDURA URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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