

Exploring the Implementation of 'Education for All' in Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe: Successes and Challenges

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Abstract

The article sought to explore the provision of education for all (EFA) in relation to the implementation of early childhood education (ECE) in Zimbabwe. An exploration was undertaken to analysis data from literature, research reports, policies and practices in order to establish the state of affairs in the provision of ECE to all children including those with the special needs. The data was analysed using theme identification methods to solicit emerging issues from the data. Generally, it was found that in Zimbabwe, EFA is implemented in the ECD sub-sector with both successes and challenges. There are barriers to attaining EFA especially for children with special needs. The specific challenges include, lack of trained ECD specialists with expertise in special needs education (SNE); shortage of equipment and material resources as well as infrastructure. The study also established that regarding EFA in ECD in Zimbabwe, the implementation is biased towards policy for action and not in action. The study recommended that there is need for equal access to quality early childhood education, provision of infrastructure, ability and age appropriate resources, health and nutrition services especially for rural children with disabilities, equity in the provision of ECD programmes, eradicating exclusion of the girl child and children with disabilities and trained specialist ECD personnel with special needs education expertise.

Kew Words: Education For all, Early Childhood Development, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Throughout the world, governments have the responsibility to provide education for all their citizens. Zimbabwe is not an exception in this matter. The kind of education provided depends on the particular philosophies and policies of the government of the day. Whereas some countries provide racial and discriminatory education, others believe that education is a basic human need and fundamental right. Hence, education must be provided to all members of the society irrespective of race, sex, age, disability and religion. Within the constraints of its economic resources, Zimbabwe strives to provide basic education to all its citizens including early childhood development learners. The provision of education to all citizens is referred to as 'education for all' (EFA). This article focuses on three aspects namely: the concept 'education for all', the ECD policy framework, and implementation of EFA in the early childhood development sub-sector in Zimbabwe. Deiner (2010) has postulated that ECD concentrates on the development of education of children from birth up to eight years. ECD is committed to the principle that births through age eight are critical years for development.

Concept 'Education for All'

In illuminating the concept 'education for all' the term education has been viewed in several ways by different authors. Tompson (1981) adopts the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education definition of 'education for all' "... as comprising organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning". Tompson (1981) further suggests that communication requires two or more people involved in the transfer of information; 'organised' means planned in a sequence with established aims and curricula; 'sustained' implies that the learning experience has a duration and continuity; and 'learning' means any change in behaviour, knowledge, understanding, skills or capabilities which cannot be ascribed to the physical growth or the development of inherited behaviour traits. Peters cited by Lawton (1972) states that:

Education ... involves the initiation of others into worthwhile activities ... science, mathematics, history, art, cooking and carpentry feature on the curriculum, not bingo and billiards.

The term, education, also refers to a set of planned activities designed to transmit certain forms of desired knowledge to other people. In the context of this paper, education conveys knowledge to young

children in the age range zero to eight years. In Zimbabwe decisions on who receives the knowledge are made by policy makers. Upon attaining independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe government adopted a policy to provide education to all to its citizens including young children, thus adopting the philosophy of EFA. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of the Zimbabwean Constitution states that:

Everyone has a right to education; education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (Bishop, 1985:39).

One of the great Enlightenment educationists, Comenius, had this to say on Education for All:

Our first wish is that all men should be educated fully and to full harmony, not any one individual, nor a few nor even many, but all men together and singly, young and old, rich and poor, of high and low birth, men and women – in a word, all whose fate it is to be born human beings; so that at last the whole of the human race may become educated, men of all ages, both sexes and all nations (Akinpelu, 1981:46).

These ideas have certain implications about the concept 'education for all'. Any government which adopts this philosophy as a guiding policy for its education system should ensure that the same type of education is provided to every citizen. This calls for a centralised system of education such as the one that prevails in Zimbabwe. There is the need to ensure that no member of the society is denied access to education due to age, race, economic status, social status, sex, disability and health condition.

In 1980, the government of Zimbabwe introduced a wide range of reforms in the education system. This was done to maintain a uniform education system and abolish the parallel distinction between black

African education and white European education which was in existence (Zvobgo, 1986:30). The Zanu (PF) Election Manifest (1980) addressed the concept of 'education for all'. This was further confirmed by President Robert Mugabe's opening address at Glen Norah High School on 31 October 1983 where he stated:

You can, therefore, see why we put so much emphasis on the need for all our people, young and old, worker and unemployed, to get some education. The creation of chances of equal access to educational facilities will help to redress the gross inequalities that were fashioned by the previous regime's discriminatory policies and practices.

The change from an elitist, settler racially-based and dual education system, to 'education for all' was the most fundamental policy reform at Zimbabwe's attainment of independence (Dorsey, 1990:167). Besides redressing the racial imbalances that existed prior to independence, 'education for all' brought unintended constraints in Zimbabwe. The quantitative increase resulted in a drop in the quality of education. Teacher shortages led to the employment of untrained teachers some of them who did not have five 'Ordinary' Level passes. The retired teachers were called back to the classroom to teach. The Primary School trained teachers were also asked to teach in the day secondary schools which had been started and mushroomed across the country. The major challenge that emerged at the time was that the early childhood development sub-sector was left under the Ministry of Women and Community Affairs and not being included in the mainstream education system regardless of the fact that EFA had been adopted as the guiding philosophy. This created a point of disjuncture between policy and practice because preschool education remained marginalised and under private organisations and individuals. With this background, Zimbabwe's, economic realities continue to render the provision of education for all to all the citizens (from ECD up to university level) strenuous and hardly attainable. Consequently, 'basic education' – the education which is deemed

essential for every citizen to be classified as literate is what is offered in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Basing on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights conveyed at the 'Jomtien World Conference on Education for All' in Thailand in 1990. The nations of the world resolved to provide all children with education regardless of context of child development, physical and mental capability. Besides, the bold step to the provision of basic education to all children of the world, children in Zimbabwe, especially those with special educational needs and those below six years of age still face challenges in getting equal access to quality ECD programmes and basic education facilities in regular classrooms. Position on EFA taken at the Jomtien Conference (1990) focused on the following key elements: recalling that education is a fundamental right to all children all over the world; understanding and ensuring a safer, healthier and more prosperous and environmentally sound world; knowing that education is an indispensable key to personal and social improvement; recognising that tradition and indigenous cultural heritage has a value in promoting development; acknowledging that educational provisions should be made universally available; and recognising the necessity to give basic education to the present and future generations. The exclusionary factors were also achieved in the Dakar World Education Conference (2000) where school and societal factors excluding girls and children who are physically, intellectually and emotionally vulnerable.

ECD Policy Framework in Zimbabwe

The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture (MoESAC) used the Education Act of 1987 and revised 1996 as the basis for formulation of Statutory Instrument (SI) 106, Secretary's Circulars 14 of 2004 and 12 of 2005. Under these circulars, primary schools are mandated to attach at least two ECD classes (ECD A – 3 to 4 year olds and ECD B – 4 to 5 year olds). The policy framework aims to initially improve 4-5 year old children's equitable access to quality basic education in ECD programmes. All the policy instruments - circulars

14 of 2004 and 12 of 2005 and the relevant SI 106, are consistent with enhancing access, equity and quality early childhood education in the country. Hence forth, these policy tools, (Circulars 14 of 2004, 12 of 2005 and Statutory Instrument 106) outline the legal and administrative framework for the provision of equitable early childhood education in Zimbabwe. The 2011 ECD Sub-sector analysis identified that the existing policies on ECD provision needed to be effectively implemented in both government and private nursery schools in order to improve children's access, equity and quality education as well as improve the growth and development of the ECD sub-sector in Zimbabwe (Mugweni, 2011).

Earlier on, Prof Dyanda (2005) of the University of Zimbabwe observed that current trends in ECD include a rights-based approach. The approach has more capacity to protect children including those with special needs. The rights-based approach takes with it some obligations. When it is a child's right, it is mandatory to have an obligation to ensure that the right is protected. Subsequently, an eclectic approach that integrates both a rights-and-need-based approach to programming should be adopted to afford all children equal access to quality ECD programmes.

Education for All in ECD: Some Successes and Challenges

In order to analyse operation of education for all in the ECD sub-sector in Zimbabwe, the Jomtien Conference Report (1990) is used as an analysis tool. The Report outlines key positions in the form of articles. The first item in the articles states that every child's basic learning needs include essential tools such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, problem solving, values and attitudes required by human beings for them to be able to survive and develop full capacities. Zimbabwe's strategies to attain education for all are founded upon identified basic learning needs of children which are acquisition of learning skills namely: language skills, numeracy skills, social skills, scientific and technology skills, creative and other skills such as Arts and Crafts (Mhangami, 2005).

The position taken by Zimbabwe is in tandem with its education policy aims, and the ECD policy framework. The emphasis on early childhood development is on numeracy, literacy, oral expression as well as development of the whole child. Consistently, the Humanities curriculum reinforces on pertinent existential issues like living together, patriotism- positive attitude towards one's country and positive moral values in children. In Zimbabwe all learners from ECD 'A' and ECD 'B' are taught pre-formal mathematics skills as a head start for numeracy. Literacy is facilitated through poems, rhymes, jingle, role play, picture reading and storytelling. Furthermore, morals, pro-social behaviour and values are instilled in young children in ECD settings through storytelling, role play and modelling adults' positive behaviour (Bandura, 2005).

Normally, the ECD curriculum has learning centres for development of oral language skills, mathematics, reading and writing, popularly referred to as the three Rs. Item 2 of Article one of the Jomtien Report (1990) report emphasises that education should facilitate children's acquisition of collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage. According to the particular item 2, social justice should achieve environment protection to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own. To enforce cultural and linguistic heritage, the Presidential Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) in Zimbabwe, recommended that ECD learners should be taught in the mother tongue, that is, first language or L1, (Sekenj & Dakwa, 2012; Mugweni & Ganga, 2011).

Consistently, the Language Policy in Zimbabwe is that children in ECD classes should be taught in their mother tongue in all learning areas. To emphasise the issue of culture and use of mother tongue, institutions of higher learning such as the Great Zimbabwe University offer degree programmes in IsiNdebele, ChiShona, Shangani and Venda. The languages such as IsiNdebele and ChiShona are taught from ECD classes up to the end of primary school in Grade Seven. With regards

to diversity in religious background, learners in Zimbabwean ECD settings learn Religious and Moral Education via the multi-faith approach. This implies that all children's religions that are practised and accepted in Zimbabwe are given recognition and accorded their due respect.

In support of the Jomtien Report (1990), post independent Zimbabwe brought about the introduction of early childhood education programmes to the African child; which was previously the reserve of the affluent whites in the colonial error (Dyanda, 2007).

It must be noted that Article 1 and item 3 posits that the fundamental aim of education is the transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values. This implies that curriculum is a selection from culture. The notion is consistent with the views of social cognitivists like Vygotsky and Roggoff that knowledge is embedded in a social context (Berk, 2000). It implies that young children learn about things that are from their culture. In our experiences as educationists, we have learnt that most content taught in different subjects is derived from the local content.

Again, Article 1 and item 1, of the Jomtien Report (1990) state that education should be provided to all children. According to the item, for basic education to be equitable and accessed by all children it should must be afforded the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. In Zimbabwe, the 1999 Education for all Assessment Committee, found that some national goals have been achieved. For example, the increase of enrolment and registration of early childhood centres (Gabbert, 2007). Also, the 1999 Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and training recommended that all ECD classes be attached to primary schools. This stance was strengthened by the Director's Circular 48 of 2007 which outlines that in an effort to democratise the ECD, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture incorporated the ECD 'B' programme into the formal primary school. This was done to further universalise access and equity. The government pays all trained teachers and makes

primary school education compulsory, reconstructs schools and builds new ones, and pays grants for the disadvantaged including orphaned and other vulnerable children (OVCs). Hence, in the Zimbabwean context, education for all is afforded to many children, especially in urban areas.

However, the scenario in rural areas is not very high especially ECD 'A' and 'B' classes that are hampered by lack of age appropriate resources and health and nutrition services.

The urgent priority is to ensure access, equity and quality ECD involving education for the girl child, removing every obstacle that militates against equal access and participation as stated in Article three item three of the Jomtien Report of 1990. Article three further recommends that all gender stereotypes in education must be eliminated. In order to address the Jomtien provisions and meet the need for education for all, Zimbabwe adopted the gender equity policy (Zvobgo, 1998). As a result, most ECD programmes are being manned by female educators. The practice is an inspiration to the girl child at a tender age. Experience has shown that both boys and girls have the potential to learn the same subjects on an equal basis.

Consistently, it has been observed that organisations such as the Girl Child Network (GCN) are empowering girls at grassroots level by providing and educating them about their rights and issues on abuse. In some sectors in Zimbabwe, experience has shown some religious groups still deprive children of education particularly the girl child. The resultant factor of such practices is that the girl children marry early. Notably, Article 3, item 4 of the Jomtien Report (1990) advocates for the removal of disparities of the poor, street kids, working children, rural and remote populations, indigenous people, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, should not suffer any discrimination in cases of accessing education. In trying to meet requirement of the Article, Zimbabwe formulated the and enacted the Children's Protection and Adoption Act which states that abusing and failing to provide basic education for children is an offence. In the Zimbabwean context, the poor attend school because the government pays grants from

Grades one to seven. However, there is need for government to cater for the ECD sub-sector in the provision of school grants as the burden of paying school fees is still being shouldered by parents. Due to persistent droughts and lack of employment, some parents in poor communities face challenges in paying school levies thereby denying children access to early childhood education (Mugweni, 2012). Item 5 of the Jomtien Report (1990) states that the learning needs of children with disabilities demand special attention. In addition, Item 5 further states that measures should be taken by member states in order to provide equal access to education by every person with disability. This should be done as an integral part of the education system. The position declared by the Jomtien Report (1990) was emphasised by the Salamanca Conference Report of 1994. The Salamanca Report (1990) states that regular schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, social, emotional, and linguistic or any other condition of disability. The introduction of the National Braille Press and the adoption of the Zimbabwe sign language recourses is a step towards affording equal access to learners with disabilities. Further, the Government of Zimbabwe enacted the policy of inclusive education. Under the inclusive education stance, children with special education needs are integrated into the mainstream education system and in regular classrooms (Mhangami, 2009).

In Zimbabwe the provision of a special needs teacher education programme at United College of Education in Bulawayo was a move to meeting EFA goals of universalising education regardless of disability. However, experience shows that the implementation of inclusive education policy in ECD remains a policy for action and not in action. An insignificant number of children are catered for in the inclusive ECD classes. The factors which militate against effective execution of the policy are: lack of human and material resources, lack of appropriate infrastructure, negative attitude towards inclusion and disability in general. Schools which offer special needs education such as St Francis in Bulawayo and Jairos Jiri Waterfalls cater for a limited number of ECD children due to lack of expert ECD personnel with special needs education

expertise in the institution and in Zimbabwe as a country.

Learning begins at birth which implies that early childhood education should involve families and communities which form the child's immediate context of development. According to the Jomtien Report (1990), the main delivery of basic education is the school which should consider the use of the mother tongue (L1) as a cultural identity and heritage. It is apparent that the view is rooted in ideas of great philosophers like Comenius and Froebel's theory of the kindergarten. Comenius conceptions of the school of Infancy or the school of the mother's knee becomes handy in this area. To reinforce the idea the 1994 Salamanca statement outlines that early childhood development programmes ought to be developed to promote physical, intellectual, social development and school readiness.

In Zimbabwe, to implement the concept of learning beginning from birth Statutory 106 and Director's Circular 48 of 2007 were enacted. These instruments form the policy framework for the effective delivery of ECD 'A' and 'B' programmes in Zimbabwe. ECD 'B' for the 4-5 year olds is being offered in many public and private settings, a practice which improves access and equity in achieving EFA. It was observed that the registration of ECD centres has increased (Mhangami, 2009). To attain EFA in Zimbabwe, participants of the Jomtien conference of 1990 like UNICEF, UNESCO and other donors have championed the funding of the construction of play centres, purchase of play materials and books in ECD settings attached to primary schools. To meet the personnel needs, ECD teachers are being trained at certificate (para-professional), diploma and degree levels. Further, ECD district trainers were in-serve to enhance managerial skills. However, experience shows that some rural ECD settings are very far and mostly manned by under qualified personnel. The practice impedes the implementation of the ECD programme and attainment of education for all in Zimbabwe.

There are challenges which impact on the implementation and attainment of EFA in the ECD sub-sector. These limitations include lack of financial and material resources to construct infrastructure (Zvobgo, 2010). Moreover, in rural ECD settings attendance by learners is affected by drought. Literature has shown that most of the rural communities do not have disposable income to pay ECD teachers (Mugweni, 2011). It is also observed that problems that hinder the success of EFA in ECD include the HIV and AIDS pandemic, unstable macroeconomic environment and the economic meltdown, or the fall of the Zimbabwean dollar against major currencies in the years 2007 to 2009. Some of the children come from child-headed families. Such children may fail to meet school requirements and access the curriculum fully due to lack of supervision of homework. In some cases these children from child-headed families end up dropping out of school.

An analysis of ECD provision in Zimbabwe reveals that overall ECD A and B classes have been attached to primary schools in an attempt to provide education for all to children in the population cohort (Mugweni, 2011). The scenario in the country is that there are four types of ECD Schools/Centres. There are ten Model ECD centres one per each Province. These centres are semi-fully resourced in an effort to meet EFA goals.

There are Cluster Model ECD centres currently obtaining in Zimbabwe. These are community driven and supported by parents. Experience has shown that these centres are well resourced. It implies that they are more likely to provide quality education. However, the third category constitutes Urban ECD centres attached to primary schools and private nursery schools. These vary from poorly resourced to well resourced, depending on the location of the school in the social strata. Then there are ECD centres in rural and remote areas. These are community driven and poorly resourced. Mostly, these ECD centres are in low rainfall areas with high food insecurity/deficits and poor community livelihoods. Overall, there are challenges with regards to qualified teachers,

financial resources, food, health facilities, availability of classrooms, age-appropriate facilities and equipment, wash-related needs and financial resources. These challenges are severe in centres located in poor urban and rural communities.

Although ETF was not focusing much on providing for the ECD sub-sector, an opportunity arose because of savings in ETF I, in that MoESAC and UNICEF developed and purchased an ECD Kit indicated in Table 1 below to ameliorate the challenge of shortage of resources in ECD A and B classes' nationwide. However, the facility was not extended to private nursery schools in urban areas. There was also need to train para-professionals on how to effectively use the different learning materials in the kit for attainment of quality ECD. Article 6 of the Jomtien Report (1990) contends that societies must provide nutrition, health care physical and emotional support. The communities must be involved in the education of their children (Van Leer, 2008). Parental involvement may be in the form of provision and maintenance of nutrition gardens in order to meet the full provision of the ECD programme. Article eight of the report reveals that supportive policies in social and economic sectors are required in order to realise the full provision of basic education. The article further spells out that close contact with contemporary technological and scientific knowledge should be possible at all levels of Education. The Director's Circular 14 of 2007 states that the government would provide grants for underprivileged children. However, the grants are not being granted to ECD 'A' and 'B' children. For attainment of EFA in early childhood development, computers are a requirement. Experience has shown that most rural ECD schools do not have computers as a teaching and learning resource. The schools do not also have qualified teachers to man up studies in computer science.

In an effort to achieve the total provision of early childhood development for EFA, Article 11 spells out that a multisectoral approach should be used to meet children's basic learning needs. It implies that many partners should collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture (MoESAC)

such as Non Governmental Organisations (NGO), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), parents in planning, managing and evaluating the many forms of inclusive education. Experience shows that to a lesser extent most of the stake holders stated above are involved in ECD programmes. For example, parents pay fees and levies, buy uniforms and help in constructing play centres. NGOs also provide different forms of aid. Government makes the provision of primary school education a joint effort between itself and local authorities such as rural and urban councils (Zvobgo, 2010).

Most ECD centres across the country are attached to schools run by either district or urban councils. In other areas Education Officers and ECD Trainers educate parents and untrained teachers on ECD programmes and making of play materials. In terms of lack of both human and material resources to attain effective ECD, delivery existed in most of the centres in the ECD sub-sector as evidence was shown in the cases visited in five provinces during fieldwork. An opportunity for MoESAC to reduce the gaps in service delivery arises in the second phase of implementing the establishment of ECD in primary schools. MoESAC, school administrators, teachers and stakeholders (including the donor community) should be aware that it is possible to strive for high-quality programmes in the ECD Sub-sector even if challenges prohibit the full realisation of certain components or factors of hallmarks of quality ECD programming and delivery. With regards to teachers, care-givers and teacher training, Mugweni (2011) found that in the ECD sub-sector most ECD classes were managed by untrained para-professionals (PP). The scenario is a challenge to attainment of quality education for all.

According to Article 13 of the Jomtien Report (1990), the precondition for educational quality and efficiency are set in the early childhood years. It further explains that basic education must correspond to actual needs and problems of the learners. It also states that the relevance of curricular activities should be linked by literacy, numeracy and scientific skills. In the Zimbabwean

situation, all subjects taught address a certain need and problem in society. For example, pre-number skills are a foundation to mathematics concepts in later life. Article 24 calls for the need of expertise and skills to carry out the initiatives for education for all. It further postulates that teacher educators need to be in-service or pre-service. The recent research by Mugweni (2012) and also experience indicate that the Zimbabwean colleges and universities embark on pre-service and in-service training for specialist early childhood development professionals for primary schools, tertiary institutions and universities with ECD programmes. The training and professional development are done to improve on human resource expertise and skills in order to offer access and quality education to the entire ECD sub-sector. The Jomtien Report (1990) also resolved that the delivery of basic education can be enhanced through the use of instructional technologies. These technologies include computers, radio, Braille and audio-visual instructional devices. In Zimbabwe, a few early childhood development centres have access to the use of modern instructional technologies such as computers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the main concept of EFA and the contents of the Jomtien world declaration (1990) on 'education for all' in relation to the practice in the Zimbabwean early childhood development sub-sector. The execution of the 'education for all' philosophy were analysed against the Jomtien Report (1990) resolutions. The successes and challenges faced during delivery of education for all the ECD sub-sector in Zimbabwe were explored. The main challenges identified were: the shortage of material resources and equipment, infrastructure and qualified personnel to deliver ECD in compliance with EFA goals. The major challenge being that the early childhood development sub-sector does not have qualified personnel with basic expertise in special needs education. As part of the conclusions, the study suggests the following recommendations in relation to EFA in the provision of early childhood development in Zimbabwe.

There is the need for equal access to quality early childhood development; infusion of local content in the ECD curriculum; inculcation of literacy, numeracy and scientific skills to all children; emphasis on culture regardless of ability and disability; the need for appropriate instructional techniques; provision of infrastructure, ability and age appropriate resources, as well as health and nutrition services especially for rural populations and children with disabilities; ensure access, equity and quality in the provision of ECD programmes; eradicating exclusion of the girl child and children with disabilities; removal of barriers against equal access and participation; government to cater for the ECD sub-sector in the provision of school grants, fees and food; a multi-sectoral approach to be used in meeting the needs of infants, toddlers, preschool and young school children's needs; the need for trained specialist ECD personnel including those with special needs education expertise; and the need for use of the Zimbabwe sign language as a literacy and numeracy development tool for young children who are deaf.

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