Research on Status of Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe

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Submitted to:
ZIMBABWE NETWORK OF EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTORS (ZINECDA),
a member of Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI)

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Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) need not be over-emphasized. Through the promotion of children's cognitive, physical and social development, ECD programmes ensure a strong foundation to education and later life. Global attention and investment in these programmes is recognition of their value in the future of young children.

In Zimbabwe, ECD programmes have followed a difficult path. Before independence, ECD programs were the preserve of the urban affluent that could afford the high fees that were demanded in the private nursery schools. In rural areas, it was left in the hands of the poor communities who could hardly provide the needed infrastructure and resources. At independence, the Government began to pay attention to ECD provision even though resources and understanding of the initiative remained limited. The programmes had their humble beginnings in the health centres, clubs and community centres under the then Ministry of Community Development and Women`s Affairs before being handed over to the Ministry of Education. Since then the programme has received prominence as government stepped in to provide policy direction and resource support.

ECD programs in schools became mandatory in 2014 after the Government of Zimbabwe took up the recommendation of a mandatory nine-year primary education system in which the first two years would focus on ECD; subsequently being given effect by Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 that made it mandatory for every school to offer the two ECD classes before grade one as part of mainstream learning. As part of efforts to promote research evidence on benefits of ECD to a child's development and performance in later years of learning and in life, Zimbabwe Network for Early Childhood Development Actors (ZINECDA) and Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI) commissioned this study to assess the status of the sector, build consensus and identify priority areas and interventions.

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined collection of quantitative and qualitative data within a stakeholder participation framework. Data collection methods entailed a review of relevant literature and consultations with key national, provincial, district and school and community level stakeholders. Interviews and focus group discussions were the key tools for data collection. An observation guide helped to gather data on the status of the infrastructure.

The overall results, which were presented in accordance with research question, show that stakeholders are moving towards a shared understanding of the scope and purpose of Early Childhood Development programmes. However, the policy framework was perceived as fragmented, rigid and unfriendly, inhibiting whatever efforts stakeholders are putting towards ECD delivery. On a positive note, signs of engagement between stakeholders and MoPSE were reported to be already underway with MoPSE taking the lead. Meanwhile, funding for ECD programmes was considered too fragile to guarantee sustainability. Too much reliance was placed on communities with very low capacity while it was felt the Government needed to do much more than just provide policy guidance. The uptake of Early Childhood Development is showing some positive trends since 2012 but still remained low; with only one in three learners attending ECD classes, on average.

The combined effect of the foregoing was the shortage of resources (human, material, etc) to fully support ECD provision. Resultantly, ECD uptake remained low with a number of factors that include long distance to schools, low prioritisation of ECD relative to other programmes, unconducive learning environment being cited as the main contributory factors.

In light of its findings, the study came up with a number of recommendations, most of which point to Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for leadership. If implemented, this should improve the status of ECD in Zimbabwe. Among others, the following are key priorities:

- Under its leadership, MoPSE needs to take a lead role in embracing on-going capacity building efforts, within a better coordinated framework to ensure everyone plays their part well
- MoPSE needs to facilitate expeditious completion of the harmonisation and review of existing policies in order to come up with a comprehensive and stakeholder-owned policy framework to guarantee effectiveness in their use
- MoPSE should review its practices in regard to distribution and facilitating accurate interpretation of all its policies by relevant users for the benefit of ECD children
- Resource mobilization must take centre stage at every level (national, district and community) through the application of an aggressive approach to guarantee a more sustainable home-grown resource base. The Government budget must specify allocation for ECD programmes.
- Relentless community (parent) engagement must be undertaken to understand their concerns and bring about increased awareness of the value of ECD and define their role more clearly.
- The low priority given to children with special needs, such as those with disabilities, requires a change in mindset. Awareness programmes for communities would go a long way to bring about such change.

ABSTRACT

ACRONYMS

CIET	Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECOZI	Education Coalition of Zimbabwe
EDF	Education Development Fund
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
SI	Statutory Instrument
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
ZINECDA	Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Development Actors

1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development and education is one of decisive areas where the foundation of basic principles and philosophy of Zimbabwe`s education system would be laid so that the child is prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

The developmental process from infancy to adulthood, let alone the transition from early childhood education to primary school is a difficult one because of the complexities in the availability of resources. The development of the child, the human resource of the future, cannot be left to chance. The importance of this early development is acknowledged the world over. Even in the face of positive initiatives, the need to conduct audits of progress is needed in order to prompt action towards its improvement.

2 BACKGROUND

The need for childhood education has, since ancient times, been recognised as critical to the child`s development (Aubrey, 2015; UNICEF, 2014). Formal early childhood education that arose in response to the needs of middle and upper income groups of developed countries was later to become a part of the educational system in the third world.

There is a body of research evidence that shows that a child's learning starts from conception (Petrovic, 2017, UNICEF, 2014). If well managed, such early learning provides a foundation for future learning. It is further argued that the first three years are important for the development of the child's brain, making it the most critical in shaping the child's brain architecture (Factsforlifeglobal, n.d.; Mangwaya et al., 2016). Meanwhile, Aubrey (2017). Csibira (2010) and Daelmans et al (2015) further posit that the first five years of a child's life lay the foundation of the child's future health, happiness, growth, development, learning and school achievement. Literature also justifies the inclusion of early childhood development programmes in economic terms, as a source of human capital. Children involved in ECD have shown great potential in school and in the workforce (Britto et al., 2011). Studies on ECD provisioning indicate that the benefits of involving children in early childhood development include: a "reduction of time needed to explain concepts … improved pass rates in subsequent grades…children who have grown through the ECD programme are well disciplined as a result of attending the centres" (Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012: 226).

Given the above arguments, the role of parents is the most critical in facilitating positive early development outcomes (Shumba, Rembe & Goje, 2014). However, apart from capacity limitations that confront them, parents are not always available to give such attention to their children due to work and other commitments. Often, the responsibility is left in the hands of the baby minder; who may not have been a mother and thus has limited knowledge of facilitating child development.

Organised ECD serves to provide education and care to children in the family or in the temporary absence of their parents (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotions, 2016). Early Childhood development services should be holistic so as to encompass the child's health, nutrition, education, psychosocial and other needs "within the context of the family and the community". The South African ECD Service Guidelines (2006).

Whereas the global community, through such institutions as the United Nations, promulgated the right to education, there is a widely shared perception that there has been lack of specific reference to ECD, tending to prioritize primary education. The UNCRC and Millennium Development Goals, for example, are eloquent in proposing the right to education (generally) and the focus on primary education respectively. However, such thinking has shifted, albeit gradually, with the recognition that the success of primary and later education depends on a strong ECD foundation. The Dakar Framework, for example, gives prominence to Early Childhood Development through its inclusion in the set of framework's generic goals… expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (Dakar Framework of Action, 2000). However, the Framework's assessments done that year noted: 'early childhood care and education had experienced only modest expansion, mainly in urban areas'.

ECD received a further boost when the Sustainable Development Goals set in, seeking to ensure 'inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning'. Goal number 4 goes further to suggest that it is not enough to facilitate access to education, but that such education must be of **good quality,** including the conditions of schooling and learning. It must also be available to all on a lifelong basis. For the avoidance of doubt, the goal goes further to define 2030 targets for ECD as to "ensure that all girls and boys have access

to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (SDG, Section 4.2).

Before independence in Zimbabwe, the ECD program was a preserve of the urban affluent that could afford the high fees that were demanded in the private nursery schools. The result was a dearth in infrastructure and other resources for ECD, especially in rural areas (Government of Zimbabwe, 2008). With the attainment of independence, the Government began to pay attention to ECD provision even though resources for ECD remained limited while community understanding of and participation in the sector remained low. It began in the humble beginnings of health centres, women's clubs and community centres that were created by the then Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs to take responsibility of children whose mothers were part of the few working women so that

they could be free to work during the day. Since then provision of ECD services has received prominence as government stepped in with a comprehensive policy framework. Much of this is discussed in sections that come later in this report.

Although research reveals the existence of gaps with regards to funding, relying on donor funding with its sustainability challenges, Zimbabwe has pledged commitment to SDG 4.2 so as to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education to make them ready for primary education. With a total of 1,825,581 infant school-age population (age group 3-7), investment in ECD increasingly becomes an essential component of the national education development (Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017).

3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As part of efforts to entrench and promote the compelling research evidence of benefits of ECD to a child's development and performance in later years of learning and in life, Zimbabwe Network for Early Childhood Development Actors (ZINECDA) and Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI) are leaving no stone unturned in coordinating efforts to facilitate discussion of the status of the sector, build consensus and identify priority areas and interventions. Apart from adding to the body of knowledge and literature in this important area of intervention, the proposed research should bring to light some of the gaps that call for attention.

3.1 THE MOTIVATION

Although a number of studies have been carried out, they have been piecemeal, leaving gaps where answers continue to be required. Besides, a comprehensive analysis of national realities, opportunities, commitment, capacities and resources such a study is necessary in order to formulate the realistic, targeted and applicable strategies to develop national ECD policies is needed. The findings will also help to inform the proceedings, content and discussions at the ECD Conference planned for stakeholders in the early childhood development by end of 2018.

3.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What is the status of ECD provision in Zimbabwe?

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the overall framework of research on the status of ECD, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

a) What are stakeholder perceptions of ECD?
b) What is the status of the ECD policy and legislative environment?
c) What are the ECD financing mechanisms, models and capacities?
d) What is the current ECD provision and delivery capacity in Zimbabwe?
e) What is the status of children's participation in ECD in Zimbabwe?
f) How might the overall ECD delivery framework need to adapt in order to better provide ECD services in Zimbabwe?

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The perception of Early Childhood Development is context specific as it varies with location. Whereas Porter (2014) claims that early childhood refers to the period from birth to 5 years of age, Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller (2011) refer to early childhood as the period from birth to 8 years. The South African Department of Education (DoE) (1996:3) also defines ECD as "an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially." World Bank (2013: np) suggests that, "Early childhood encompasses the period of human development from the prenatal stage through the transition into the early primary grades." Hence, the need to provide prenatal care for mothers during pregnancy. From the above discussion, ECD is not limited to education but other sectors as well.

According to UNESCO (2006), ECD / ECCE involves all programs and activities which support children's survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been embraced as an important development issue across the world. Deprivation of ECCE may fuel malnutrition, lack of care, poor treatment as well as poor physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. The diverse interventions include parenting, community-based child care, centre-based provision, formal school-based pre-primary education as well as child focused health and nutrition programs. ECD is beneficial because it:

- Diminishes the potency to drop out of school. It has also been found that grade repetition on primary education is lowered due to attendance in ECD education (Myers, 1992; Young, 2002).
- Enhances student learning in school and increases retention rates up to the terminal grades.
- Reduces personal and social costs in the form of poor adjustment, continued high primary school repetition and dropout rates, and, for the country, another generation of functional illiterates (Halpern and Myers, 1985).
- Promotes stimulation, the identification and the correction of a variety of problems related to health, nutrition, physical and mental handicaps, pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-numeracy skills, the development of the joy of exploration, experimentation, a heightened sense of curiosity, a love for learning and motivation.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE ECD POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT?

According to Neuman and Devercelli (2012), the rationale for developing a national ECD policy or framework is to: provide a country's vision for the young children, to illuminate the goals, objectives and strategies needed to realise the vision; clarify the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders and to define the roles of the private and public sectors, for example, in terms of funding and service provision. The same authors attest that by 2012 eleven African countries had **no comprehensive ECD policies.** These included Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Togo and Zimbabwe (Neuman and Devercelli, 2012).

The inclusion of Zimbabwe in the list of countries simply points to **lack of comprehensiveness** of the policy guiding framework. This is because much has been done post-independence. Makokoro (2017:n.p.) adds to this argument by categorically stating that "Apart from the various Permanent Secretary and Directors' circulars and statutory instruments spanning 2004 to 2014, there is no comprehensive ECD policy in Zimbabwe."

The Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training was a critical process in the evolution of Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe. Following one of its key findings: that ECD benefits were scant, generally, and skewed in favour of urban areas while rural areas lagged behind, the Commission's recommendation of a mandatory nine-year primary education system in which the first two years would be called ECD A (3–4 year olds) and ECD B (4–5 year olds) (Tshabalala and Mapolisa, 2013; Mangwaya, Blignaut & Pillay, 2016) provided impetus for increased attention to provision of ECD services. The plethora of high level policy pronouncements by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture was to give effect and direction to implementation of the recommendation. Kageler (2015) provides a summary of three of these early policies and their purposes as shown below:

Table 1: Summary of three early policies and their purposes

Policy	Purpose of policy
Secretary's Circular No. 14 of 2004	Provided guidelines on the implementation of the recommendations of CIET (1999).
Director's Circular No 12 of 2005	Provide guidelines on the attachment of ECD A and ECD B to the primary school system
Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005	Specified regulations for operations and registration of ECD centres

Implementation of the recommendation for the 9-year primary education cycle was given effect by Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 that provided the regulations (SI 106 of 2005; Tshabalala and Mapolisa, 2013) and strengthened by a later Secretary's Circular Minute Number 2 of 2014 which made both inclusion and participation mandatory by stating that:

> " *This policy strategy effectively means that it is not optional for any learner to omit attending ECD A or B. The full two years are part of the nine year Primary School Education Curriculum ... therefore with effect from January 2014, every Zimbabwean child is expected to receive two years of structured quality pre-formal learning through attendance in an ECD A and ECD B facility of the Primary School closest to his/her home in preparation for Grade one enrolment"*

As part of efforts to demonstrate expected standards in terms of centre infrastructure, human resources and learning material, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education went on to establish one model ECD centre in each of the Zimbabwe's ten provinces. Among other benefits, this would give visibility to the policy effort. By 2008, 4407 primary schools (77.45%) had opened ECD classes (Government of Zimbabwe, 2008) even though rural areas still lagged behind due to a combination of ignorance and poverty levels.

The Zimbabwe Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015-2022), itself an important piece of ECD policy, puts early childhood development at the centre of educational experience in the lives of young learners. To this extent, the framework spells out a set of pillars for the infant school module. These include (i) acquisition of foundational skills for learning in the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains; (ii) establishment of building blocks for socialisation; (iii) development of an initial appreciation of national heritage and identity; (iv) development of physical, psychomotor and social competencies; (v) demonstration of early signs towards lifelong learning and problem-solving aptitudes; (vi) acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills, including basic practical; and (vii) competences necessary for life and work. Essential to the implementation of this framework is commitment at national level, especially in financing the education sector. The current study seeks to ascertain the current status of the policy environment, especially with regards to availability and coverage of the ECD policy/policies as well as the views of key stakeholder respondents around the same.

4.2 FINANCING MECHANISMS, MODELS AND CAPACITIES; WHAT IS THE CURRENT ECD PROVISION AND DELIVERY CAPACITY IN ZIMBABWE?

Given the level of material and staff resource requirements, education financing, including financing for ECD provision, has a bearing on the status and quality of what can be provided. This section takes a look at financing models, including sources and volumes that can be availed. Financing that is adequate, predictable, equitable and sustainable is the precursor for high-quality ECD service delivery. The starting point appears to be the policy guidelines for ECD financing before an appraisal of how it is working on the ground. According to various literature sources, main sources of ECD funding include international funding partners, public funding, non-state actors (civil society, private sector) and local communities.

4.3 WHAT IS STATUS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECD PROGRAMMES?

In light of the Education for All Goals, the preoccupation with children's participation in education was: how many of the eligible are in school? By implication, participation in ECD would be about the levels of children enrolled in ECD programmes (as reflected by official Ministry statistics), relative to the eligible population in that age-group. Two measures are often used for the purpose: Gross Enrolment Rate and Net Enrolment Rate, the latter being preferred because of its focus on the actual eligible population. The greater the participation rate, the firmer the confirmation that those out of school were getting fewer and fewer.

In the context of the above, global, participation in ECD services has increased considerably since 2000; from 27% to 54% between 1990 and 2012. It is projected to reach 58% by 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). Regional variations show the following by 2012: 74% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 89% in North America and Western Europe, 20% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 25% in the Arab States (UNESCO, 2015). Zimbabwe participation rate was nearly 30% as of 2012 (MoPSE Database, 2012).

Since 2012, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) has been conscientiously collecting annual data on ECD enrolments. With guidance from Central Statistical Office, MoPSE has also been determining the levels of participation. Table 2 shows the overall NERs for the period 2013 – 2017.

Table 2: ECD Net Enrolment Rates in Zimbabwe: 2013 - 2017

Year	Net Enrolment Rates (NER) (%)			
	Male	Female	Total	GPI
2013	22.97	23.83	23.40	1.04
2014	24.74	25.21	24.98	1.02
2015	28.54	29.36	28.95	1.03
2016	32.82	33.32	33.07	1.02
2017	31.70	32.28	31.99	1.02

Source: MoPSE Database 2013-2017

The NER shows that the participation rates were still low, even though they have been on an increasing trend since 2013 to a best level of 33.07% in 2016. The 2015 and 2016 rates may be an indication that the policy of having ECD as part of primary school that took effect in 2014 was bearing fruit. However, the decline in 2017 may be a sign of other intervening factors. With a gender parity index (GPI) greater than 1, more girls have been participating, albeit marginally. Further analysis of the 2017 rates was undertaken by province and the results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: ECD Net Enrolment Rates in Zimbabwe by Province (2017)

Province	Net Enrolment Rates (NER) (%)			
	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Bulawayo	26.72	27.99	27.36	1.05
Harare	14.28	13.47	13.87	0.94
Manicaland	34.98	35.79	35.38	1.02
Mashonaland central	32.70	33.71	33.21	1.03
Mashonaland East	32.16	32.82	32.49	1.02
Mashonaland West	29.98	30.42	30.20	1.01
Masvingo	39.63	39.94	39.78	1.01
Matabeleland North	42.20	44.93	43.55	1.06
Matabeleland South	37.05	38.03	37.54	1.03
Midlands	33.18	34.06	33.62	1.03
Grand Total	31.70	32.28	31.99	1.02

The best is Matabeleland North at 43.55%. Most provinces show that only around 1 in 3 children are able to access ECD. The rate for Harare shows a low 13.87% (one in seven participate). Noting that the Ministry only collects statistics from registered centres, this means many children remain unaccounted for. A positive observation is that there is provision of ECD learning in both urban and rural areas, never mind the quality. In reality, therefore, the participation rates shown in tables 2 and 3 are only a partial view of reality. A system that embraces privately owned centres would go a long way in providing a nearer approximation of the situation.

While this section presented the status, albeit partial, of the Zimbabwean situation relative to global trends, this study sought to find out what the current situation looks like. This is done more qualitatively and the results are presented in section 6.5 of this report. Meanwhile, the discussion will also focus on the shift in the participation debate and direction to include a focus on those learners who are still out of school or are hard to reach (UNESCO, 2009).

In explaining the low rates, many studies carried out in Zimbabwe attribute these trends to, among other reasons, long walking distances to school, especially in rural areas, persisting negative parental attitudes towards ECD and the shortage of resources, especially finances in the form of user fees and the absence of qualified teachers. It will be useful to find out what reasons participants bring up during the data collection processes.

4.4 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH DELIVERY OF ECD

Literature highlights many constraints in ECD provisioning. In South Africa, for example, a key challenge was noted to be the fragmentation of responsibilities for ECD. The implementing departments tend to work in silos (Tyilo, Luggya & Mdaka, 2017). In Zimbabwe, the situation is not different, given the scenario of different Ministries (Education, Health and Child Care and Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare) having responsibilities over children.

Another major challenge is underfunding for the sector. This has resulted in an acute shortage of teachers, with 4000 teachers taking care of about 427 800 learners; resulting in a deficit of 5 800 qualified teachers in 2016. This reflects lack of capacity to effectively provide quality ECD service. Additionally, the sector has inadequate age- appropriate infrastructure and equipment and "very few learning materials resonate with the play and learn approach and the culture of the nation" (Makokoro, 2017).

ECD provisioning is also constrained by shortages in terms of personal resources that children bring to school and the conditions of the schools themselves – including inadequate and inappropriate classrooms, inadequate equipment, inadequate furniture, inadequate picture reading books, overcrowding in classrooms, high teacher pupil ratio, use of paraprofessionals and lack of Education Officers to effectively supervise the provision (Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012). Teachers-in-charge and school heads who are meant to supervise ECD delivery themselves have very limited knowledge about the sector, even though class teachers may have adequate qualifications to cater for ECCE classes (Mangwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2016).

Furthermore, there was lack of teacher support at the inception of the policy to include ECD in the mainstream education system. In corroboration, Moyo, Wadesango and Kurebwa (2012) attest that lack of qualified teachers affects the practitioners' ability to deliver effective lessons. It should be noted that in Zimbabwe positive strides have been made to redress the situation as all training colleges for primary school teachers are training ECD practitioners.

It would be interesting to find out what the parents and other stakeholders have to say about this parental education.

Makokoro (2017) also brings in another dimension; that 27.6% of children in the 0-8 year old cohort are stunted, while 11.3% are underweight; emphasising the need for feeding schemes in schools. These statistics paint a gloomy picture which may probably be improved through interventions such as the school health education for children from ECD to Form 6, parents and school staff with the aim of equipping them positively with knowledge on health, attitudes and skills (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018).

Studies also established a constraint related to parental involvement that is perceived to be low (Mawere, Thomas & Nyaruwata, 2015; Shumba et al., 2014). The Mawere et al (2015) study also found that although parents do understand the meaning of parental involvement in ECD, their participation is curtailed by various factors that include lack of resources and different perceptions of ECD.

5.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. In essence, the theory is based on the premise that every human being develops through a process of interaction with their environment. There are five environmental layers that influence a child's development, the intensity of which depends on the position of that layer relative to the child. Often, the ecological systems theory is illustrated as a series of five 'nested' circles to reflect the relationships among the different levels. The five different ecological levels range from the individual (innermost), through the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (outermost). More recent texts now include an additional layer; the chronosystem.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is considered suitable for this study. It acknowledges the significance of the individual developing child, the context and the interrelationships that exist between the systems surrounding the ECD child (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik, 2009). Figure 2 provides an overview of the 'nested' systems. The implication is that adults concerned with the care of a particular child should pay close attention to that child's behavior in different settings or contexts and to the quality and type of connections that exist between these contexts.
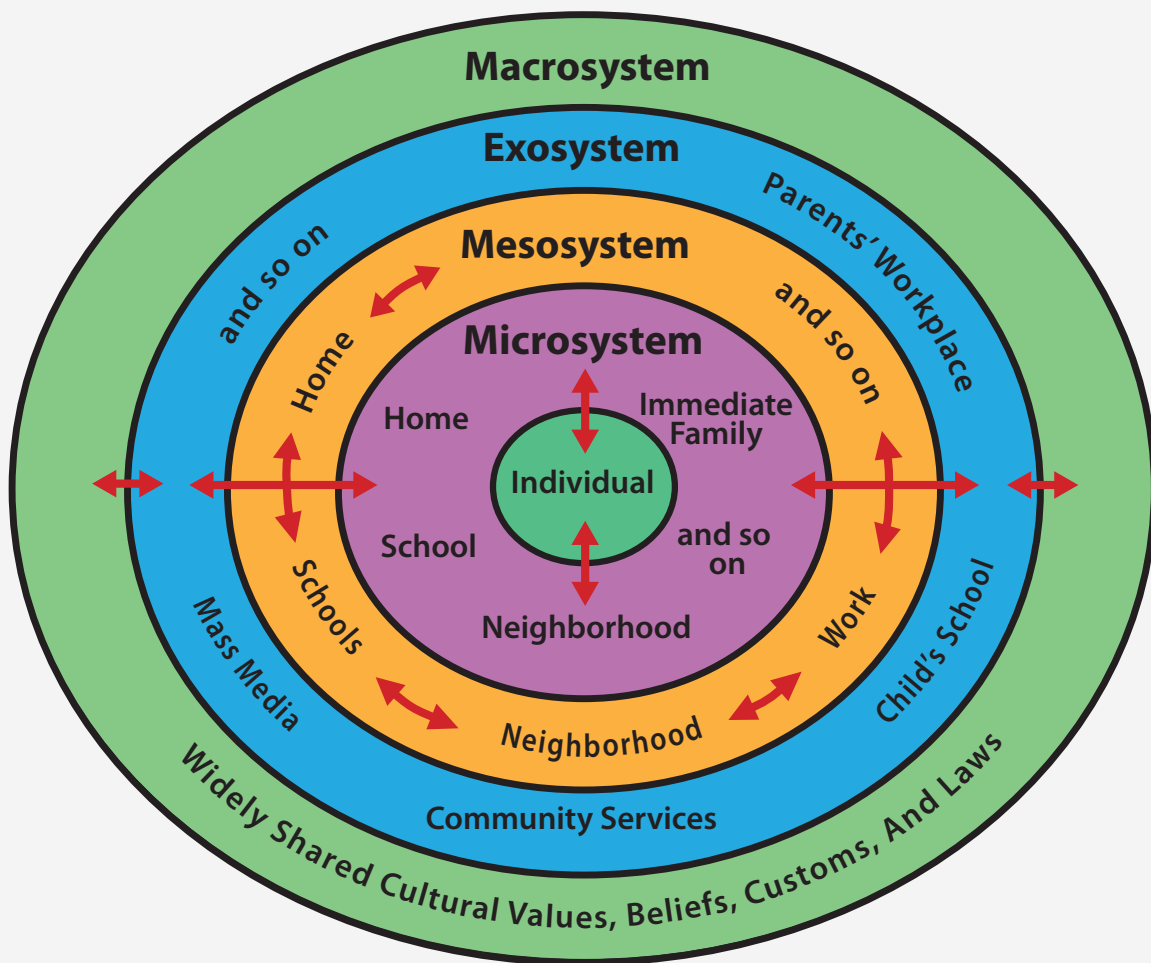

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological-theory
Source: https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-theory/

Microsystem - This is the child's most immediate environment. The child interacts with people such as parents, school or daycare centre and other caregivers (Chinhara, 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1998). How the child develops is influenced by how these various individuals interact with him/her as well as how the child reacts to their influence. The more nurturing and supportive the environment, the more conducive it is for a child's development.

Mesosystem - At one point or another, the various microsystems which the child finds himself/herself part of, interact with one another. This brings about a new system (a system of microsystems), which is then termed the mesosystem. Linkages between home and school, between peer group and family, or between family and church are examples of mesosystems. How the child develops in this new system is a function of how parents manage it (Hayes, O Toole & Halpenny, 2007). The development of a child whose parents are actively involved in their child's friendships invite them (friends) over to their house and spend time with them, is likely to be affected positively through harmony and like-mindedness. However, a child whose parents show dislike for their child's peers and openly criticize them, is likely to experience disequilibrium and conflicting emotions, affecting the child's development in a negative sense. These are essential lessons for the parent and the ECD teacher.

Exosystem - The exosystem is about interaction between two or more settings, one of which may not necessarily contain the developing child but affects him/her indirectly. Examples of such places and people may include the parents' workplaces, the larger neighborhood, and extended family members. A father who is continually harassed at the workplace ''may take it out on his children and mistreat them at home'', thereby negatively affecting their development.

Macrosystem - The macrosystem is, by far, the largest though most distant collection of people and places to the child that still exercises significant influence on the child. The child's cultural patterns and values, specifically the child's dominant beliefs and ideas, may have a bearing in how the child develops. It goes without saying that a child in war-torn areas ''will experience a different kind of development than children in communities where peace reigns''.

Chronosystem - It is argued that the **chronosystem** brings about the time dimension. As time changes, some things in the child's environment will change and other remain the same. Time will, inevitably, bring about a change in family structure, residential place as well as employment status of parents, in addition to externalities such as economic cycles and other social changes. All such changes may have a bearing on how the child develops and learns.

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined collection of quantitative and qualitative data within a stakeholder participation framework. Data collection methods entailed a review of relevant literature and consultations with key national, provincial, district and school and community level stakeholders. The consultations provided ample information through interviews and focus group discussions.

5.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

5.3.1 Review of relevant literature
The researchers undertook a review of previous studies on the subject; which enabled the researchers to obtain what work has been done before. It also involved a study of Government's national development frameworks and legal provisions surrounding early childhood development as well as the sector Ministries' policies and process reports. This process provided useful insights into various contextual issues and aided the preparation of data collection instruments.

5.3.2 Key informant interviews
The study identified and interviewed a sample of key informants that were made up of national, provincial, district level, school and community level stakeholders on issues related to perceptions on ECD, roles of different stakeholders, the policy framework, funding of ECD programmes, status of provision, challenges and opportunities in the provision of ECD services. A semi-structured interviewer-completed key informant interview guide was used for the purpose.

5.3.3 Focus group discussions
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with community representatives. The focus of discussions was on ECD knowledge and attitudes, their perceived roles, challenges faced in the provision of ECD and what they saw as the actions that needed to be taken. An FGD guide that consisted of a list of issues and related probes was used to facilitate the discussion.

5.3.4 On-site observations
The research team designed an observation tool to collect information on the status of ECD facilities and equipment and materials during visits. This enabled some insight into the provision of these facilities in both school and private ECD centres.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

From the onset, the study was understood to be about issues rather than numbers. However, due recognition was given to the fact that it had to embrace as broad a spectrum of stakeholders as possible. The target population of the study was all the schools and centres in sampled provinces and districts.

5.4.1 Selection of study sites

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling strategy involving sampling of provinces, districts and schools/ECD centres, before sampling respondents within each of these levels. At the first level (province), Harare was purposively selected because it hosted all national level stakeholders. Thereafter, four provinces were randomly selected out of the remaining nine to end up with a total of five provinces for the study. However, given resource constraints, physical visits were undertaken to three provinces while data collection was done via skype in the other two districts. Questions were also sent to these in hard copy which further added to the data collection efforts.

The sampling process provided a total of 10 of the country's 66 districts. Selection of study districts was based on a combination of purposive and random sampling. The purposive component was meant to guarantee inclusion of districts that host provincial capitals in order facilitate easier access to provincial stakeholders that are housed in the provincial capital. Remaining districts were randomly selected.

A minimum of four ECD centres were meant to be selected. However, given the challenges in gaining access to some areas, some provinces ended up providing more for a total of 26 centres. This served the purpose of providing evidence on an illustrative rather than exhaustive basis. The selection included representation of different ECD categories.

5.4.2 Selection respondents for the study

Research respondents were largely purposively selected. At national, provincial and district levels, respondents included relevant Ministry Officials (Education, Social Services and Health), Ministry partners, civil society organisations and private providers. At school/centre level, key informants included heads of schools/centres or their representatives, teachers and members of the School/Centre Development Committees/Associations (SDC/As). Observations of facilities, equipment and materials were also done using an observation tool designed for the purpose. The community level involved those members whose children were enrolled at the school/centre or from the neighbourhood. The following is a list of some stakeholders consulted during the data collection process.

Table 4: List of some stakeholders consulted

Groups
1. Ministry (MoPSE)
2. Ministry (Health
3. Ministry (Labour & Social Welfare)
4. UNICEF
5. Education Coalition of Zimbabwe
6. ZINECDA
7. Civil Society
8. Universities
9. Teachers Training Colleges
10. Heads of Primary Schools
11. Heads of Private Centres
12. ECD and Grade 1 teachers
13. Community Leaders
14. School Development Committees
15. Local Authorities

5.5 CHALLENGES FACED DURING THE STUDY AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

The process of conducting the study was fraught with several challenges that the research team had to contend with. However, every effort was made to come up with strategies to minimise the negative effects of the challenges on the quality of the results. Table 5 shows the challenges experienced and how they were mitigated.

Table 5: Challenges faced and mitigation strategies adopted

Challenge	Mitigation strategy adopted
a. Delays in commencing the research work, occasioned by administrative processes, including disbursement of the first tranche of research funds	• Adjustments were made to allow administrative processes to be completed. However, there were also efforts made to pre-finance some of the early and local activities.
b. Declines in participating in the research by some provinces and respondent categories. This affected the sample as previously planned in for fieldwork	• Consultations with ZINECDA secretariat were undertaken. Although a support letter was issued by ECOZI/ZINECDA, this did not yield the desired cooperation. Some adjustments made to include different provinces

This section is prefaced by an analysis of respondent perceptions of Early Childhood Development (ECD). The rest of the section then largely follows the key research questions outlined for this study. These include the status of the ECD policy environment, financing measures and mechanisms, provisioning capacity and children's participation in ECD programmes.

6.1 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT AND PURPOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

6.1.1 Perceptions about the concept of Early Childhood Development

Assessment of respondent understanding of, and perceptions about, ECD was considered necessary as this might have a bearing on the extent to which they participate in a sustainable way. This question was put across to all responding groups at the commencement of each engagement, all of which were qualitative.

There was considerable consensus across most respondent groups, which included relevant government Ministries, especially Primary and Secondary Education and its development partners, school level professionals (heads of schools and centres and their teachers) and some community members; that the main thrust of ECD programmes was to allow for a child's holistic development. However, there were some extreme leanings towards the purely cognitive thrust (mostly by some community groups). They argued that this should manifest through an ability to read as well as an ability to speak fluent English. For this reason, they would stop at nothing to get their child into a 'five star' ECD centre to create the right environment.

Thus, whereas the overall purpose of ECD was understood; continuous engagement at all levels was needed to ensure that the real purpose of ECD was better appreciated.

Across the board, respondents also indicated that ECD was important for child development; citing the main benefits as including preparation for school readiness, improving interaction with other children and releasing parents to concentrate on their other roles and responsibilities. This speaks to both school readiness benefits that eventually extend beyond grade one entry and social benefits. It became clear with further probing and engagement that school readiness was also about a healthy and sociable child as well as one who was well nourished, giving rise to the argument that all these facets were necessary to a child's development. However, there were subtle variations between community and school based informants; the former giving more emphasis to readiness for grade one. They saw the ability to converse in English and do a few basic

calculations as a sign that the centre was doing well. They also thought it was beneficial to parents in that this would free them to go about their other duties and routines. The school based informants, on the other hand tended to stress the holistic development philosophy.

Ministry partners, school/centre heads and teachers all seemed to concur on their understanding of ECD and its purpose, in which the developmental, holistic thrust and preparatory element for grade one and beyond were key features. This was not surprising given their interest and routine focus on ECD issues. However, communities though not entirely different had their points of emphasis. Here are some excerpts from some community members:

> "Of course they must be able to read and write and communicate in English for me to say it was worthwhile; this is necessary to give them a good start in grade one" (Parent participant).

> "If they come into grade one before they are able to do some reading and writing, they are already left behind. This should be a prime purpose of the ECD programme" (Parent participant)

The excerpts show an awareness of the need for grade one preparation. Given their limited understanding, they are convinced that reading and writing is a pre-requisite, though educationists believe this should not be the prime focus. Elsewhere there were sentiments expressed to the effect that if preparatory reading efforts, are not undertaken, then it becomes a waste of time because they will just be "playing." It appears that what these parents just need is awareness assistance.

6.2 ON THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

In line with international and regional instruments that Zimbabwe has ratified, the Zimbabwean legal environment is awash with the provisions for citizens' "right to education". The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 enshrines the right to education in Article 75 while the Education Act [Chapter 25:04] of 1987 as amended by Act 2 of 2006 and Act 2 of 2008, is the key legal instrument that re-emphasizes on 'the right to school education for every child in Zimbabwe". The Education Act also incorporates some of the Provisions of the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education by saying "no child in Zimbabwe shall; (a) be refused admission to any school; or (b) be discriminated against by the imposition of onerous terms and conditions in regard to his admission to any school; on the grounds of race,

tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or gender". Whereas there is no deliberate segregation, on the grounds of variables such as age, some education practitioners have argued that not enough specific reference is made to ECD.

With various instruments and guidelines already referenced, this section focuses on what the research found on ECD policy knowledge and awareness, availability and use of the policies on the ground. What follows is a sampling of excerpts of what respondents had to say:

> " *Currently, there is no ECD policy in Zimbabwe. What is there are guidelines in the form of circulars for regulating purposes. As a ministry we are harmonizing these circulars in an attempt to come up with an ECD policy. The ministry introduced ECD centres in all schools (ECD A and B), guided by statutory instruments (SI), for example 106 of 2005, however ministry looks forward to revise it because stakeholders think it is too stringent. The ministry is going to have a community consultative engagement in policy development. ED 46, to have an addendum that seeks to capture data from private centres." (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education HQ Official).*

> " *Zimbabwe does not have a comprehensive ECD policy but it is regulated by Director and Secretary Circulars and Statutory instruments (such as SI 106 of 2005). The government is trying to harmonize the statutory instruments and circulars so as to help craft an ECD policy. These are efforts to create a harmonized ECD document to regulate implementation of early learning in Zimbabwe. This is because some of the circulars released were contradicting each other." (Education Coalition of Zimbabwe Interviewee).*

On face value, the responses appear contradictory. However, the essence is about the Ministry and its key stakeholder concern over the scattered nature of guidelines currently available. That the Ministry and its stakeholders have realised the need for this harmonisation points to positive thinking. Within the frame of the harmonising efforts is a review of the instruments in response to feedback from the users - "because it is too stringent". There is also a realisation of the incompleteness of ECD data with those from private centres currently excluded, thereby giving a distorted picture of reality.

In addition to the top-level insights described above, school/centre level responses, especially from providers/owners who were the loudest in their voices; literally accusing the authorities of imposition of policies without consultation. They were especially concerned about policies on the registration of ECD centres that they said were not only bureaucratic but also expensive. Instances were cited where some registrations had taken up to five years to come through. Besides, the registration fees were considered too high for the ordinary genuine provider. The excerpt reveals the sentiments of a provider:

> " *Capacity to provide ECD services are very difficult, especially in the first years of operation because of higher registration fees amounting to $2000 paid to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in addition to the $200 for the health registration certificate. When inspectors come to do their job, there is the involvement of costs of going to get them to come to the ECD centre do their job and take them back to their offices. All these costs then affect the child because the ECD service provider will concentrate on clearing all these before focusing on the needs of the child. As a result, some potential providers take the illegal route of operating without registration", ECD provider.*

There were equally hotly disputed issues around some policy provisions:

> *The policies are very clear on the provisions regarding infrastructure. For example they talk of toilet-pupil and teacher-pupil ratios of 1:8 and 1:20 respectively, where are the resources to make these possible"? (Private centre administrator).*

Once the policies are developed, they should be in all the right places for implementation. MoPSE officials confirmed the procedure for distribution of policy guidelines and circulars to the different lower levels, down to the school level.

> *This is done through our structures - provincial and district offices. All centres should receive these policy guidelines", (MoPSE National Level Official).*

In spite of the Ministry statement, some lower-level interviewees brought a mixed bag of responses during data collection visits to their sites. Here are some excerpts:

> *We receive all these circulars and keep them on our files. When officials visit on inspection routines, they want to see the policy files and we show them", (Head of a registered primary school).*

> *We never received them but because some of our neighbours have received them, we request and make our own copies".*
> *(Head of a registered private centre).*

> *I was unaware of the ECD policies. I relied on what the head told me. I only knew about the existence of these policies when I went for a workshop" ECD Centre teacher participant).*

Going by these sentiments, it appears that the distribution channel is fraught with challenges. On one hand, these important documents do not always reach all intended schools and centres, some of them having to innovate to find them. Some heads of schools and centres were unable to produce specified policies when asked to do so, even after initially indicating that they had received the policy guidelines. On the other hand, the internal knowledge management systems (within schools and centres) do not seem to be working as well as desired. If the concern is about having them safely secured for 'inspection' by visiting officials, then they do not serve their purpose.

At the classroom level, some teachers spoke about lack of access to policies, professing ignorance about the existence of particular policies.

"We do not have access to ECD policies even though they affect us as teachers", said one ECD teacher. Another teacher said; "We were only shown these once when they were read to us by the school head. We never heard about them again. This is not of concern to us as we go about what we know best-our teaching" (ECD teacher respondent).

One of the major Ministry partners attributed to the targeted distribution (to registered schools and centres), meaning that those not registered were not prioritised). It was also a case of heads who did not share with teachers; even though the policy may have been received by the school. What this means is that some ECD teachers may not have information on up to date policies. Whereas some policy guidelines on ECD provision and administration are available, challenges in their effectiveness is negatively affected by lack of interpretation support:

> *The policies lack clarity. Officials would do well to explain these at workshops soon after distribution" (Head Respondent).*

> *When we ask heads what these mean, we also do not always get helpful answers" (Teacher participant)*

Zimbabwe has done well to develop some guidelines for the administration of ECD centres. However, much more needs to be done in terms of consulting on some of the provisions as well as the management and operationalization of the developed policy framework.

6.3 ECD FINANCING (OPTIONS, MODELS AND STATUS)

This section presents the status of ECD funding as obtained from various available documents as well as from the respondent categories that participated in this study. The presentation of status is guided by the following questions:

a) What are the sources of ECD funding in Zimbabwe?
b) What are the funding levels from the different sources?
c) How do the funding levels impact on the quality of ECD provisioning?
d) What is needed to guarantee predictable and sustainable funding?

According to the respondents, funding for ECD provision is a shared responsibility between the state and non - state actors. For instance a senior MoPse official had this to say:

> *Yes, the government has a prime responsibility for the education of its citizens. However, other players need to chip in in support of the government".*

Similarly a UNICEF official stated:

> *The government is the principal duty bearer but this does not exonerate the other stakeholders such as civil society, private sector, communities and parents from playing a supporting role".*

An ECD provider opined that:

> *Parents should take a leading role in educating their children. They should be responsible for their fees and other costs. The government is overburdened and should just chip in here and there".*

Parents expressed different views:

> *The government can dodge its responsibility but cannot dodge the consequences of dodging that responsibility. It must pay", said one parent*

The sentiments expressed above corroborate what is in literature that ECD funding is a joint responsibility between state and non-state actors (UNICEF, 2017).

Various documents perused as part of the study confirmed that the Government was one of the sources of funds for ECD. The Government of Zimbabwe ensures that all educational and related services and facilities have a budgetary allocation which is channelled through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). Within MoPSE, department-based disbursements will be ensuring that all major sections have an allocation. As noted by a senior Key Informant from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), the ministry is divided into three sections; that is Infant, Junior and Secondary and there is always a budget for each section. The flow of funds is from Ministry of finance to MoPSE, which then exercises its prerogative to allocate to the sections - then to provinces and districts and schools. Government support is not adequate enough and, more often, ECD is not prioritised. Contrary to other education levels (primary and secondary), MoPSE does not give grants to private schools and in particular, private ECD centres. In addition, even though the government has financial support schemes such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) that target vulnerable children, such schemes are not extended to cater for ECD. The Ministry of Finance had, at some point, made it clear that communities should bear the responsibility of ensuring that ECD is expenses, including hiring staff, are met at community level. For instance, in the 2018 budget Finance minister said the government would not pay ECD teachers due to financial constraints. As a result, many ECD centres countrywide rely on school fees for their funding support.

The overall MoPSE budget allocation the three-year period 2017 – 2019 has been on an increasing trend (USD803.771million in 2017; USD905.593 million in 2018 and USD1.162681billion for 2019). However, much of this (well over 90%) has been going towards employment costs (Kageler, 2015; UNICEF, 2017; 2018), leaving little to trickle to other purposes. Relative to the needs of the sub-sector, the allocation towards ECD has been small. However, a notable positive development is that ECD has been receiving increasing attention with allocations of USD2 million in 2015; USD 144million in 2016; USD214million in 2017 and USD242million in 2018 (UNICEF, 2017; 2018). On scrutiny of the most recent budget estimates (Blue books), a further notable feature is the appearance of specific ECD line items and some outcome indicators on ECD in budget estimates (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2018/2019). Although these are considerably small

relative to the needs, the Government must be commended for taking such bold steps. In spite of these efforts the sector remains grossly underfunded. Given the importance of this sector, stakeholders might need to undertake relentless advocacy to government for bolder increased allocations.

Having noted this documentary evidence, this study engaged various participants as described to solicit their views on the issue of funding of ECD programmes. Evidence shows that the government was indeed supporting ECD activities. However, its contribution was perceived to be low and even lower when compared to what non-state players provide. One parent noted that the Government was simply playing its statutory role, even in the face of difficult economic conditions.

Among the factors that ensure a vibrant and sustainable ECD system is the availability of an adequately financed professional teaching staff. To this end, the research study investigated the systems in place for the recruitment and remuneration of ECD staff and found that qualified ECD teachers who are employed under the MoPSE were paid by government while para professionals are paid by the parents and community. Communities play a bigger role in financing ECD through fees payment. The money raised through fees is apportioned across areas such as paying ECD staff (para professionals) and establishing or renovating ECD facilities.

Other funding sources were identified as non-state actors. These include Development partners, private sector and communities. "Development partners have been providing assistance to the ECD sector – such as money for supervision, money for in service training, learner welfare, special needs coming from organizations such as the UNICEF", said one participant. This view was supported by other key informants who confirm most ECD funding as coming from school fees in both government and private ECD centres, coming heavily from fees: "There is no outside funding all the funds come from fees paid by parents. We pay heavily in the form of ECD user fees, especially in private centres", Parent key informant.

There was an overwhelming position that because of various challenges, including those related to the economic environment as well as attitudes, ECD funding was inadequate. This was affecting the quality of services that can be provided. "Lack of funding has led schools and centres employing para professionals who are then paid by the community. This does not augur well for effective development of children", ECD Provider. Another ECD provider expressed the view that communities were now given the burden to pay ECD teachers' salaries, leaving nothing for the holistic development of the child for example, child sized furniture. A specific consequence was that lack of funding to provide adequate resources undermine school readiness by ECD children.

Recommendations included encouraging all players to increase their efforts in mobilising funds for the ECD sector, given its importance.

Development partners are also a crucial actor in Zimbabwe's ECD financing through provision of money for supervision of ECD programmes, in service training, learner welfare, and special needs coming from organizations. It emanated from the study that the donor community is playing a crucial role in supporting the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) in ECD financing initiatives through the Education Development Fund (EDF) under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). In these complementary efforts by the donor community, UNICEF was identified as a key development actor that has for long been a trustee for donors which want to assist in ECD funding in Zimbabwe.

ECD infrastructure provision is paramount in ensuring the development of ECD. Government efforts in setting aside funds for construction of ECD centers were commended by many respondents that were engaged in the study. However, this support was only extended to ECD centers that are registered with the MoPSE resulting in private ECD centres being excluded and some operating with below standard facilities. Overcrowding in small classrooms was also cited as the aftermath of poor ECD financing especially in private ECD centres.

An investigation aimed at unravelling the reasons for low funding commitments yielded few new insights. ECD is costly because of the need of specialized facilities such as adequate space and play materials for learners. In urban areas the situation was better as parents put greater effort in trying to pay. In rural areas it is estimated that about 20% of parents pay school fees. Government policy that children whose fees have not been paid are not sent home means that little pressure is brought to bear on the parents to pay school fees.

6.4 ECD PROVISIONING CAPACITY

The capacity of a systems to provide a service is fundamental to all those who should benefit from such a service. Given its importance, ECD is no exception. For ECD, that capacity is judged on the basis of provision of a quality learning environment; which includes, among other important facets, infrastructure and appropriately trained and skilled personnel to deliver the service. This section takes a close look at the status of these requirements.

6.4.1 Classroom provision

School level professionals believe that the classroom is one of, if not the, most critical resource if children are to benefit from their ECD experience. Not only does this protect against weather elements (cold, heat, wind and rain) but also provides all round protection against an intrusive external environment. Besides, teachers need the walls to display their materials so as to give the classroom the conducive learning appearance it ought to have. The status of classroom provision was assessed from both available records data collected from centres accessed for the study. For the study, it is undertaken overall, by location and by type of centre.

6.4.1.1 The classroom surplus/deficit

This is the measure based on comparison between available classrooms and desired classroom levels desired number for eligible learners. An excess arises when the available units exceed desired levels while a deficit in classroom provision is when the opposite is true. According to UNICEF (2015), the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education had a classroom deficit of 33 600 nationwide in 2015. This reflected the cumulative effect of persistent under-funding of the capital budget. Of this number, 46.1% (15 490) was attributed to Early Childhood Development, severely impacting on children's wellbeing. The situation was reportedly dire in rural and resettlement areas.

Centre heads and teacher responses were especially vocal about the classroom deficit situation in their own centres and other centres in their neighbourhoods. They expressed dismay at the situation, arguing that the shortage results in cramming learners into the limited space, causing overcrowding. Here are some excerpts from informant interviews:

"At times the classroom can hold as many as 60 or more children because there is simply nowhere else to go. We cannot send them away" [Centre Head, Midlands]	"There is one dedicated room for four ECD classes. We prioritise ECD B. Our ECD A classes are conducted under tree shades. If it rains, children stay home" [ECD teacher, Manicaland]	"We have tried to work with communities to address the deficit issue. It appears, however, the ballooning enrolments pull the ends apart" Civil Society ECD provider

6.4.1.2 Learner/classroom ratio analysis

Classroom adequacy does not just rest on the number of classrooms but on their allocation for teaching and learning purposes. The learner/classroom ratio is a critical indicator, for that purpose. Table 6 shows total centre enrolments for centres covered by this study, total number of classrooms and learner/classroom ratios (rounded off to the nearest whole number) by province.

Table 6: Total centre enrolments for centres covered by the study

Province	Enrolment	Number of classrooms	Learner/classroom ratio
Harare	142	11	13
Manicaland	796	16	50
Mash West	58	2	29
Mat South	884	13	68
Midlands	1 167	16	73
Total	3 047	58	52

The table 6 shows an overall learner/classroom ratio of 52; with Midlands, Matabeleland South and Manicaland having high ratios of 73, 68 and 50 respectively. Harare enjoyed the best learner/classroom of 13. Generally, this is a reflection of overcrowded classrooms.

The consequences come to bear on both educators and learners; creating obstacles in 'progressive activities of classroom teaching learning process' (Matshipi, Mlaudzi & Mashau, 2017).

| Congested classroom with children | Crowded classroom without learners |

Figure 2: Congested classroom with children and crowded classroom without learners

When analysis of learner/classroom ratio is undertaken by type of centre (in-school or out of school (private), the trends are as depicted in figure 3.

Learner classroom ratios by type of centre

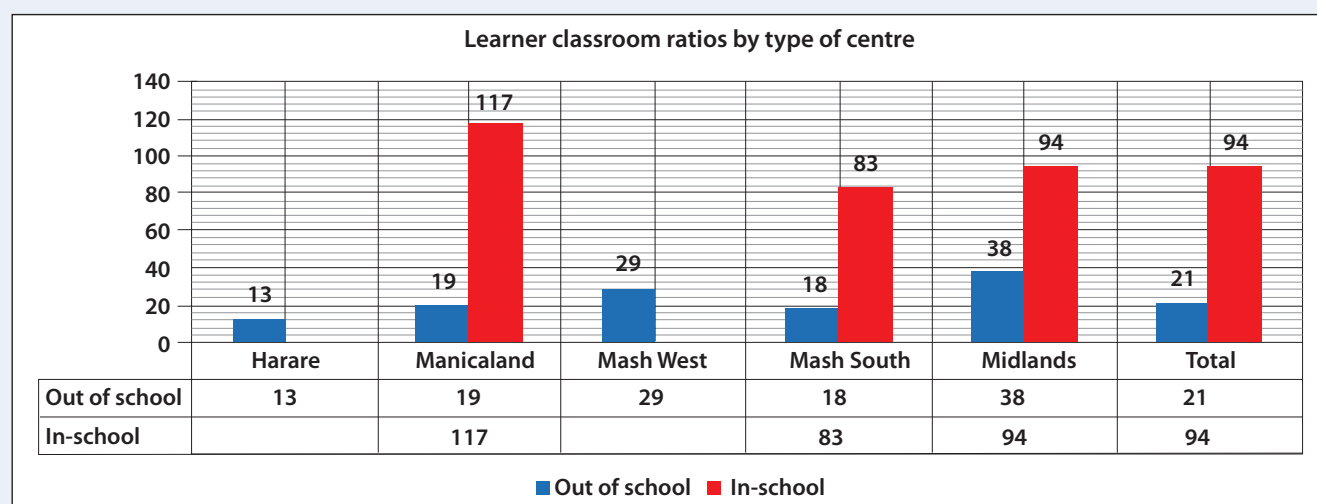|	Harare	Manicaland	Mash West	Mash South	Midlands	Total
Out of school	13	19	29	18	38	21
In-school		117		83	94	94

■ Out of school ■ In-school

Figure 3: Learner classroom ratios by type of centre

In-school centres were worse off than out of school (mostly private) centres with ratios of 94 overall (compared to 21), 117 for Manicaland (compared to 19), 94 for Midlands (compared to 38) and 83 for Matabeleland South (compared to18). These data show that, on average, learner/classroom ratios were much too high for centres located within primary schools while for those outside the schools (mostly private), ratios were within reasonable ranges except for Midlands and Mashonaland West. Harare province has, by far, the best learner/classroom ratio.

Further analysis of learner/classroom ratio undertaken by location of centre (rural versus urban) confirms the above findings – learner classroom ratios are too high. The table 7 shows distribution of enrolment and schools covered by this study, together with the learner/classroom ratios computed for each category by province.

Table 7: Distribution of enrolment and schools

Province	Rural centres			Urban centres		
	Enrolment	Classrooms	Ratio	Enrolment	Classrooms	Ratio
Harare	--	--	--	142	13	13
Manicaland	393	10	39.3	403	6	67
Mash West	--	--	--	58	2	29
Mat South	238	5	48	646	8	81
Midlands	429	3	143	738	13	57
Total	1060	18	59	1987	40	50

The situation is equally depressing with overall 59 and 50 learners per classroom for rural and urban areas respectively. The rural component of the provinces shows figures in excess of the recommended 1:20 threshold, with Midlands topping the list at 1:143. Meanwhile, except for Harare, all urban centres are equally in excess of the policy threshold. At 81 and 67, Matabeleland and Manicaland lead the rest.

6.4.1.3 Further analysis of classroom availability and adequacy

The learner/classroom ratio is only a signal of the classroom availability concern. If used in isolation, it can mask multiple challenges such as condition and size of the classrooms.

Figure 4: ECD classrooms in a state of disrepair

A number of centres had ECD children learning in classrooms that were in a poor and dilapidated condition. The pictures in figure 4 show "repelling" conditions for ECD children, the left hand picture shows an old structure, the second one shows a broken and almost collapsing ceiling. Whereas classrooms should provide an environment that promotes learning, the two pictures are in several ways a health hazard and a safety risk to learners.

A further, and even bigger, concern is that of the size of the classroom, relative to the number of learners it accommodates. The classrooms vary from the usual standard that are found in well to do communities.

In some urban ECD centres, bedrooms of former residential properties have been converted into classrooms and, as a result, a high level of crowdedness prevails. A visit to one ECD in the capital of Harare revealed that a 3m x 4m room was housing a class of 14 children; translating to 0.86 square metres per learner against a recommended policy threshold of 2.25 square metres per learner. Such a scenario already makes movement within the learning facility difficult, before consideration of space for learning areas. The cry for more classroom space needs no over-emphasis. In other centres, make-shift facilities have been constructed to get the children under some kind of roof.

6.4.2 Outdoor equipment

There is more learning value in the playground that just having fun. Outdoor equipment and facilities enrich the playground experience. The current study analyses availability and adequacy of an entire range of outdoor equipment and facilities. Table 8 shows the findings against variables such as enrolment. The cells indicate the quantities of each type of equipment and average availability has been calculated for each type of facility.

Table 8: Outdoor equipment and facilities

School code	Enrolment	Swings	See saw	Slides	Climbers	Merry go	Balancing beam	Tree House	Sandpit
1	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	13	4	2	3	1	0	0	0	1
3	16	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
4	23	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
5	26	2	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
6	30	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
7	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	40	6	1	4	2	1	0	1	1
9	50	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	1
10	51	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	55	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
12	58	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
13	75	4	2	2	3	1	1	2	1
14	80	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
15	104	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	112	2	2	1	3	2	1	1	1
17	127	7	3	2	2	3	2	1	1
18	129	8	3	3	2	2	0	0	1
19	135	6	3	2	2	0	0	0	1
20	140	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
21	203	4	2	0	4	1	4	2	4
22	212	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
23	215	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
24	352	4	2	2	2	0	2	0	1
25	378	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	1
26	380	1	3	2	2	1	0	0	2
Totals	3 047	59	35	30	37	4	13	7	23
Average number of children per facility		51.6	87.1	101.6	82.4	217.6	234.4	435.3	132.5

While availability varies from school to school according to its circumstances, each equipment category was considered against the total enrolment to provide overall impression of adequacy. The average number of learners per piece of equipment provides a sense of overcrowding. Given that crowdedness, the equipment is bound to wear out faster due to overuse. A major concern is that of those centres with a limited range or none of these facilities (1, 7, 10, 15, 20 and 23). It goes without saying that learners in these centres are denied the opportunity to develop the skills expected of such experience.

6.4.3 Indoor play and learning resources

Indoor resources include all the manipulative materials whose purpose is to develop a range of psychomotor and other skills. The study sought to find out the status of provision under the categories of available and adequate, available but not adequate and not available. Figure 5 shows the findings over a diverse range of resources.
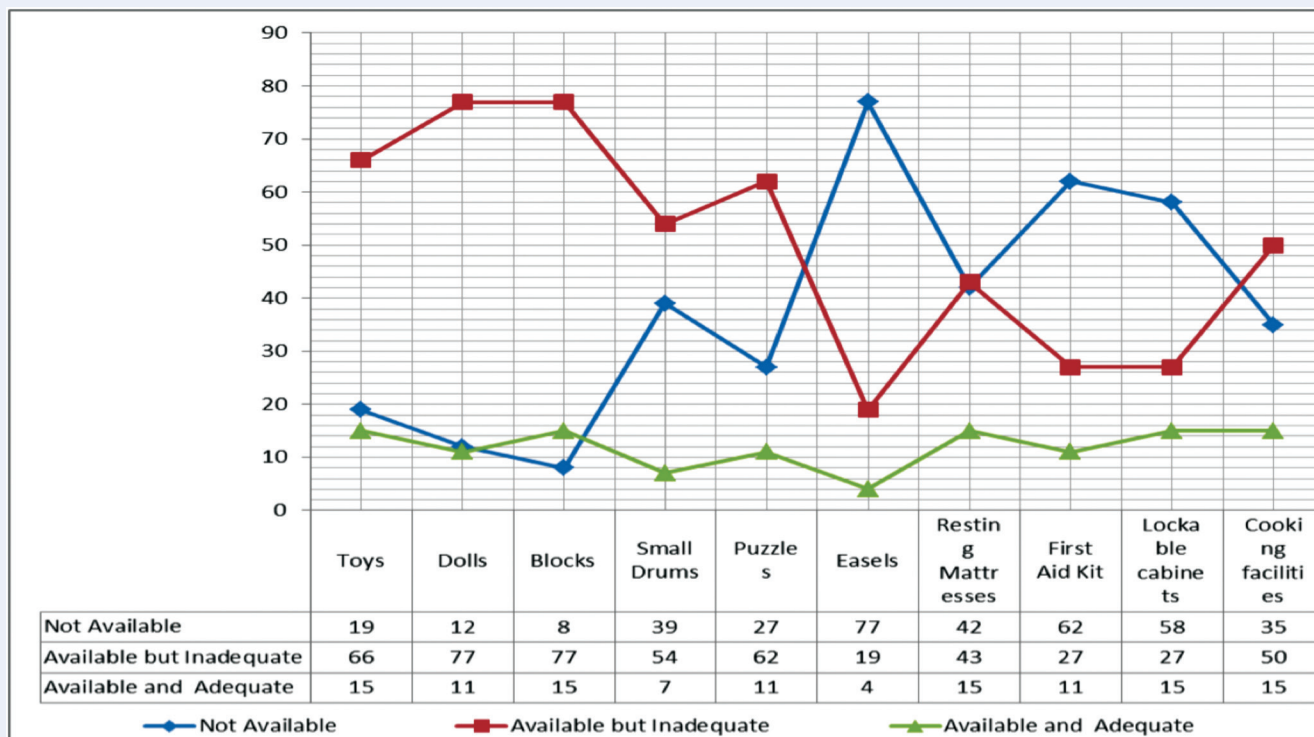
Figure 5: The state of availability of indoor learning and play resources

	Toys	Dolls	Blocks	Small Drums	Puzzles	Easels	Resting Mattresses	First Aid Kit	Lockable cabinets	Cooking facilities
Not Available	19	12	8	39	27	77	42	62	58	35
Available but Inadequate	66	77	77	54	62	19	43	27	27	50
Available and Adequate	15	11	15	7	11	4	15	11	15	15

On average, 12% of centres in the sample reported having adequate facilities while 37.9% have none. The low lying availability and adequate graph (across all resources) indicates that, according to the centres, the indoor learning resources are far from adequate. Those that are available are being rendered inadequate (mostly toys, dolls and blocks) by increasing demand for ECD services. Given the good intention of the policy position that no child shall be denied access, the centres have simply been swamped thereby overstretching the few resources available. There is a considerable variety that is not available at all. These include easels, first aid kit, small drums and cooking facilities. The absence of a first aid kit in some centres does not augur well for response in the case of accidents.

6.4.4 Provision of child friendly facilities and equipment

The adequacy and appropriateness of facilities is an issue of concern in terms of child friendliness, which in turn seeks to create a conducive learning environment. Table 9 and figure 6, respectively, show some statistics and photos obtained from the study.

Table 9: Facilities relative to children's enrolment (n=3047)

Enrolment	Child friendly facility or equipment							
	Chairs	Benches	Tables	Toilets	Water sources	Hand washing	Water storage	Access ramps
Overall (total) number of units	1654	117	424	93	34	57	49	12
Ratio (children) per unit	2	26	7	133	90	53	62	254

With reference to table 9, the overall picture is that of shortage and/or congested use for each facility/equipment type, especially when considering the standards set by the Ministry, which are, for example, 1:1 for chairs and 1:8 for toilets. In most cases, benches, which should serve to relieve the pressure of the shortage of chairs are not necessarily age-appropriate and, therefore, still fall short of creating the right sitting conditions for learning. Such an environment is far from conducive for children's development. The need to take appropriate action and improve the supplies calls for urgent action.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

| (a) ECD classroom with no furniture | (b) Toilet – Unsuitable and age-inappropriate |

Figure 6: ECD classroom with no furniture and unsuitable toilet and age-inappropriate

It was also found that in some schools, ECD toilets were the same as those used by, at best grades 1 to 2. The worst case scenario was those instances where ECD classes used toilets used by the rest of the school. Figure 6 shows a toilet that was not only age inappropriate but also not in sanitary condition.

6.4.5 Teacher supply and quality

There is an argument that in the quality learning environment framework, the teacher is one of the most important pillars in facilitating provision of education and determining its quality (OECD, 2009). The teacher should not just be an available 'body' in front of children but should be knowledgeable, skilled and have the right attitudes. Part of this study was to take a close look at the status of these teacher facets in terms of ECD system provisioning capacity.

6.4.5.1 Teacher availability

A critical indicator for determining teacher availability is the teacher/pupil ratio, an important consideration before quality issues such as teacher qualifications and experience are considered. The teacher/pupil ratio depends on available enrolment data and data on numbers of teachers. Simply put, it is the result of apportioning number of learners per teacher, even though practically in the classroom a different scenario may prevail depending on the circumstances of each school. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics, it is the **"average number of pupils per teacher at a given level of education, based on head counts of both pupils and teachers"** (http://uis.unesco.org/node/334770). Table 10 shows the enrolment and teacher data on which the teacher/pupil has been calculated.

Table 10: Enrolment and teacher data in sample schools

	ENROLMENT					NUMBER OF TEACHERS				
	By location		By type of centre		Total	By location		By type of centre		Total
PROVINCE	Urban	Rural	Private	In-school	Total	Urban	Rural	Private	In-school	Total
Harare	142	0	142	0	142	8	0	8	0	8
Manicaland	403	393	213	583	796	11	19	10	20	30
Mash West	58	0	58	0	58	2	0	2	0	2
Mat South	646	238	55	829	884	22	10	5	27	32
Midlands	738	429	228	939	1167	32	12	16	28	44
Total	1987	1060	696	2351	3047	75	41	41	75	116

There is overwhelming perception that the ECD teacher supply is weak, both in terms of numbers and training. In the sample used in this study, teacher/pupil ratios, derived from table 10, worked out as shown in figure 7. The figure shows teacher/learner ratios by centre location (urban or rural).

Teacher/Learner ratios by centre location

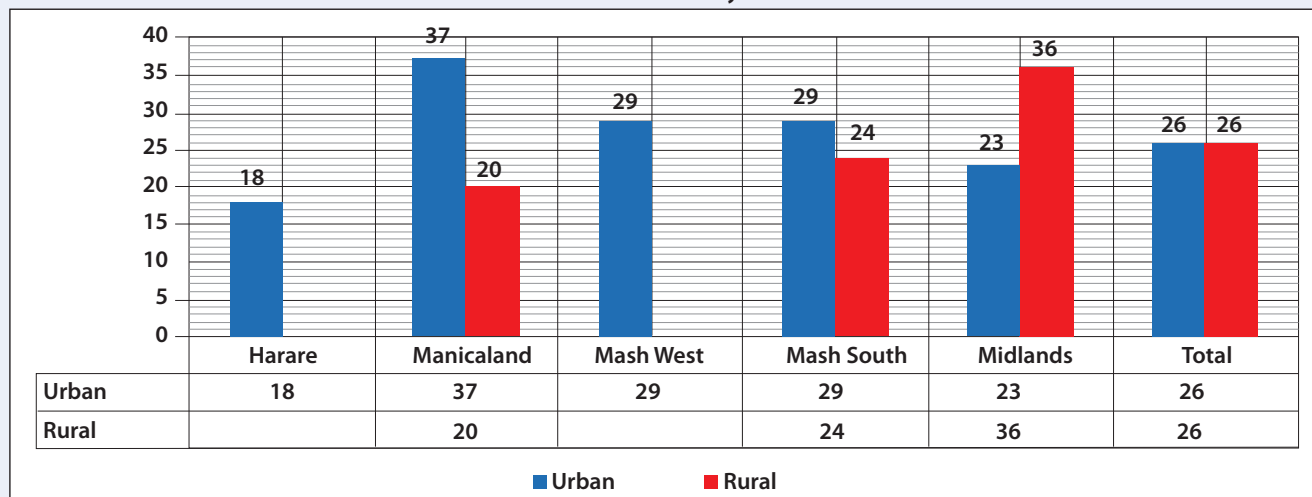|	Harare	Manicaland	Mash West	Mash South	Midlands	Total
Urban	18	37	29	29	23	26
Rural		20		24	36	26

Figure 7: Teacher/learner ratios by centre location (rural/urban)

The overall/total ratios stand at 26 for both rural and urban centres, apparently dispelling the generally held notion that rural schools are worse off. It could be argued that the results are a lot better than those depicted by the 2017 Ministry database where for every teacher, there were 42 learners (1:45 in rural schools and 1:31 in urban schools). However, with section 13.1(a), of Statutory Instrument (SI) 106 of 2005 indicating that 'There shall be one teacher to a minimum enrolment of 20 children at each ECD centre', the current supply falls short of requirements. With the current scenario, teacher-pupil interaction is compromised. One teacher participant had this to say:

> " *The numbers keep on increasing. I combine the ECD A class with the ECD class because the centre says cannot afford another teacher as parents are not paying their dues. It is impossible for me to give them the right attention. I just do my best to keep them occupied.*"

The trend is mixed when analysis is undertaken by province. Manicaland province, for example, shows greater congestion of 1:37 for urban centres while the rural centres are at par with the policy prescribed 1:20 threshold. Midlands, on the other hand, has 1:36 for rural centres with urban centres are 'better off' at 1:23. Thus, on the basis of the findings of this study, the centre location variable is inconclusive as a mixed picture emerges. A bigger sample might present a clearer picture. However, except for Harare, the teacher/learner ratio exceeds the policy stipulation and is therefore confirming that teacher supply is low. This is confirmed by similar findings in a study on Factors Affecting Development of Early Childhood development in Zimbabwe by Moyo et al (2012). The study found that because implementers did not comply with recommended ratios in the ECD policy, most ECD centres had very high teacher / pupil ratios, compromising effectiveness of ECD programmes. Teacher/learner ratios were also computed by type of centre (private versus in-school) in order to determine whether the centre type factor had a bearing on the ratios. The results worked out as shown in figure 8.

Teacher/Learner ratios by type of centre

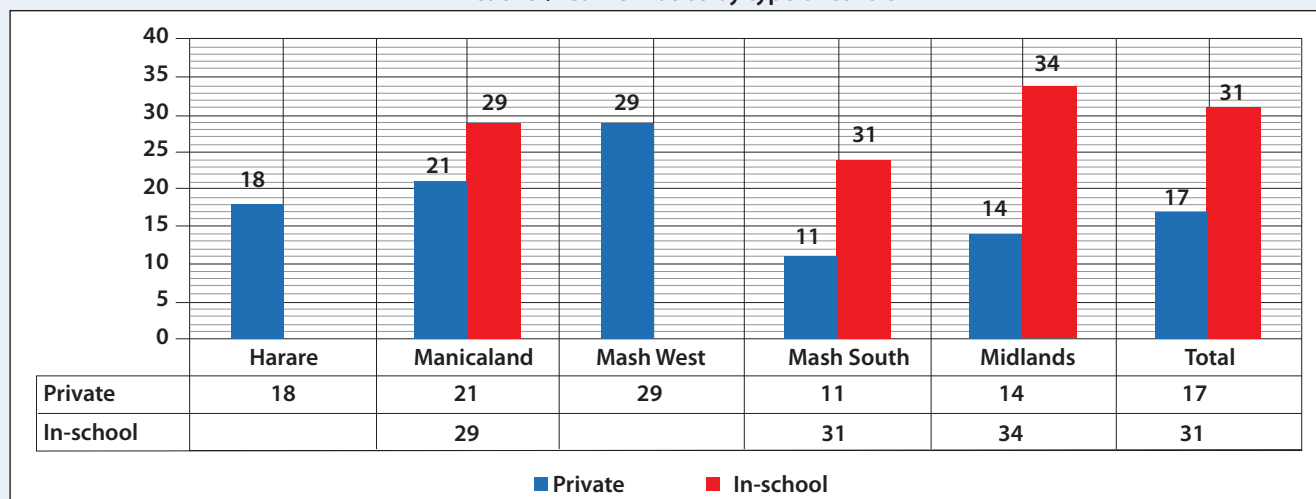|	Harare	Manicaland	Mash West	Mash South	Midlands	Total
Private	18	21	29	11	14	17
In-school		29		31	34	31

Figure 8: Teacher/learner ratios by type of centre (private or school-base)

Analysis of the data shows some very clear trends: that in-school centres have consistently higher ratios than private out-of school centres and that apart from Mashonaland West, all provincial ratios fall near or within the policy threshold of 1:20.

Why does the teacher/pupil remain high? Discussions during interview and focus group sessions provided some insights. The explanation goes back not only to inadequate infrastructure but also because schools are prohibited from turning away children who are in need of places (Education Act 2006 [Chapter 25:04], as amended, The Secretary's Circular 13 of 2014). Although this is a good move in affording eligible children access to ECD B education, the policy nevertheless undermines the quest for quality.

6.4.5.2 Quality of teachers

The decision by the Government of Zimbabwe to start teacher training for ECD at Seke Teachers College in 2005 was well advised, given concerns about quality ECD services. With other institutions joining the teacher training effort, including universities, evidence in various documents and on the ground shows that much progress has been made in terms supply of trained teachers.

Going by the 2017 Ministry statistics, the ECD teacher establishment was made up of 13% graduates (of which 7% have a teaching qualification), 45% holders of a Diploma or Certificate in Education while 42% were para-professionals). The current study revealed the findings as presented in table 11:

Table 11: Distribution of ECD teachers by qualification (n=116)

	Overall	Harare	Manicaland	Mash West	Mat South	Midlands
Qualified	56	62	57	100	34	69
Paraprofessionals	44	38	43	0	66	31
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

With the overall situation showing 56% trained and 44% either untrained or paraprofessional, the situation has not changed much over 2017 (58% in 2017). All provinces, except Matabeleland South, show above average proportions of qualified teachers. The situation, though much improved, is still far from desirable if the desired quest for quality is to be achieved in accordance with provisions of Sustainable Development Goal Number 4: "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning for all …by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, 2016).

The proportion of teachers by sex, itself an important variable, is overwhelmingly skewed in favour of women. This is a positive sign, given that women are known to be more caring in dealing with these early developers.

Some providers observed that one issue that undermines the provision of quality ECD services is that of contradictions in Government policies. Whereas the government took a strong position in terms of teacher supply and budgetary commitments, the statement by Finance minister that the government would not pay ECD teachers due to financial constraint undermines the previous policy position. "It is proposed that the pending requests to recruit an additional 5907 teachers at ECD level be shelved and pave way for parents and communities to continue supporting the provision of ECD services", said Finance Minister. It is understood that this has had negative ripple with some students who were enrolled for ECD teacher training withdrawing from the courses for which they had enrolled.

6.4.5.3 Leadership and supervision

Visits to private data collection sites revealed that a good number of centres are manned by people who may not be qualified ECD practitioners. They get in there for business purposes; raising questions about the quality of professional leadership from such centre leaders. Although there are current provisions to allow private centres to receive supervision from mainstream schools, a situation that may open up streams of support, "it must not be forgotten that these school-based supervisors need capacitation before they can deliver", said one private centre manager.

Considering the infrequent support by the inspectorate, the much needed guidance could be going for long periods without being availed. According to a ZINECDA interviewee, about 50% of those trained are still employed as teachers and other 50% have since started their own ECD centres. Could this be the beginning of a shift in trends that will eventually see the centres manned by professionals?

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The methodology specified for this study was that data would be presented from both primary and secondary sources: secondary sources being Ministry database and studies undertaken on Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe and primary data coming from the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with various participants. Although this section combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis, more emphasis is on the latter.

6.5.1 Enrolment rates

The general sentiment across participant groups was that, regardless of low participation rates, much progress had been realised in the last couple of years. However, the uptake has not reached good enough levels due to various reasons:

> " *The infrastructure, especially classroom space, is limiting in terms of increasing numbers" (ECD private provider)*

> " *I cannot afford to pay for ECD child to go to play when they can play here at home" (Parent participant)*

> " *The school is 8 kilometres away. This is not only too far for the small children to travel but there is no one to take them there without compromising other work here at home" (Parent participant)*

> " *The school environment is not the friendliest. The make-shift structures and lack of suitable toilets present a health hazard for the little one. I would rather they stay home" (Parent participant).*

Distilling the essence of what parents are saying, the issues appear to be affordability, long walking distances to and from school, and the shortage of appropriate infrastructure. There is also a perceptual issue about the substance and purpose of ECD services as they remain viewed as "going to play". Explaining where the problem really lies, heads of ECD centres saw the issues differently:

> " I cannot explain it in any other way. The parents are simply not cooperating due to their ignorance of the benefits" (Head of ECD centre)

> " Resources are limited. The centre cannot attract qualified teachers, hence parental perception that there is no value addition" (Head of centre)

> " Sometimes teachers are absent out of lack of motivation. The school does not have much to pay them. How can children continue to come when teachers are not available" (Centre head participant)

6.5.2 ECD enrolment rates: ECD A versus ECD B

An analysis of enrolment patterns between younger and older ECD children (ECD A versus ECD B) was undertaken as part of the current study. This was based on the most recent available (2017) data as provided in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education database. Figure 9 shows the relationship.
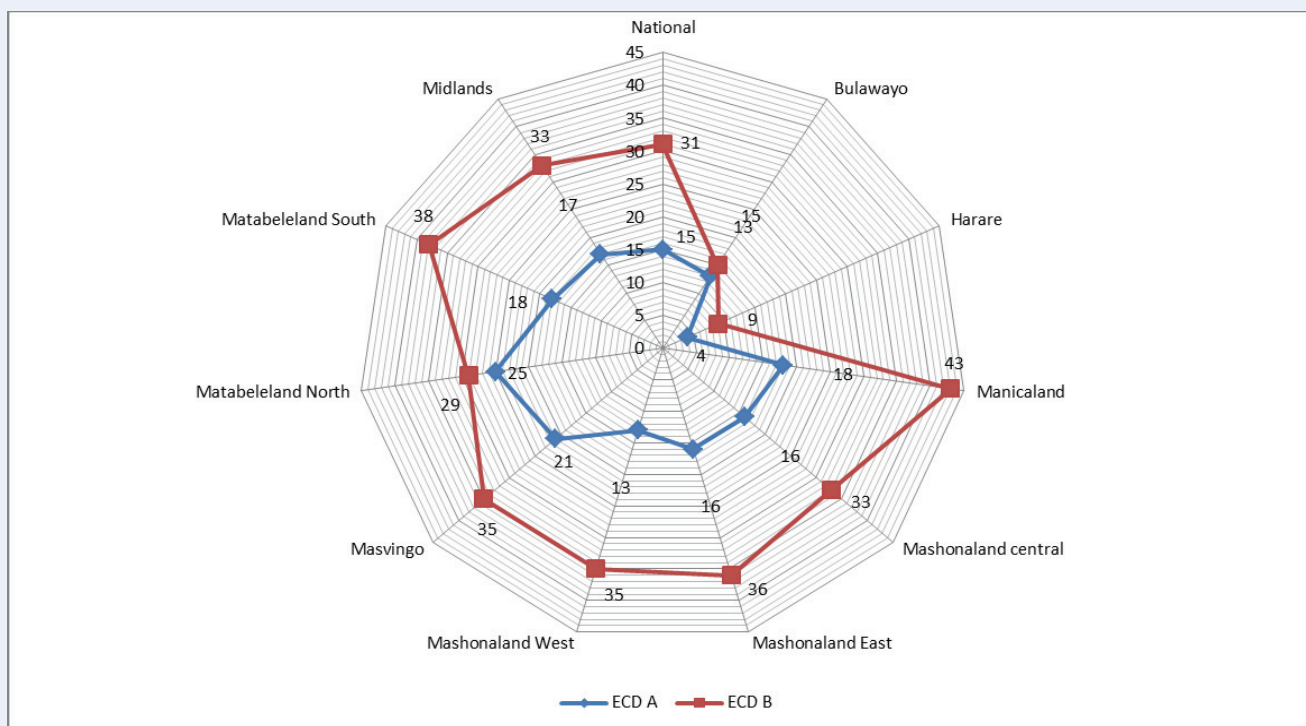
Figure 9: Teacher/learner ratios by type of centre (private or school-based)

The wagon wheel shows the ECD A 'wheel' inside the ECD 'wheel;, indicating consistently higher participation rates for ECD B than ECD A for each province and for national level. Why, overall, would enrolment be lower for ECD A that ECD B? This question was used as the prompt for all participant groups. The findings were varied:

Parent groups argued that this trend was motivated by the need to let children grow a little more before they could walk the long distances to ECD centres, especially in rural centres. Accordingly, the idea was to defer their enrolment until they had come of age. However, other participants, while agreeing with the parents, believed that the decision was economically motivated:

> " ECD is an expensive undertaking. As a parent, one has to have capacity to afford it. Most parents, especially in urban areas where the fees are higher, would rather forego the ECD A component and invest in ECD B, effectively cutting the cost by half" (Head of private ECD centre).

There were also additions to the argument, suggesting that if parents had their way, they would also probably forego ECD B. However, they have little option given the requirement that for anyone to enrol into grade one, they must have come through ECD B.

6.5.3 Children with special needs

The issue of children with special needs also came under the spotlight; revealing lack of proper ECD learning for children with special needs. The only disability recognised was physical. However, out of a total of 18 classrooms (table 5), there are only 12 (table 7) with access ramps. In most cases very few teachers have any experience of communicating using sign language, neither are there suitable facilities at the centre level.

6.5.4 ECD attendance rates

> The issue is beyond enrolment. Many enrol but few attend regularly as some enrol but attendance is erratic (Primary school based centre head).

Most of the reasons cited for low enrolment equally apply to erratic attendance, In an effort to address the issue of long walking distances travelled by the kids and encourage more participation, the Ministry has tried to revive and maintain community ECD centres in some areas. However, the trend is that they close down unless the community is committed enough to support with both infrastructure and payment of teachers. Other factors affecting attendance include illness, weather elements, and home chores such as looking after small animals.

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

a) Although there was consensus on the perception of early childhood development (ECD), there were subtle points of emphasis that might lead to variations in support efforts.

b) Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education facilitates development and distribution of policies and guidelines. However, the distribution is done selectively with private providers generally excluded from the receipt. This creates unnecessary differentiation of service provision to children.

c) Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has policies and guidelines for ECD but these are too fragmented for meaningful and effective use by critical stakeholders. Although the process is reported to be underway, it is taking longer than necessary to complete.

d) The multi-sector coordinated ECD deliver effort does not appear to be functional with visibility of some sector Ministries (Public Service, Labour and Social Services and Health and Child Care either very low or absent. As a consequence, some ECD development facets run the risk of being sidelined at the expense of holistic child development.

e) ECD funding comes from both Government and private sources. However, this is not adequate to take care of the needs of the ECD programmes.

f) The provision of key factors of classroom and teachers falls short of requirements; thus undermining the quality of ECd services that can be provided.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

a) Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and ley ECD actors need to embrace on going capacity building efforts to ensure everyone is on the same ECD conceptual page.

b) As the Ministry tasked to coordinate the provision of ECD in Zimbabwe, MoPSE must of necessity review its practices in regard to distribution and facilitating accurate interpretation of all its policies to all relevant users for the benefit of ECD children.

c) Coordination among key responsible Ministries must be re-ignited to ensure harmonious and holistic attention to a child development needs

d) Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should facilitate expeditious completion of the harmonisation and review of existing policies in order to guarantee effectiveness in their use.

e) Resource mobilization must take a much more aggressive approach through combined efforts of Government and private providers and stakeholders. The budget must have specific allocation and be increased for ECD.

f) While long term provision is the ultimate answer, MoPSE must find innovative solutions in the short term to ensure satisfactory availability of such important resources.

g) On the issue of low ECD uptake, relentless community (parent) engagement to understand their concerns and why children are not coming to ECD as well as inform policy making and encouraging the parents to take children to ECD

h) There is low visibility of children with special needs such as those with disabilities, necessitating aggressive efforts to bring them into the fold.

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(a) National level informants

Name of participant	Organisation	Designation
Mrs Musoko	MoPSE Head Office	Director – Infant Education
Mrs Tachiona	UNICEF	Programme Officer – Education
Mr Michael Rafomoyo	ECOZI	National Coordinator
Mr Naison Bhunhu	ZINECDA	National Coordinator
Mrs Jenneth Musiyiwa	Women's University in Africa (WUA)	Programme Coordinator (includes ECD)
Mrs D Madzima	Higher Life Foundation	Programme Officer
Ms Auxilia Badza	World Education Inc.	Education Manager
Ms Janet	Chiedza Child Care Centre	Programme Officer - Education
ECD Lecturer*	Teacher Training College 1	ECD Lecturer
ECD Lecturer*	Teacher training college 2	ECD Lecturer

*The lecturers requested anonymity

(b) Teacher participants

	ECDA QUALIFIED	ECDA PARA/TEMP	ACDA B QUALIFIED	ECD B PARA/TEMP	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS
HARARE	2	2	3	1	8
MANICALAND	7	11	10	2	30
MASH WEST	1	1	1	1	2
MAT SOUTH	5	7	6	14	32
MIDLANDS	12	4	19	10	45
TOTAL	27	26	38	29	116

*The lecturers requested anonymity