

**EXPLORING THE REALISATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
IMPLEMENTATION IN THE EDUCATION SKILLS AND SECTOR PLAN IN ZAMBIA**

**BY  
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**A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Education in Educational  
Administration and Management.**

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I, Rita Nsamya, do hereby solemnly declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where acknowledgements have been duly made through citations and references. I further declare that to the best of my knowledge, this work has never been previously submitted for the award of any degree at the University of Zambia or any other educational institution.

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Author's Signature

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**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

This dissertation of Rita Nsamya is approved as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Educational Administration and Management by the University of Zambia.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of Early Childhood Education in line with the Education Sector and Skills Plan as it has implications on policy analysis and implementation which will bring recognition to the state of ECE in Zambia. The research study was underpinned by Edward III's theorizing approach or policy implementation theory which lies on the premise that if a policy needs to be effectively and efficiently implemented, the implementers not only have to know what to do and have the ability to carry out the policy, but also have the intention to implement the policy.

This research applied a qualitative approach that used a descriptive narrative design. The study sample included thirteen (13) participants whom were officials from the Ministry of General Education and from the Directorate of Early Childhood Education to constitute the sample for the analysis. Under purposive sampling- typical sampling techniques were used to sample the participants. Data was generated using interviews and document analysis. It was then analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis techniques based on the emerging themes from the study.

The findings of the study sought to suggest that little had been done in terms of construction of ECE schools as the ESSP recommended, as in the past years funding allocated to ECE in the National budget was not enough. Furthermore, some parents in rural areas are still not convinced of the importance of ECE. The study further revealed that most of the challenges experienced in the implementation of ECE are as a result of fiscal challenges- which have resulted into a small number of well-constructed schools, lack of teachers in schools and unavailability of data on progress of ECE. Participants further added that partnerships were being formulated with International Organizations that have come on board to spread and develop the sector.

The study recommended strategies which included the government constructing appropriate Infrastructure for better ECE practices, instead of using infrastructure which was designed for children above the age of six. ECE class-sizes and child-teacher ratios must be considered when enrolling children for quality education provision so as to produce desirable results was also another recommendation and lastly, the need for ECE centres to have active partnerships with parents which accommodate their needs.

**Keywords:** Partnerships, Implementation, Early childhood Education, ESSP

## **DEDICATION**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ECE</b>	-	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECEC</b>	-	Early Childhood Education and Care
<b>ESSP</b>	-	Education Skills and Sector Plan
<b>DEBS</b>	-	District Education Board Secretary
<b>DESO</b>	-	District Education Standards Officer
<b>ECCDE</b>	-	Early Childhood Care Development and Education
<b>ECCE</b>	-	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECD</b>	-	Early Child Development
<b>ECDC</b>	-	Early Childhood Development Care
<b>MOE</b>	-	Ministry of Education
<b>MOGE</b>	-	Ministry of General Education
<b>MOE</b>	-	Ministry of Education
<b>ESA</b>	-	Education Sector Analysis
<b>NGO</b>	-	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>CDC</b>	-	Curriculum Development Centre
<b>EC</b>	-	European Commission

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background to the study on the history and development of Early Childhood Education, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives and research questions. It further presents the significance of the study, delimitation of the study and limitations of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks and ends with the operational definition of terms in this study.

#### 1.2 Background to the study

Early childhood education (ECE) is a critical phase in a child's development and has been recognized globally as a fundamental human right and a key factor in achieving sustainable development goals. The importance of ECE has been reiterated in numerous studies and reports, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s *"Early Childhood Care and Education"* (2019) and the World Bank's *"Investing in Early Childhood Education: A Review of the World Bank's Recent Experience"* (2020). These reports emphasize that ECE not only provides a foundation for lifelong learning but also contributes to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, fostering their overall well-being.

Furthermore, research has shown that investments in ECE yield significant returns, not only for the individual child but also for society as a whole. A study by Heckman and Masterov (2007) found that high-quality ECE programs have a positive impact on children's long-term outcomes, including higher educational attainment, increased earnings, and improved health outcomes. Additionally, ECE has further been linked to reductions in crime rates, improved social cohesion, and increased economic productivity (Heckman, 2019).

Given the evidence of the benefits of ECE, there is a growing recognition of the need to prioritize and invest in early childhood education on a global scale. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a target to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 (UN, 2015). This target reflects the global commitment to ECE as a critical component of the education system and a key driver of sustainable development.

A study by Fung et al. (2022) in Malaysia reinforces this notion, emphasizing the critical role of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in shaping neurological development. The researchers asserted that children's neurological growth is profoundly influenced by their early learning experiences. They argued that during this formative period, the brain requires targeted stimulation to develop optimally, laying the foundation for future learning. Furthermore, such stimulation enhances neural pathways essential for a child's social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Early Childhood Education, therefore, leverages a diverse range of sensory activities, including kinaesthetic, tactile, auditory, and olfactory experiences, to stimulate a child's brain and enable it to reach its fullest potential. This emphasis on multi-sensory engagement not only promotes cognitive development but also fosters a child's overall well-being, preparing them for a successful transition into formal education and beyond.

The importance of early childhood education (ECE) is further underscored by its critical role in shaping children's lives and future outcomes. As the European Commission (EC) report (2014) emphasizes, the early years from birth to compulsory school age are pivotal in setting the foundations for lifelong development and establishing patterns that can influence children's lives. High-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is essential in this context, serving as a cornerstone for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development, and later employability (EU report, 2016).

Improving the quality and effectiveness of ECEC systems is not only crucial for individual children but also for securing smart, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth on a national scale. This assertion aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the global commitment to ensuring that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 (UN, 2015). As such, the availability of high-quality, affordable early childhood education and care remains a top priority for various nations, including Zambia.

A study by Ansari (2018) in the United States underscored the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) by examining the academic trajectories of middle-class children who attended preschool at age four. The findings revealed that these children exhibited stronger academic skills at the start of kindergarten compared to their peers who received informal care, with these advantages persisting—albeit at reduced levels—through the end of eighth grade. However,

children who attended preschool for 20 or more hours per week also displayed slightly higher levels of externalizing behavior problems and less optimal social skills, though these effects diminished to negligible levels over time. Overall, these findings suggest that investments in preschool programs yield long-term academic benefits, extending up to a decade later (PsycInfo Database Record, 2022).

Early Childhood Education is also a significant factor in determining school performance and progress at a later stage in life. Research has shown that children who have participated in early childhood education and related programs generally remain in school and are unlikely to repeat classes. Their performance is much better compared to those who have never attended pre- primary programs (Mutafela, 2016; Munthali, 2014).

ECE programmes are helpful to increase literacy rate, decrease dropout rate, improves retention rate and enhance the learning outcomes for all the students enrolled at ECE level belonging to different sectors of the society (Farooq, 2013). Due to lack of ECE programs in developing countries, the dropout rate at primary levels is very high. One of the major reasons of high dropout rate is lack of ECE. Students leave their education mainly because they are not well prepared for primary education levels. These programs are helpful for the mental development of the students. The performance of the students enrolled at ECE level is increased. It helps to decrease the dropout rate. The dropout rate affects the literacy rate in a developing country like Pakistan badly. So, an effective ECE program is not only helpful in decreasing the dropout rate but is helpful in increasing the literacy rate as well (Masroor, et al 2019).

Even though the advancement in Early Childhood Education has been appreciated on a global and continental scene, the case of Zambia is different as implementation of this very important sector is still lagging as gaps in research have pointed out. However, trends in policy formulation show reasonable strides have been made in Early Childhood Education as stated in the Educating the Nation policy document that government would embark on the provision of ECE by 2006 to children aged 2-6 years. Unlike in previous documents such as Education Reforms (1977) and Educating Our Future (1996), Educating the Nation (2005) recognized ECE as a pre-requisite for primary schooling and noted it as critical in the achievement of Education for All (Munsaka,2017).

The MOE (1996:8) refers to Early Childhood Education as “an organized form of education provision for children between the ages of three and six.” Such provision is made in the form of

pre-schools. Early Childhood Education makes a positive contribution to children's long term development and learning by facilitating an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation stages of lifelong learning. The program, at the early childhood stage, helps to ensure opportunities for holistic learning and growth. The ECE programme needs to be determined by children's developmental and contextual needs, providing for more need based inputs and an enabling environment.

In Zambia, Early Childhood Education was a component of schooling before independence in 1964 under sub 0 education offered for a year. It involved learning to write letters of the alphabet on the ground (Education International, 2009; Tuntufye, 2014; UNICEF, 2008). To guide ECE provision in Zambia for the local children, the colonial government came up with the 1957 Day Nurseries Act as one of the first signs of policy direction in Zambia.

Further, the government of Zambia showed commitment to recognising Early Childhood Education by coming up with a Sixth National Development Plan (2011-2015) and the educational document policy—Educating Our Future of 1996, which brings out the importance of early childhood education in building early education foundation in the child (Ndhlovu, Daniel and Mtonga et al., 2016). In addition, the policy brings out the need for early childhood education in building up "cultural capital" and compensating for disadvantages that may arise from impoverished homes where reading, writing, or other education-related materials are absent (MoE, 1996).

The renewed emphasis on ECE could have stemmed from the worldwide consensus that the success of schooling in other levels can be greatly enhanced by a more organized ECE sector. ECE is described as the provision of care and education to children of zero to 6 years of age. The common forms of ECE in Zambia are described as Nursery (kindergarten or baby class), pre-school and reception. Day care centres cater for children aged zero to 2 years, while nursery schools offer activities to children aged 2 to 4 years in order to help develop their language and social skills through playful art works. Pre-school is usually considered a preparatory stage for entry into primary formal schooling (MoE, 2013).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is “a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity”. It comprises of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals are indivisible and encompass economic, social and environmental dimensions. SDG4 focuses on

education and aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. In line with Sustainable Development Goal number four (4); by 2030, all girls and boys must have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education (Krupar, 2020). To fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), governments have committed to work toward specific targets using agreed upon monitoring indicators and processes. A core principle of SDG4 is that “education is a fundamental human right and enabling right” (UNESCO, 2016D) SDG 4 reiterates governments commitments to uphold and respect the right to education, as codified in international law.

In order to fulfil the goals of Vision 2030 and the seventh national development plan at national level, the ESSP was formulated to provide the education sector with a clear set of strategic priorities, based on a sound analysis of prevailing conditions and trends in the sector, whose attainment will ensure measurable progress towards quality and relevant education services in Zambia over the implementation period. However, the Government of the Republic of Zambia is also aware that, within the education sector, much international assistance is conditional on the existence of a ‘credible education sector plan’ that is linked to the national development vision and plan, and that meets internationally agreed criteria in terms of national ownership, soundness and relevance, coherence and feasibility (ESSP,2019).

The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) recognizes the important role ECE plays as the foundation of learning. The Education Sector Analysis (ESA) shows that Government of the Republic of Zambia’s involvement in ECE has, in the past, been minimal and was limited to enabling individuals and organizations to establish and manage ECE centres. In this regard, the mandate for ECE was moved in 2011, from the Ministry of Local Government and Housing to the then MoE. Since then, however, GRZ involvement has changed and the MoGE has made major strides in building the capacity for management, coordination and delivery of ECE at all levels. In 2015, the MoGE established the Directorate of ECE (DECE) with a full staff establishment. Available resources are limited, however. DECE’s major role has been to preside over and coordinate matters pertaining to ECE provision, particularly in developing framework documents on improved access and quality (ESSP, 2019).

The Education and Skills Sector Plan (ESSP) covers all sectors of education including Early Childhood Education. It was formulated as a working policy in 2017 to run for a period of four years up to 2021. The Education and Skills Sector Plan is the major primary plan that guides all educational sectors in Zambia (MoGe, ESSP, 2017). Early Childhood Education is identified as a critical player in developing a child to lay an ironclad foundation for smooth progression into the other grades and ultimately higher education.

From the time the Education and Skills Sector Plan was launched, it has identified key strategic priority areas in which Early Childhood Education in Zambia can be further developed which are among but not limited to; Access and Participation, Quality and Relevance, Equity, Management and Governance, expanding the provision of fair play and learning materials, implementing school readiness assessment, collaborating with communities to provide caregivers and lastly, establishing model ECE centres (MoGe, ESSP, 2017).

The importance of the Education Sector Skills Plan cannot be overemphasized as it is considered as a road map for progressing through education steadily. Further, the focus of the Education and Skills Sector Plan is to increase funding to the education sectors, such as the broadening of access and participation in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Recognizing the complexity of development challenges and the need to achieve sustainable 7NDP goals, the ESSP strategy calls for multi-sectoral and integrated programming to ensure that stakeholders work together to achieve desired outcomes.

Early childhood education equips young children with the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for successful school adjustment and adult competence later on. It ensures that young children will enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Moreover, school-based assessment should be conducted as early as preschool in order to be comprehensive, valid and reliable.

Children who receive early childhood education will have greater readiness to learn in terms of physical wellbeing, psychomotor skills, social competence and language ability. They will experience less stress and anxiety because early childhood education prepares them for the upcoming school year, ensuring a smooth transition to school life. Further, it allows parents and teachers to find out the child's expectations and specific challenges in order to prepare him or her for independent learning (Fung,et al 2022). In brief, early childhood education serves as a window

of opportunity for young children to learn to express their needs, become more proficient readers and establish more secure relationships with significant others.

Equally, a study done by Munthali (2014), explained how early cognitive development determines school performance and progress at a later stage in life. It further went on to explain the strong association between early childhood factors and primary school performance, such as; school retention and the unlikelihood of repeating classes. ECE also contribute towards low fertility rates as the incidence of childbearing for girls aged 10-18 is much less among those who attended pre-primary programs as children, compared to girls of the same age who had not attended pre- primary programs.

It has been increasingly recognized that early childhood is a critical window in the life course. The MDGs focused on child survival and early health, and the SDGs have broadened that vision with attention to early childhood development and preschool. A study done by Young Lives displays its findings draw attention to the central importance of context in shaping early childhood, each of the different layers highlighted in the bio ecological framework playing a part. The findings point to the usefulness of this framework in understanding the sources of influence that bear on early development in the household environment (food, water sanitation and adequate care), local community institutions (health services) and high-quality, holistic early learning programmes), all the way up to macro-level policies (Boyden et al ,2019).

This study therefore aimed to explore the implementation of Early Childhood Education in the Education Sector and Skills Plan in line with achieving both Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals by seeking answers to the extent of implementation of ECE in line with the ESSP, the challenges that have been faced in implementation and lastly the overall strategies in place to alleviate the challenges ongoing in this sector.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) aims to facilitate optimal development of the child's full potential and lay the foundation for all round development and lifelong learning. The overall objective of early childhood care and education is to ensure maximum outcomes in children's

Physical development, cognitive development, socio-emotional moral development, cultural development, early language for communication, literacy and numerical knowledge development,

it is therefore an essential foundation for lifelong learning and has a lasting impact on early childhood development (Mehar, et al, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the Government of Zambia has recognized the importance of Early Childhood Education as shown in the goals and aspirations of the Education and Skills Sector Plan (ESSP), which was launched in 2019 instead of the originally planned year of 2017. The launch or implementation of the Education and Skills Sector Plan was to cover the key priority areas, including the quality provision of education in terms of efficiency, access, and equity that need to be worked on in the Early Childhood Education sector. However, little has been done as far as the implementation of early childhood education is concerned. Therefore, this study might help us understand the progress in the implementation of early childhood education through the Education and Skills Sector Plan which provides the foundation of implementation of education policy for other consecutive sub sectors such as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education. This is also in line with both local and international protocols which emphasize quality of learning at ECE level.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the implementation of Early Childhood Education in the Education Sector Skills Plan in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

1. To explore the degree to which the Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity.
2. To establish challenges encountered in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity.
3. To ascertain feasible strategies that could be put in place to alleviate the challenges in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity.

#### **1.6 Research Questions**

1. To what degree is the Early Childhood Education implementation being realised in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, equity and efficiency?
2. What challenges are encountered in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP?

3. What feasible strategies could be put in place to alleviate the challenges in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity?

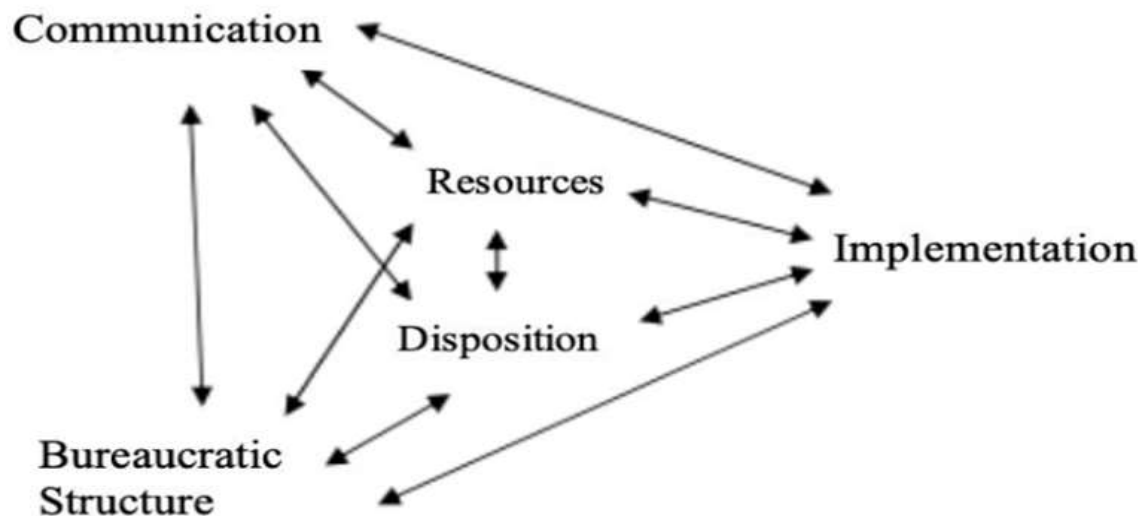
### **1.7 Significance of the study**

This study explored the realization of Early Childhood Education Implementation in the Education Skills and Sector Plan. It is anticipated that the study's findings may heighten comprehension on the implementation of Early Childhood Education in terms of access, quality, equity and efficiency. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings from the study may be used as a reference point for policy makers to come up with workable solutions that would enhance the implementation of Early Childhood Education as a cardinal sector. Lastly, the study's findings may add value to the already existing body of knowledge and expose its limitation in terms of scope and results to other potential researchers for future studies to be undertaken.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

Edward III's theorizing approach or policy implementation theory was developed in 1980 and has four variables that determine the success of policy implementation, namely; (1) communication, (2) resources, (3) disposal or attitudes and (4) bureaucracy.

George C. Edward III identifies communication as the primary and pivotal factor determining the success of policy implementation. Once the decision-maker has a clear understanding of their objectives, effective implementation becomes feasible. Success hinges on the dissemination of policy decisions and implementation guidelines to relevant stakeholders, ensuring that they are well-informed and aligned with the policy's objectives. In this theory, the other variable that affects the success rate of public policy implementation is temperament. The attitudes or disposition of policy implementers are also an important component of their approach to public policy implementation. When implementing an effective policy, there is no real bias, because policy implementers must not only know what will be done, but also have the ability to implement it (Jatmikowati, 2021).



**Figure 1: Structure of a theoretical model**

According to Winarno's Edward III (2005), "trends or dispositions are one of the factors that have important consequences for effective policy implementation." If the implementer has a positive tendency or attitude, or supports policy implementation, it is likely that the policy implementation will be carried out in accordance with the first decision. Conversely, if the implementer refuses to implement the policy because of negative or conflict of interest, the implementation of the policy faces serious obstacles.

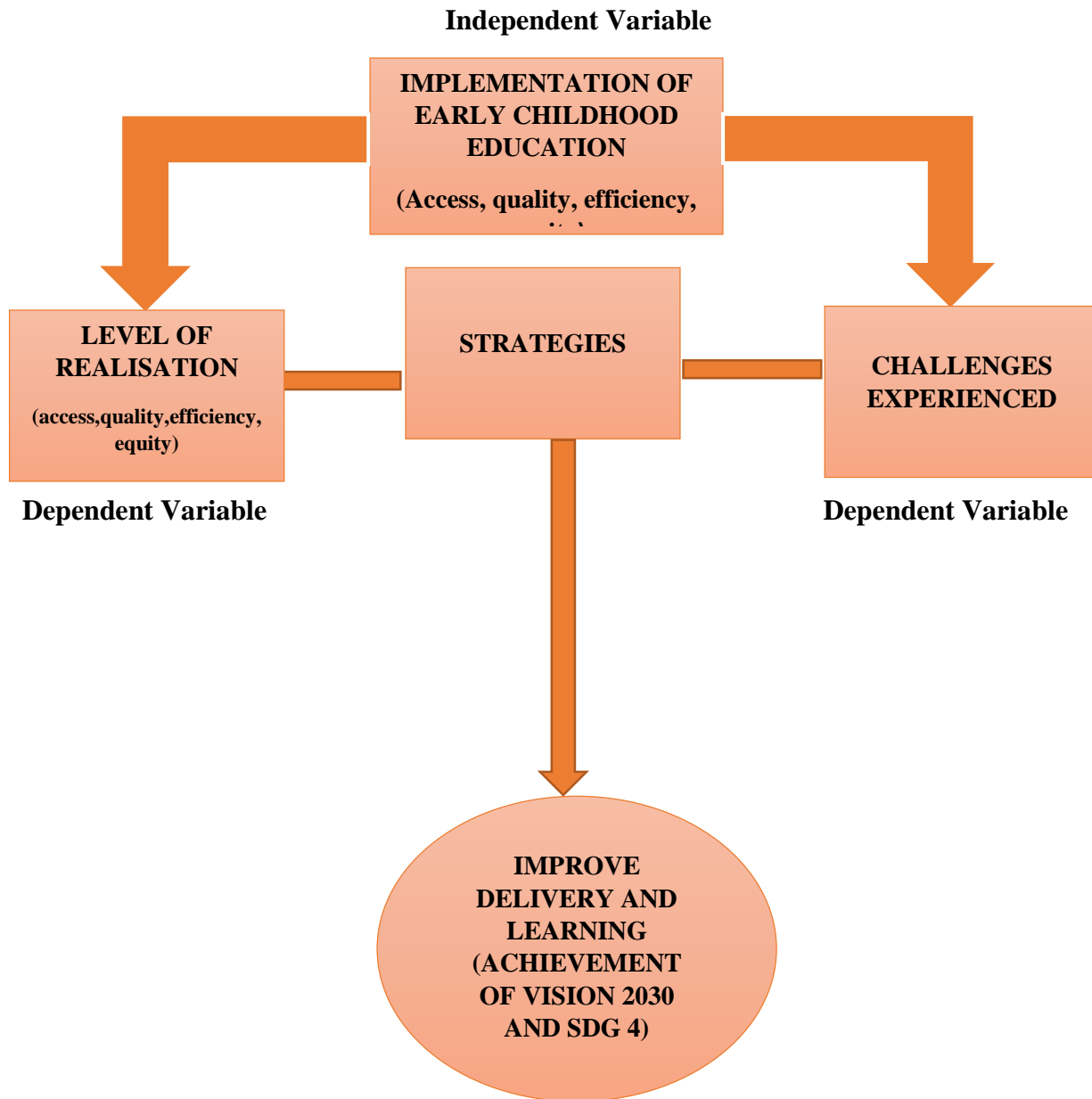
This theory is considered an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it proposes four variables which affect policy implementation success through the dimensions of communication, resources, disposition or attitude and lastly bureaucracy structure. In contrast to other implementation models that use context specific variables to explain Implementation, the Edwards theory is based on the premise that if a policy needs to be effectively and efficiently implemented, the implementers not only have to know what to do and have the ability to carry out the policy, but also have the intention to implement the policy. Given the emphasis it places on successful implementation of a policy; this model might also allow us to further understand the lagging in the implementation of ECE in line with ESSP.

### **1.9 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is a structure in which the researcher can best explain the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied. It is linked with the 3concepts, empirical research

and critical theories used in promoting and systemizing knowledge used by the researcher; it is arranged in a logical structure to aid or provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another (Grant and Osanloo, 2014).

**Figure 2: Conceptual framework for the Implementation of ECE in the ESSP.**



An independent variable is the variable you manipulate, control or vary in a study to explore its effects. Turabian (2018) explains that it is called ‘independent’ because it’s not influenced by any other variables in the study. It is the presumed cause. While the dependent variable depends on others factors that are measured. According to Turabian (2018), these variables are expected to

change as a result of the experimental manipulations of the independent variable. It is the presumed effect.

Figure 2 above, is the conceptual framework underpinning this study by signifying the implementation of early childhood education in public primary schools. It therefore, shows that successful implementation of the ESSP will be measured in the context of quality, access, efficiency, equity in ECE.

This conceptual framework was designed to examine the degree to implementation of Early Childhood Education using four dimensions of access, quality, efficiency and equity. Furthermore, it displays the link between challenges faced to implement ECE and strategies to ameliorate these challenges resulting in what would be termed as the successful implementation of ECE. The assumption is that in order to successfully achieve improved learning and delivery and the bigger picture of achieving vision 2030 and SDG 4, the degree of implementation will define the strategies needed in order to be in line with these goals.

#### **1.10 Limitation of the study**

Msabila and Nalaila (2013) postulate that limitations of a study include potential challenges anticipated or faced by the researcher. Likewise, this study cannot be conducted without constraints. Since the participants sampled for this research was only thirteen (13) in Lusaka District, the findings of this study may be generalised with caution to other centres in the District and Zambia at large.

#### **1.11 Delimitation of the study**

The study was limited to Lusaka, rather than a national or global scale. This was done to ensure an in-depth exploration of the local ECE context as the headquarters for the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Early Childhood Education are in Lusaka Province.

#### **1.12 Operational Definitions**

**Early Childhood Education** – The holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

**Education Sector and Skills Plan-** The working educational policy for the Early Childhood Education Sector.

**Early Childhood Development-** Early years in a child's life (particularly birth to three).

**Education** – The life long process of acquiring knowledge and skills.

**Child Care** – Education for children from birth to 2 years old.

**ECE Annexing-** Attachment of Early Childhood Education centres to government primary schools.

**Level of Implementation-** Refers to the stages or phases at which educational programs, policies, and practices are adopted and put into practice in early childhood settings, such as preschools, daycare centers, and early learning classrooms.

**Level of Realisation-** Refers to the degree to which the intended goals, outcomes, and benefits of a program, policy, or initiative have been achieved in practice.

**Access-** Refers to the availability and equitable provision of early learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, location, or abilities.

**Quality-** Refers to the characteristics and attributes of programs that contribute to the optimal development and learning of young children.

**Equity-** Refers to the principle of ensuring that all children, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

**Equality-** Refers to providing every child with the same resources, opportunities, and support to ensure that they can access and benefit from early learning programs.

**Illiteracy-** Not being able to read and write.

**Child-** Any young boy or girl between the ages of 3-9.

**Primary school-** A lower school level from grade 1-7.

### **1.13 Summary of the chapter**

The foregoing chapter gave the background to the study on the implementation of early childhood education in line with the Education Sector and Skills Plan. The chapter also presented the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research objective and questions, significance of the study, theoretical framework and conceptual framework, limitation of the study, delimitation of the research, definitions of operational terms that were used in this study. Therefore, the next

chapter endeavors to review various related literature deemed relevant to the study based on the research objectives.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1: Overview**

A literature review is a critical summary and evaluation of existing research and scholarly articles relevant to a particular topic or research question. It provides an overview of the current state of knowledge on the subject, identifies gaps or inconsistencies in the literature, and offers insights into future research directions (Smith,2020). Building upon this foundational understanding of a literature review, Cooper, H. (2021) in "Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis: A Step-by-Step Approach," further adds that a literature review serves to contextualize the research problem within the broader academic discourse, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the existing research landscape and informing the development of new research inquiries.

The current chapter outlines the review of related literature that is concerned with this study and how it will guide the study of Implementation of Early Childhood Education in line with the ESSP. In doing so, studies carried out by other previous researchers in both developed and developing countries were reviewed to provide rich experiences to the current study. Therefore, the literature review in this chapter was arranged as follows;

#### **2.2 A Background focus on Implementation of ECE around the globe**

Educational policy implementation is the process by which educational policies, which are decisions made by policymakers to address educational issues, are put into action. It involves translating policy intentions into concrete actions, programs, and practices in educational institutions. Implementation can include activities such as developing curriculum guidelines, allocating resources, training educators, and monitoring progress.

A study by Belfield et al. (2021) highlights the importance of considering the complexity of policy implementation, the role of local context, and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful outcomes. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding the implementation process and how it can be influenced by factors such as resource availability, stakeholder engagement, and the political environment.

As the demands placed upon educational systems intensify for the delivery of high-caliber education and the proliferation of reforms escalates, there exists a notable discrepancy in the attention accorded by policymakers towards the execution of these reforms. The implementation

of education policies constitutes a multifaceted and dynamic process, intricately involving various stakeholders, the mismanagement of which can culminate in failure. Therefore, it becomes imperative to comprehensively grasp this process, elucidate its determinants, and investigate avenues through which it can be rendered more transparent and efficacious. Governments persistently seek enhanced methodologies to realize their policy objectives. Although the significance of policy implementation in bridging the chasm between policy pledges and actual outcomes has been recognized, the intricacies of this process remain inadequately explored. Policy implementation is broadly construed as a sequence of endeavors orchestrated by governmental bodies and other entities aimed at realizing the objectives articulated in policy directives (Bullock, Lavis 2019).

In the course of time, scholars in this area of study have embraced the viewpoint of this topic because many countries in Sub Saharan Africa have recently prioritized ECD in their reform agendas. Groups such as the Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD), at the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), help shape policies that integrate approaches to supporting child development (ADEA, 2017). Put simply, of the 47 countries in Sub Saharan Africa, at least 23 already have approved national intersectoral Early Childhood Development policies, and another 13 have drafts according to Vargas-Baron & Schipper (2012). Other countries like Kenya in particular; have been recognized for their large-scale national ECD program serving children from different socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds (Okenga, 2013).

In line with this, a study showing the development of a comprehensive human resources development plan and implementation strategy for the Namibian Basic Education Sector (2017) in Namibia highlighted that the Namibian Government has committed itself to Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a key route to the development of the potential of its children, youth and workforce, therefore ECD plays a central role in NDP4. Furthermore, the new philosophy of NDP4, is to provide direction as regards high level national priorities, desired outcomes and strategic initiatives, however a recent study done by Gacher and Suhr (2021) titled Improving Early Childhood Development with result based financing concluded that Namibia still has many children from low income families that have limited access to high quality education. This signals

the need for implementation of ECE to be strengthened in Namibia along with the need for more staff to come on board.

In support of this, Shallwani (2018) in his exploratory study that examined the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of Early Childhood Care and learning at selected community based childcare centers (CBCC) centers pointed out key factors contributing to the success of the Kenya ECD program which have included community involvement and ownership, government involvement and support, decentralized training systems, and strategic support by multiple development partners which is extremely progressive however successful implementation of ECE has still been insufficiently explored. In contrast to these studies, our study focused on implementation of ECE in the ESSP.

The study above reveals a significant correlation with another study done by Saber (2017) which focused on Malawi's ECD system that is guided by the National Policy on Early Childhood Development (2006) and the National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development (2014), as well as several other plans and guidelines. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) implements ECD policies across sectors. This study broke down the stages of Early Childhood Education beginning with pre-primary education for 3 to 5 year olds which is provided free of charge at public childcare centers, as are a range of essential health services available at public hospitals and health facilities. However, despite this well-defined structure, this and other studies done by other scholars like Chirwa and Harvey (2018) conclude that the ECE service delivery in Malawi suffers from poor quality. The absence of an explicit ECD law and corresponding budget is undoubtedly another major obstacle to effective implementation of established ECD policies and services.

A recent UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2019) further highlights the strides made by Malawi in expanding access to early childhood education. The report emphasizes the government's commitment to increasing enrollment rates and improving the quality of ECE programs. However, it also underscores the need for continued efforts to address disparities and ensure equitable access to quality education for all children in Malawi.

Past research in Early Childhood Education has further shown that investing in the early years of life has a profound impact on brain development, affecting a child's learning, health, behavior, and ultimately, income (World Bank, 2023). It is well recognized that targeted investments in

Early Childhood Development (ECD) offer opportunities to address inequalities, break the cycle of poverty and improve outcomes in later life. The United Republic of Tanzania has become the first country in the Eastern and Central Africa to launch a national multi sectoral Early Childhood Development Programme that will be implemented from financial year 2021/2022 to 2025/2026.

Furthermore, the National Multi sectoral ECD Programme seeks to ensure that all children in Tanzania are developmentally on track to reach their full potential. Building on every woman and every child strategy of SURVIVE, THRIVE, AND TRANSFORM and nurturing care framework, the programme will address systemic and programmatic challenges that affect growth and development of young children 0—8 years in line with the Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2 which states that “by 2030 countries to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development”.

The case of the South African education system is no different from others as it is in a precarious state. Since the abolishment of the 1953 Bantu Education Act which shaped the education system during the Apartheid era, significant inequalities still characterize the country in educational outcomes. Norling (2020) notes that the system still displays dysfunctional behavior despite the national government developing progressive policies that are in line with international trends. UNICEF (2020) released its 2020 Basic Education Budget Brief which highlighted that government policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD) had not been implemented effectively. ECD facilities across the country vary in quality and operations and in most cases relatives or non-profit organizations provide the service and it is not equitably accessible especially to those who need it most. Although the national government has made substantial progress to increase access to basic education the quality thereof is concerning. Being enrolled in school does not automatically translate to learning (World Bank, 2019).

Kotzé (2015) further analyzed the likelihood of successful implementation of the National Development Plan in South Africa. The plan proposed universal accessibility to two years of ECD education before Grade R. She found that participation rates in ECD programs had increased significantly. She showed an increase in participation rates in all the age groups with the largest increase of 38% among the four year olds.

In 2013, 64% of four year olds, and 81% of five year olds in South Africa attended an education institution (Kotzé, 2015). However, a large majority of the facilities were inadequate, very few

centers had adequate teaching materials, and barely any of the teachers at any of the centers were adequately trained. From this it was concluded that the potential impact of pre-Grade R on subsequent learning is high. This may imply that the quality of many ECD programs needs to be improved to reach this potential and new approaches are needed in order to achieve all round successful implementation of this sector this is supported by a study done by Van der Berg and colleagues in 2019 which assessed various early childhood interventions implemented in South Africa, including preschool education programs, parenting support initiatives, and community-based interventions. They examined the effects of these interventions on children's cognitive development, socio-emotional well-being, and school readiness.

The research findings indicated that early childhood interventions have a positive impact on children's outcomes across multiple domains. Specifically, children who participate in high-quality ECE programs show improvements in cognitive abilities, such as language skills, numeracy, and problem-solving. Moreover, these programs contribute to enhanced socio-emotional development, including social skills, emotional regulation, and self-confidence. Overall, the research by Van der Berg et al. (2019) highlights the critical role of early childhood interventions in South Africa and emphasizes the need for continued investment and policy support to ensure that all children have access to high-quality ECE programs.

A focus on implementation also brings to light countries like Mozambique where in 2021, with support from UNESCO, through its Capacity Development for Education (CapED) programme, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and other partners, developed its new Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2029, which will guide the country's education system for the next decade. The ESP's goal is to outline the Government's long-term vision to ensure a transparent, participatory, and effective system that will improve equitable and quality education (UNESCO, 2021).

Previously, the Mozambique Education Sector Strategic Program Project (ESSP) done by IE was as follows: outcomes were moderately satisfactory; the risk-to-development outcome was moderate; Bank performance is satisfactory; and borrower performance is satisfactory. The lessons learned were: improvements in the quality of education require more specificity in terms of targets and more attention during implementation; there is need for the appropriate use of the Sector Wide approach (SWAP); donor funding will be better harmonized if the shared financing arrangement incorporates a vision for the development of the sector; issues related to the development of

secondary education require specific attention; there is need for Bank and donors to adopt creative and structured strategies for developing consensus; mainstreaming of project implementation requires fine tuning and reorganization; and the importance of addressing the HIV/AIDS issue.

Additionally, the Education Sector Strategic Program Project (ESSP) provided increased and equitable access to higher quality education through improvement in the management of education in order to promote economic and social development in Mozambique. There are four main project components of the ESSP. The first improves the quality of education by expanding pre-service teacher training programs; revitalizing the network of teacher support zones; transforming the curriculum for grades 1-7 to reflect integration of the educational cycles and materials, and to promote values and sensitization to national culture and regional diversity; supplying textbooks and teaching materials; improving classroom assessments and examinations; providing grants for quality improvement; and training school directors. The second component increases access to education and improves equity by expanding the number of places and supporting girls' education initiatives as well as improving non-formal education and special education. The third component strengthens the institutional capacity of the education ministry in organizational structure, policy and planning, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation and lastly the fourth component funds development of a strategy for operating the technical and vocational systems and for enhancing quality and efficiency in higher education.

As shown in other studies, ECE progression varies from one country to another but ultimately the focus has remained the same. For Zambia, ECE became part of the National Policy supported by legislation through the Education ACT of 2011. Coverage of ECE in Zambia by 2014 was 15% of children in grade 1 with school preschool or nursery school experience and mostly limited to urban areas. This is evidenced by Cabinet Memos No.CO.101/19/21 of August 2014 and that of September 2014, MFB/53/1/1. It was therefore recommended that a new Department of Early Childhood Education be created in the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MoE, 2016). The department was to be responsible for the development and implementation of ECE policies, programs, and activities and perform specific functions in the Country. The policy aims to engage parents, communities, NGOs and other stakeholders in support of ECE and help the government to achieve its goals and the mandate has enabled MoE to accelerate ECE service delivery throughout the country including the rural and hard to reach areas

as well as through functional areas such as access, quality, equity and efficiency yet not much research has been channeled towards implementation of ECE in Zambia.

Following the declaration of Universal Primary Education with efforts to adhere to Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Zambian government was prompted to take an active role in the provision of ECE. In July 2015 the Directorate of Early Childhood Education (DECE) was established as a sub-sector in the MoE. The Ministry was granted Treasury Authority (TA) NO. Six (6) in 2015 which gave effect to the creation of 12 positions for the establishment of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education. The role of the newly established Directorate was to coordinate and address the needs of the early childhood education sub-sector in the country.

The Ministry has taken important steps to establish and accelerate the delivery of ECE services countrywide including the development of the National ECE Curriculum, annexing over 4,072 Centres in existing primary schools and deploying 1,933 qualified ECE teachers. The MoE stated in its Strategic Plan of 2003 – 2007 that Early Childhood Education was an integral part of basic education, as such programming for increased access to ECE, especially in the rural and hard to reach areas became a strategic focus.

In Zambia, the Education and Skills Sector Plan (ESSP) encompasses all facets of education, including Early Childhood Education (ECE). Initially devised as a functional policy in 2017, the plan was slated for a four-year duration, concluding in 2021. Serving as the principal directive for all educational sectors in Zambia (MoGe, ESSP, 2017), the ESSP underscores the significance of Early Childhood Education in laying a solid groundwork for a child's seamless progression through subsequent grades and onward to higher education.

Since its inception, the Education and Skills Sector Plan has identified strategic priority areas aimed at advancing Early Childhood Education in Zambia. These include, but are not limited to, enhancing Access and Participation, ensuring Quality and Relevance, promoting Equity, bolstering Management and Governance, expanding the provision of educational resources and learning materials, instituting school readiness assessments, fostering community collaboration to support caregivers, and establishing model ECE centers (MoGe, ESSP, 2017). Expanding beyond Zambia, the principles and strategies outlined in the ESSP can serve as a model for other African countries seeking to strengthen their ECE systems. By prioritizing ECE and implementing targeted

interventions aligned with national goals, African nations can unlock the full potential of their youngest citizens, laying the groundwork for a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

Currently, educational provision is guided by the National Education Policy document, *Educating Our Future*, which focuses on equitable access to quality education at all levels of the education subsector. MoE has undertaken various activities to improve the delivery of quality ECE in the nation and has also been working with various partners and line Ministries who have supplemented and complimented MoE's efforts to increase access and provide quality education in the subsector. MoE acknowledges the importance of ECE in preparation for formal and non-formal learning.

While Zambia has made strides in developing policies and frameworks for ECE, there is limited research on the implementation processes and governance structures at the national, provincial, and local levels. Further investigation is needed to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation mechanisms, identify barriers and facilitators to implementation, and explore opportunities for enhancing coordination and accountability in the ECE sector.

In countries like Nigeria, the ECE landscape is not any different, while the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) specifies the guidelines for operating preprimary education in Nigeria; it does not specify the care and support requirements for children 0 through 3 years of age. This is a major gap that has left the operation of early childhood care and pre-primary education more in the hands of private operators without adequate guidelines or standards. The comprehensive education analysis jointly undertaken by Nigeria's federal government, United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1997 revealed the enormity of this problem and underscored the urgent need for government action to provide adequate policy provision for child health care and educational programming to enhance early childhood education. A pilot study of early childhood care facilities and practices by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and UNICEF as well as the Education Sector Analysis by the Federal Ministry of Education, UNESCO and other development partners such as DFID, USAID, World Bank, and JICA further paint a grim picture of the situation on the ground.

However, an analysis of the current situation indicates that, to a great extent, the Nigerian child suffers deprivation from lack of good social services in terms of poor nutrition, health care, and access to safe water and sanitation, general protection from environmental hazards and insecurity.

All of these gave justification for the formulation of National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (IECD), which was officially launched in October 2007. This provided early childhood care and development in Nigeria to adopt an integrated approach for the care and support given to children aged 0 through 5 years. This is a holistic approach in which the Federal Ministry of Education collaborates with other ministries including, Health, Environment and Housing, Women Affairs, Information and Communication, Finance, Agriculture, and Water Resources, as well as the National Planning Commission to provide interventions for the cognitive, physical, social, moral, and emotional development of the child.

For over two decades, Zimbabwe has been embroiled within a complex web of economic, political, and financial challenges. In 2013, the country embarked on an ambitious journey of overhauling its education system by moving from content knowledge to a competency-based curriculum. The theory of change, in particular, was that, if the curriculum is entirely overhauled from outdated knowledge-based to twenty-first-century skills and competencies, then in the long-term, students would ultimately be able to meet the economy and labor market demands.

Research indicates that many ECE centers in Zimbabwe suffer from poor infrastructure, including inadequate classrooms, play areas, and sanitation facilities (Chirwa, 2019). Limited access to educational materials, toys, and learning resources further hampers the quality of ECE provision (Mabvurira & Matemba, 2018).

In Zimbabwe, after the Nziramasanga (1999) Commission's recommendation for ECD policy transformation, a number of policies were promulgated to operationalize the ECD programme in the country. Secretary's Circular Minute Number 14 of 2004 offered guidelines on the implementation of the current model of ECD services as recommended by the Commission. Sibanda (2014) enunciates that the 2004 ECD policy in Zimbabwe, which is also known as the National Early Childhood Development (NECD) programme is thus regulated by Secretary's Circular Minute Number 14 of 2004, S.I 106 of 2005 and Circular Minute Number 12 of 2005. The policy specified that ECD was to be part of the formal primary education making it mandatory for public primary schools to attach at least one ECD-B class for children aged between 4 and 5 years starting 2005.

The policy also mandated the schools to attach an additional class, that is, ECD-A for the cohort of children aged between 3 and 4 years beginning 2006. Dyanda et al. (2005) elaborate that the

Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, then instituted each government primary school in Zimbabwe to attach at least two ECD classes for children in the 3 to 5 years' age group. This meant that the primary school period in Zimbabwe was extended to 9 from the previous 7 years.

Economic inequalities contribute to disparities in access to quality ECE services, particularly in rural and low-income communities according to a study done by Chirwa (2019). Findings in another study done in Zimbabwe about the challenges in Early Childhood Education showed that poverty, unemployment, and lack of parental education are associated with lower enrollment rates and reduced participation in ECE programs (Nhapi & Chitiyo, 2017).

Inconsistent policy implementation and inadequate regulatory frameworks pose challenges to the effective delivery of ECE services (Mabvurira & Matemba, 2018). Fragmentation and ambiguity in ECE policies hinder coordination among stakeholders and result in uneven standards across different ECE settings (Nhapi & Chitiyo, 2017).

To regularize the implementation and operations of the ECD programme in Zimbabwe, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 specifies regulations and requirements relating to registration of ECD centres, age of attendance, state of facilities including infrastructure, ablutions and amenities, play centres and space. It is also specified that ECD classes should be manned by appropriately qualified teachers. According to Samkange (2016), realizing the need for qualified teachers at ECD level, the two ministries of education in Zimbabwe collectively responded by making a commitment to train 10,000 teachers for the ECD programme while imploring universities to offer both pre- and in-service training programmes for teachers. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) strongly acknowledge that early childhood educators with appropriate training and qualifications provide more nurturing and responsive education and care for young children.

In theory, this has made early education available to all Zimbabwean children. According to the Zimbabwe report (2020) while 84% of public primary schools provide ECE A classes, with 98% offering B classes, gaps continue to exist and participation remains patchy: gross and net enrolment rates for A and B classes currently stand at 32% and 56% respectively. Reasons include a lack of parental demand and awareness of the importance of early childhood education and the fees involved, this implies that dissemination of ECE awareness has not been successful implemented. According to the World Bank, 34% of Zimbabweans lived in extreme poverty last year, which is 6% more than in 2018. That equates to 5.7 million people. This means many parents cannot afford

ECD classes. The inconsistent quality of services is another concern that has hindered successful implementation of ECE in Zimbabwe.

For Tanzania, Early Childhood Education is provided by public schools and private centers and is coordinated by two ministries. While the care and education of children aged 0-4 is under the department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Health, Community Development Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDEC), the care and education of children aged 5 to 6 years is under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). The Education and Training Policy of 1995 directed each primary school to have an attached preprimary class. However, a study conducted by Kweka, et al., 2000) reported that most ECE centers were not registered and not attached to primary schools. Attaching ECE centers to primary schools is important because it may facilitate the smooth transition of children to primary schools as they experience similar environments and the same teachers (in some areas the Grade one teacher also teaches an ECE class in Tanzania).

The United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2012) follows the 1(2)-6-4-2-3+ formal educational model, which includes one (or two) years of PPE, 10 years of compulsory primary and lower secondary education, two years of upper/high secondary education, and three or more years of tertiary education. The system evolved from the inherited 4-4-4-4 colonial education system. With Tanzania's rapid economic growth and social changes as well as technological advancements throughout the world, it became obvious in the early 2000s that Tanzania's existing education policy was not bringing the desired results. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995) aimed to increase access to education without compromising the quality thereof, and focus on issues related to inclusiveness, class size, improved teacher training, and attrition issues (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2014). As such, educational practitioners started to argue for changing the education policy to meet new demands.

The government of Tanzania acknowledged preprimary education for children ages 5 and 6 years under Tanzania's ETP in 1995 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995), and placed it under the direction of the Ministry of Education. However, it was formalized and made compulsory and free in the 2014 Education and Training Policy (MoEVT, 2014). The recognition of preprimary education was a response to the international policy statements which emphasized the rights of education for all children. The government of Tanzania agreed to provide ECE in partnerships

with parents, community, and nongovernmental organizations (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). Ndijuye's study (2017) brought out salient views which supported the idea above that apart from obligations to international policy statements, changes in social and economic situations also raise society's interest in preschool education for their children before compulsory schooling.

In support of the above, the Global Partnership for Effective Cooperation (2021), reaffirms that Tanzania Development Vision of 2025 seeks to transform the education system so that it can develop the country's human capital in tandem with socio-economic changes. One element of the development is vision is a well-educated and learning society, it is also envisioned that Tanzania's people should be ingrained with a developmental mindset and competitive spirit. This should start at a very early age where children's mindsets will be inclined towards hard work and self-discipline. Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2014. The ETP is the result of the harmonization and subsequent repeal of the Education and Training Policy (1995), the Technical Education and Training Policy (1996), the National Higher Education Policy (1999), and the Information Technology and Communication for Basic Education Policy (2007).

The policy stresses the importance of pre-primary and primary school education. It emphasises that PPE is compulsory for a period not less than one year in order to meet children's needs. Section 3.1 of the policy states that "each child aged between 3 and 5 years should be enrolled in a compulsory one year of pre-primary education. Furthermore, a child between 4 and 6 years and who has completed pre-primary education, in accordance with the law, must receive basic education for a period of 10 years to acquire reading, writing and arithmetic skills, general knowledge and in technical education and vocational training". The policy further postulates that the Government will provide a FFBE in public schools. With regards to access to education, the policy states that the government shall increase diversified and equal education and training opportunities to all groups at all levels.

In high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings, the active and positive engagement of ECE teachers with children emerges as a pivotal determinant of classroom efficacy and child development outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2010). Integral to this engagement is the adept use of language by ECE educators, wherein the employment of positive language, comprising praise and encouragement, assumes paramount importance in fostering a nurturing and conducive classroom climate.

Empirical evidence underscores the significance of positive language in facilitating productive teacher-child interactions, elucidating its manifold benefits in terms of eliciting cooperation, enhancing learning time, and promoting engagement among children (Kersey & Masterson, 2011; Fullerton et al., 2009). Notably, the utilization of positive language emerges as particularly salient in the case of children at risk for behavioral disorders, where it contributes to bolstering compliance and fostering sustained engagement (Fullerton et al., 2009). Moreover, the cultivation of positive teacher-child relationships is intricately intertwined with the consistent use of affirmative language, as it reflects genuine interest and investment in children's well-being (Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

Effective ECE practitioners are characterized by their unwavering commitment to holding high expectations for all children while employing praise as a means of affirming and acknowledging their efforts (Hinnant et al., 2009). The influence of teachers' expectations on children's learning trajectories is well-documented, underscoring the pivotal role played by affirming language in shaping children's self-concept and academic outcomes (Hinnant et al., 2009). Furthermore, empirical research attests to the motivational potency of sincere praise, which not only bolsters children's intrinsic motivation but also augments their engagement in learning activities (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).

Beyond its immediate effects on motivation and engagement, the tone and tenor of teacher language also exert enduring impacts on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Studies have demonstrated that a prevalence of approving tones and diminished disapproving language correlates positively with children's gains in cognitive abilities and self-regulation skills (Fuhs et al., 2013). Thus, the strategic deployment of positive language by ECE educators emerges as a cornerstone of effective pedagogy, with far-reaching implications for both immediate classroom dynamics and long-term child outcomes.

In 2017, a study done by Mangwaya titled “The readiness of schools in Zimbabwe for the implementation of early childhood education”. This qualitative study focused on primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education. Adopting a multiple study design, the study explored, through semi-structured interviews and documentation, school heads, teachers-in-charge and classroom teachers’ perceptions of their respective schools’ state of readiness for the installation and implementation of early childhood education. The study

established that, while classroom teachers were adequately qualified to implement early childhood education, teachers-in-charge were not. Secondly, school heads received limited induction for the introduction and implementation of early childhood education. Additionally, inadequate teaching learning resources and lack of on-going teacher support contributed to schools' lack of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education. Although the study was among primary schools, it might point to the fact that there seems to be a disconnect from ECE as a sector and other sectors in schools (primary and secondary) Hence there is need for stakeholders to collaboratively engage with the school administrators in implementation of this sector to improve knowledge and bring attitudinal change on ECE in society and among parents.

Another educational policy that has been enacted over the years is the Free Primary Education Policy which the then republican President of Zambia announced the introduction of Free Education from grades I to 7 with effect from 2002. The announcement was seen in the context of unprecedented declining enrolment rates and increasing dropout rates even after three years of BESSIP whose objectives were to increase enrolment and improve learning achievement (MoE, 2003) the implementation of free education was seen as the best vehicle for promoting inclusion nationwide and ensuring that no child was denied an opportunity to attend school for failure to meet school costs. The policy stated that; no pupil at grade 1 - 7 was to be levied any user fees including PTA levies. Instead, PTAs may raise funds for specific school projects through raffles and other legitimate means after getting clearance from the Provincial Education Officer, no pupil was to be denied enrolment or excluded from school for failure to contribute to PTA fund raising activities.

The Child Fund Project research which was conducted in 2015 on school enrolment and drop-out among vulnerable rural Zambian revealed that although Zambian education policies that promoted school attendance had been successful in ensuring enrolment and attendance, there were however challenges that had remain to keep children enrolled until Grade 7. The daily stressors such as excessive chores, looking for piece work and worries about school fees were found to be the main predictors of school drop-out. The predominant self-reported reason for school drop-out was a lack of financial means. It therefore seemed insufficient just to pay school fees, as other indirect costs (books, uniform, etc.) still posed a financial barrier for poorer children.

It appears that while there is much research and literature, some of this academic literature may not necessarily reach policy makers or educational leaders. On one hand, the literature review shows that a one-size-fits-all model of implementation is unfeasible given the political nature of reforms, the context and the actors. However, it is suggested that there is space and possibilities to develop more systematic approaches to implementation while allowing flexibility to adapt to local context. More concretely, the consistent view in the literature presented is that for policy makers at the national level, it appears helpful to develop a framework that can contribute to analysis and operationalize of education policy implementation.

### **2.3 Challenges in implementation of Early Childhood Education**

Numerous scholarly works have delineated a spectrum of challenges impeding the effective implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Foremost among these challenges is the dearth of sufficient teaching and learning resources, encompassing materials, facilities, and educational aids vital for comprehensive pedagogical delivery. Socio-economic determinants significantly influence access to and quality of ECE, manifesting as barriers to enrollment and participation for marginalized populations. Moreover, the elevated teacher-child ratio, often coupled with inadequate remuneration schemes, poses formidable obstacles to fostering individualized learning experiences and fostering meaningful teacher-student interactions within ECE settings. Financial constraints further exacerbate these challenges, constraining the allocation of resources crucial for sustaining optimal ECE environments. Through a review of different literature, these multifaceted impediments emerge as salient factors undermining the realization of effective ECE programs.

Despite the recognized benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs, the attainment of high-quality ECCE services remains incomplete in certain regions. Predominantly situated in urban settings and often privately organized, such programs tend to favor children from higher-income households. For instance, in China, preschool attendance stands at 95% in urban regions, whereas only 50% of children in rural areas are enrolled. Similarly, in Azerbaijan, kindergarten attendance rates for 5–6-year-old children are reported at 35% in urban areas, contrasting starkly with a mere 12% in rural settings. Likewise, in Togo, access to early childhood services is estimated at approximately 8% in rural areas compared to 60% in urban centers (Education International, 2010).

Moreover, research by Manji et al. (2015) reveals that children residing in urban areas of Tajikistan, Iraq, and Yemen are four times more likely to participate in ECCE programs than their counterparts in rural regions. Furthermore, in Kenya, participation rates in ECCE services demonstrate significant disparities, with urban areas boasting a 75% attendance rate compared to a mere 25% in rural counterparts (Ibid).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) implementation in Africa encounters numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness and universality. One prominent obstacle lies in the inadequate infrastructure and resources available for ECE provision across the continent. Despite efforts to expand access, many African countries grapple with limited facilities, educational materials, trained educators, and supportive policies (UNESCO, 2019). This deficiency significantly impacts the quality and accessibility of early learning experiences for children, particularly those in marginalized communities.

Moreover, low enrollment rates and access disparities persist as pressing challenges in African ECE systems. Despite strides in policy development, many children, especially those from rural areas, impoverished backgrounds, or with disabilities, continue to be excluded from early learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2018). Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions to enhance access and participation among vulnerable populations, thus promoting inclusive and equitable ECE provision. Enhancing the capacity of ECE teachers through comprehensive training and ongoing professional development initiatives is imperative to improve teaching practices and child outcomes in the region.

Socioeconomic and cultural factors also influence the implementation of ECE in Africa. Economic disparities, cultural beliefs, and societal norms can impede access to early learning opportunities and perpetuate educational inequalities (Asante & Ampiah, 2017). Addressing these systemic barriers requires holistic approaches that consider the socioeconomic context and cultural diversity of African communities, ensuring that ECE programs are culturally relevant and responsive to children's needs.

For context, the implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria encounters multifaceted challenges, as identified in recent literature. Several studies have illuminated these impediments, providing insight into the complexities surrounding ECE provision in the Nigerian context. One prominent challenge is the inadequate infrastructure and resource allocation within

ECE settings (Okeke, 2017). Insufficient facilities, including classrooms, play areas, and educational materials, hamper the delivery of quality early childhood education experiences. Moreover, the lack of funding and budgetary constraints further exacerbate these deficiencies, limiting the capacity to improve infrastructure and resource availability (Akpan & Uko-Aviomoh, 2018). Additionally, the shortage of qualified early childhood educators presents a significant obstacle to effective ECE implementation (Okeke, 2017). A dearth of trained professionals capable of delivering developmentally appropriate pedagogy and nurturing care diminishes the quality of early learning experiences for children. This shortage is often compounded by inadequate teacher training programs and professional development opportunities (Ogbe & Atakpa, 2020).

Socio-economic factors also play a pivotal role in shaping access to and participation in ECE programs in Nigeria. Economic disparities and poverty contribute to unequal access to quality early childhood education, particularly among marginalized communities (Akpan & Uko-Aviomoh, 2018). Additionally, cultural beliefs and societal norms may influence parental attitudes towards ECE, affecting enrollment rates and parental involvement in early learning activities (Ogbe & Atakpa, 2020).

Furthermore, policy fragmentation and inconsistencies in ECE governance pose challenges to effective implementation and regulation of early childhood education initiatives (Akpan & Uko-Aviomoh, 2018). Inadequate coordination among government agencies and stakeholders, coupled with a lack of comprehensive policy frameworks, hinders efforts to streamline ECE provision and ensure quality standards across diverse settings.

Another study conducted in Nigeria by Adenike (2016) shed light on the challenges impeding the effective implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) within the country. It underscored the Nigerian government's concerted efforts to prioritize ECE through various policy formulations and intersectoral collaborations. Despite these endeavors, the research identified persistent hurdles in the implementation process, notably the significant dearth of professionally qualified caregivers and teachers for young children. This finding aligns with the established understanding that early childhood educators possessing adequate professional preparation are pivotal in providing developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and educational experiences for young learners (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2007). However, the study did not elucidate on the specific measures or interventions undertaken by the

government to mitigate this challenge, leaving a gap in understanding the holistic approach toward addressing the deficiency of qualified ECE personnel in Nigeria.

This aligns with the submission in an Issue Brief by National Governors Association Centre for Best Practices (2010) that the knowledge and skills of early childhood care providers and teachers are critical factors in their delivery of high-quality developmental and educational experiences to young children. In confirmation of this, Boyd (2013) reported the result of a study conducted in 2002 by National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD) and The Early Child Care Research Network (ECCRN) in which it was found that providers with BA degrees in ECE provided higher quality learning experiences for children in their care. This underscores the importance of giving children the opportunity to learn under professionally qualified caregivers/teachers.

Unfortunately, the situation is contrary in most pre-primary schools in Nigeria. In privately owned pre-primary schools, teachers with no training in ECE are often found in children classrooms while in pre-primary sections of government owned public schools, older female teachers with no qualification in ECE are often seconded to children classrooms. Findings from various studies conducted by researchers in Nigeria have consistently confirmed this same situation (e.g., Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Amadi, 2013; Okewole, IlueziOgbedu, & Osinowo, 2013; Osho, Aliyu, Okolie, & Onifade; 2014).

The problem of using unqualified staff was also noted by authors in Nigeria, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) who argued that this lack of professional training for teachers was liable to worsen the problems of implementing ECE in Nigeria. This was because almost all the teachers in Nigerian pre-primary schools were not professionally qualified, a clear process of employing and hiring teachers of ECE could enrich and strengthen the outcomes of the programme.

This has been widely observed as a similar research done in Botswana by Mokibelo (2022) indicated that Ministry of Basic Education (MOBE) takes time to employ qualified teachers of ECE. While it was evident that there is shortage of teachers, the arrival of teachers in schools took more than a year or two. Again, teachers lamented that they were self-sponsored to be trained in ECE diploma and certificate programmes. Even though there was shortage of classes and teachers, there are teachers who have not yet been permanently employed, they were employed on temporary basis and when their contracts ended, they were not easily replaced. This means that

some classes take long without teacher aides and therefore, where necessary, teachers seek the assistance of Covid-19 team or Tirelo Sechaba participants (National Service participants) who are not qualified to assist in teaching ECE programme.

According to the teachers in Botswana, the employment of non-teaching staff undermines their profession. This lack of qualified caregivers and teachers limits the successful implementation of ECE everywhere including Zambia. From these studies, it can be concluded that the lack of qualified teachers has hampered the implementation of ECE in other countries; including Zambia hence there is urgent need to address this. The current study aims to bring awareness on this issue in order to change implementation policy towards ECE in the ESSP.

Another factor that hinders the provision of quality ECCE programmes especially in rural areas of Botswana is the shortage of funds. Unlike in many developed countries where Governments fund ECCE, this is not the case in Botswana. The vast majority of ECCE funding is from parents' fees (Bose, 2008). It was only ten years ago (2014), when the Government of Botswana started to provide funding for reception classes for children aged above 5 years. Consequently, a majority of children below 5 years who come from poor families are unable to access quality ECCE. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, which consumes a large percentage of resources of many countries, it is unlikely that the Government of Botswana can expand the funding of ECCE to children below 5 years as shown in a study done by Mwaipopo, Christina et al. (2021).

Berlin, R. (2018) argues that there are major factors that have continued to affect effective implementation of Early Childhood Education in developing countries and that these factors go beyond social-economic, financial, teaching and learning resources and teacher pupil ratio. She affirmed that these challenges are faced by most, if not all, ECE educators. One such challenge is a gap in Policy framework; there is a gap between policy and implementation in that there is a lag between policy making and programme implementation. That gap is also seen in terms of the trouble which is there in integrating what is happening in higher education and what is happening in schools; in higher education, theory is taught but in schools, practical approaches are needed; the policies are “beautiful”, but the implementation is the problem; what is on paper is different from what is on the ground. Malnutrition and ill-health are an example of the factors associated with the socio-economic factors.

These factors can significantly damage the cognitive processing ability of children. Children whose processing capacity is impacted by ill-health and malnutrition may require more hours of instruction to learn various skills. As such, implementation of early childhood education may prove critical especially in low income countries (Fasoli, L. et al 2007). Socio-economic differences affecting effective implementation of ECE also cut across regions, with some being labeled ‘marginalized’.

Regional disparities have significant role in facilitating access to early childhood care and education, where enrollment levels in rural and marginalized areas are low in comparison to those in the urban areas. Children from the marginalized communities in rural and marginalized in developing countries suffer from lack of access to early childhood education. They are left at the mercy of the community. Curriculum is the how of any educational enterprise. It is the vehicle through which any educational programmes can be successfully implemented. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children’s development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and, the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL), 2012).

The early childhood curriculum helps to ensure that staff or teachers cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups. These descriptions about ECE curriculum indicates that it is an indispensable material in the business of implementing ECE programme. Its indispensability spurred the government of Nigeria to see to the development and production of National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5years by NERDC, with the support of UNICEF. This curriculum was launched in 2007. The unfortunate thing however is that this curriculum, since it was launched, is not found in almost all pre-primary schools in Nigeria. This is particularly true of privately owned schools. The non-availability of the National Early Childhood Curriculum for Ages 0-5years in pre-primary schools has been confirmed in findings of researches conducted in different states in Nigeria (e.g., Viatonu, et al., 2011; Amali, et al., 2012; Okewole, et al., 2013).

When it comes to Professional development, the teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational enterprise. This is why the federal government of Nigeria stated in NPE (2013) that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (Federal

Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). Jibril (2007) has submitted that whatever input is made into an educational system in respect of management, resources, facilities and array of instructional materials, will be of little avail if the teacher is unskilled, poorly trained or even ignorant. This is to say that whatever intervention the federal government of Nigeria makes to improve ECE will be of little effect if pre-primary school teachers are not given constant professional development.

Unfortunately, some of the challenges of ECD programmes in developing countries like Zimbabwe relate to lack of ability to attract and retain motivated and qualified teachers to work in rural and remote areas (Sun et al., 2015). According to these authors, ECD educators have typically been perceived as substitute mothers and therefore not in need of professional training. Lack of play materials, equipment, and toys was prevalent in both indoor and outdoor areas at most centres visited. Britto et al. (2011) posited that a vibrant early childhood programme should have a physical environment that reduces young children's exposure to accidents and unanticipated threats. There is a need to worry about lack of quality in ECD because it contributes to a healthy and holistic development of a child.

The results from a study done in Zimbabwe by Mugweni (2017) showed that rural, resettlement, and farm ECD centres are served by untrained teachers. It was also found that the performance of trained teachers outweighs that of untrained staff and paraprofessionals in the execution of the ECD curriculum via a play-way method. Qualified practitioners are the key factors in providing high-quality care with most favourable and social outcomes for young children (Mugweni 2011).

In the same context, Zafeirakou (2012), argues that an ECD programme requires personnel that have the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to design, implement, monitor, assess, and develop activities appropriate to the age groups from birth to eight years old. It was also found that the socio-economic status of the country negatively affects the quality of ECD provisions in Zimbabwe.

UNESCO (2008) further reports that data collected from 50 developing countries between 2002 and 2004 showed that the percentage of trained ECD teachers fluctuated between less than 25% and more than 95%. Similar studies have confirmed a dearth of qualified ECD teachers, particularly in rural areas. On the whole, ECD teachers have lower educational and professional qualifications and hence receive lower salaries than primary school teachers, both in developing and developed countries (Sun et al., 2015). Often ECD children are taught by para-professionals.

On these bases, Mangwaya et al. (2016) imply that one of the most cited reason for failure of implementation of many educational innovations, including ECD programmes is lack of adequately and appropriately trained staff.

Poverty is one of the major factors in the lack of ECE facilities and subsequent implementation. People could not send their 3 - 5 years old children in the pre-school institutions due to lack of financial resources required in the form of fee for these institutions. Poverty limits the chances of educational attainment, yet at the same time, educational attainment is one of the prime mechanisms for escaping poverty. Improving school readiness and child development will reduce poverty-related disparities. ECE programmes are helpful for cognitive, social and emotional development especially for poor family children (Anne Smith, 2014). A high quality Early Childhood programme can be very effective for the reduction of poverty. It has very useful role for all the developments occurred in early years of life.

Financial constraints can lead to ineffective implementation of early childhood education. At macro level, a good number of developing countries have suffered from the heavy debt burden following their pursuit on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund fiscal policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programs. It is reported that these debt-servicing programs are partly responsible for significant reduction in government funding for subsidized education, health care and school related expenses. The result has been that families bear more responsibilities in the implementation of early childhood education programmes.

It is widely acknowledged that early childhood educators with required professional preparation provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and education experiences for young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2007). This aligns with the submission in an Issue Brief by National Governors Association Centre for Best Practices (2010) that the knowledge and skills of early childhood care providers and teachers are critical factors in their delivery of high-quality developmental and educational experiences to young children.

The other challenge, especially in developing countries, borders on learning space. Adequate space is required when setting up classroom teaching/learning centres. Teguma, et.al (2012) stated that there are three basic settings needed when setting up an ECE classroom: a place for the whole class to work together, a place for students to work independently, and a place for teacher-directed small

group work. They further recommended that it is helpful to use a map of the classroom with scale cut-outs of furniture and equipment to try different arrangements and that there is need to arrange the room in a way to better accommodate children's needs.

Ntumi (2016) examined the challenges that pre-school teachers encounter in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum; exploring teaching methods employed by pre-schools teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The key findings of the study revealed that pre-school teachers are faced with a lot of challenges in implementing the early childhood curriculum. A notable one among them are that most pre-school teachers do not understand the early childhood curriculum, pre-school teachers do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help them implement the Early childhood curriculum, parents do not involve themselves in their wards education therefore, it makes it difficult for pre-school to do the work alone. It was also revealed that teachers, teaching and learning materials are the main factors that influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. The researcher recommended that private proprietors and government authorities overseeing the pre-school program should organize frequent in-service training for both teachers and parents with respect to early childhood education curriculum.

Cruz, J. (2017) further argues that in the last decade, the boundaries of the profession have changed rather dramatically for teachers. He says that as they have become a more complex and diverse society, the roles traditionally ascribed to teachers have taken new meaning and significance. In the case of teachers of young children, their role has expanded to encompass many, heretofore, duties and responsibilities that were often considered to be part of the home. He argues that young children, for all intents and purposes, have become a social and political commodity. The welfare and education of children have become fair game for those seeking to win votes or sympathy for a particular cause. Consequently, teachers are finding themselves in the midst of a social revolution between forces competing for the hearts and minds of parents and their children. On the one side you have those that advocate for custodial care and on the other those that promote learning. Both sides have caused sufficient upheaval in the profession such that what teachers of young children should know and be able to do has taken new meaning.

Cruz (2017) went on to say that early childhood educators face insurmountable challenges in meeting their professional obligations. Aside from the traditional roles that teachers have assumed, they are now expected to serve as curriculum specialists, diagnosticians, health care providers, family counselors, adult educators, program managers, child development experts, child

advocates, mental health specialists, nutrition specialists, and many others too numerous to list. At the same time, the teaching profession is confronting new notions of pedagogy and more intense scrutiny by professional groups, because the early years have now become a cause célèbre for many people and groups, there is no shortage of self-described experts ready to promote their opinions and solutions for the care and education of the young children that are yet to grow.

Unfortunately, such entities often lack the preparation and the grounding in the various bodies of knowledge that comprise the field of early care and education. For example, all too often, the curriculum is misunderstood and looked upon as something that teachers do to children and not as something that teachers do with children. Parents are frequently considered a part of the physical landscape and learning enterprise not as the child's first teacher or partner in the care and education of young children. Here teachers are relegated to assembly line roles and pressured to keep to a certain instructional time schedule under the guise of teaching and children learning.

This approach to the care and education of young children will surely undermine the current mantra of "no child left behind" so prominently promoted by certain groups and individuals. In this highly politicized environment of schools and childcare, early educators are faced with the challenge of defining what to teach, when to teach it, and why it is important to teach it, all against enormous barriers. Dodge and Colker (1992:37) agreed and reaffirmed the same position and stated that "the challenges are, indeed, daunting. But it is important for us as a profession to be able to assure the public that what children should know must be availed and when they should know it. As professionals, early educators must take ownership of the challenges and provide the leadership to make it happen. The early childhood profession is not for the faint of heart or the passive individual. Pre-school teachers are an active, demanding, and complex profession. Early educators are the first line of defense in the teaching and learning of young children. The impact that can be seen today will be felt tomorrow and for generations to come. Hence, the legacy will be revealed."

To sum it all up, the implementation of Early Childhood Education in Africa is confronted by a constellation of challenges encompassing inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified educators, socioeconomic disparities, and governance complexities. Addressing these challenges necessitates concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to foster an enabling environment conducive to the holistic development of young children. Furthermore, policy implementation and coordination present significant challenges to the effective delivery of ECE

services in Africa. While many countries have developed ECE policies and frameworks, weak governance structures and limited funding hinder their translation into actionable strategies on the ground (Asante & Ampiah, 2017). Strengthening policy implementation mechanisms and fostering intersectoral collaboration are essential to bridge the gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes in ECE provision.

As in many other countries, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers are predominantly staffed and owned by women, with a notable scarcity of men in such roles. Research suggests that a gender-diverse workforce in ECCE can positively influence children's development, promoting greater flexibility in gender role expectations (Urban, 2009; Piburn, 2010). However, internationally, men's representation in the ECCE sector remains low, varying significantly across countries. For instance, in Europe, men's presence in ECCE ranges from non-existent in Hungary and Spain to slightly more common in the Netherlands (Urban, 2009). Similarly, in the United States, only 2% of the ECCE workforce comprises males (Flynn, 2014), while male teachers are scarce in preschools in Trinidad and Tobago. Research findings in Botswana by Bose (2008, 2010) and Mwamwenda (2014) reinforce this trend, indicating that the majority of ECCE centers are female-headed, with a teacher population comprised of 98% females and only 2% males.

Several factors contribute to the low representation of male teachers in ECCE, including societal perceptions of ECCE as a female-dominated field and low wages associated with the teaching profession (Farquhar, 2006; Larisa, 2012; Flynn, 2014). Men's role as primary income earners in their families may further deter them from seeking employment in the ECCE sector due to financial constraints (Farquhar, 2006). Additionally, concerns about child abuse accusations and challenges in gaining trust from community members hinder male teachers' entry into the profession (Wilkins & Gamble, 2012; Abdul-Majied & Seenath, 2015). However, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that male childcare teachers are more likely to be potential child abusers, nor that female teachers are less prone to abuse (Farquhar, 2006). Recommendations for addressing these challenges include thorough screening of both male and female applicants during recruitment, avoiding male teachers working alone with children to minimize vulnerability to false accusations, and promoting gender-inclusive recruitment strategies (Woltring, 2012).

## **2.4 Strategies to improve Early Childhood Education**

The benefits of making early investments in children through early childhood development programmes have been well examined. They include healthy development of children, greater capacity to learn while in school and increased productivity in adulthood, thus presenting opportunities to break the cycle of inequality and poverty (World Bank, 2016; USAID, 2013; UNICEF, 2017). Crucial to attaining this, is the creation of rich and stimulating environments, assured safety underpinned by care and protection, stable and nurturing relationships, adequate health, nutrition, and early learning opportunities (Ibid).

Such conditions enhance cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes as well as executive functioning, leading to improved academic achievement in primary school and ultimately, increased opportunities for staying and progressing in school. Articulating the benefits in monetary terms, the World Bank (2016) hints that for every additional dollar invested in quality preschool programmes, the investment will yield between US\$6 and US\$17 in returns towards development and economic gains.

The inclusion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in four of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with very specific targets and indicators, represents global stakeholder convergence on the need to prioritize and scale up investment in ECD, further reaffirming the conclusions above. However, Zambia, like many other less developed countries, continues to face major challenges in creating a favorable environment for thriving ECD. These challenges include fragmented ECD related policy framework and programming, limited investment in ECD-related research, weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and limited awareness among parents and key stakeholders of the importance of ECD (Nishi, 2018). Other major challenges include limited funding to ECD in the national budget, limited coverage and access to ECE, particularly in rural areas, poor quality of ECE services, poor nutrition and feeding related practices, weak child protection systems, limited child registration, and limited access to clean drinking water and sanitation, among other things (ibid).

Improving workforce quality has been a major goal of many countries, with most states working to build systems of professional development and a good number providing incentives for increased compensation, educational attainment, and retention. Concurrent with these efforts,

national professional organizations have developed ECE accreditation systems, for which some states and communities provide technical assistance and quality-improvements grants.

This past decade has seen the rapid proliferation of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). Designed to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early childhood settings, they serve as an “engine” for states’ efforts to bring together existing programs, systems, funding streams, and structures into a comprehensive ECE system.

Quality rating systems emerged from grassroots efforts by state child care administrators and advocates for children, who sought to improve quality and simplify the process for parents of choosing better-quality programs. In the 1990s, states began developing tiered reimbursement policies, paying higher rates for accredited programs. They soon began to take a broader look at effectiveness and outcomes, which led to a more strategic approach, linking the offerings of the professional development system, for example, to the requirements for ECE staff in licensing regulations. By the end of the decade, the first quality rating initiatives had been established: Oklahoma’s, which was state-sponsored, in 1998, and Denver’s, a private initiative, in 2000.

A policy brief that was presented by the New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (2009) identifies quality rating and improvement system as a strategy for assessing, improving, and disseminating information about the level of quality across the full continuum of ECE programs, including school-based pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and center- and home-based child care. (Some states include school-age programs as well.) The approach is market-based, creating an industry-wide standard for quality assurance and a framework for improving consumer knowledge and influencing choice. The system awards quality ratings to programs that meet a defined set of standards. All QRIS have five components: standards; accountability; program and practitioner outreach and support; financial incentives; and parent/consumer education.

## **2.41 Standards**

States typically use child care licensing regulations as the foundation of the system, including two or more levels of quality criteria beyond this baseline and allowing for progression to the highest level of quality as defined by the state. The standards used to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that indicate quality and are linked to positive outcomes for

children. Common indicators of quality include professional development and teacher qualifications; accreditation; parent/family involvement; learning environments; administrative policies and procedures; and financial management. Standards may be aligned with a state's early learning guidelines, and are based on widely accepted existing quality standards for programs and practitioners, such as those developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start, and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC).

#### **2.42 Accountability**

Accountability and monitoring processes are used to determine how well programs meet QRIS standards, assign ratings, and verify ongoing compliance. Monitoring provides a basis of accountability for programs, parents, and funders by creating benchmarks for measuring quality improvement. In most states, the licensing agency takes on this role, either alone, or in partnership with the subsidy agency or a private entity, such as a child care resource and referral agency or an institution of higher learning. Most often, licensing agencies designate separate QRIS staff who are responsible for monitoring; the majority of states check annually, and some more frequently.

#### **2.43 Program and Practitioner Outreach and Support**

Most states have professional development systems that organize training opportunities, recognize practitioners' achievements, and create quality parameters for available training. A QRIS builds upon and integrates the existing infrastructure, raising the bar for quality. Support for providers, such as training and mentoring, as well as technical assistance for programs, promote participation and movement along the continuum of quality standards. North Carolina, for example, has linked the early childhood coursework offered by its community colleges to the credentials specified in its rated license. Oklahoma established early childhood scholar coordinators in each community college to counsel and support ECE staff pursuing coursework and degrees.<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania redesigned its professional development system to integrate on-site technical assistance, creating a program improvement system aligned with its QRIS and establishing a database to track the provision of technical assistance. Maine has created data links between its QRIS and the state's practitioner registry.

#### **2.44 Financial Incentives**

All of the existing QRIS offer financial incentives to support programs and providers. Financial support, linked to compliance with quality standards, can be a powerful motivator for participation in the system. Among the most common incentives are tiered child care subsidy rates; wage bonuses, quality grants or merit awards; tax credits; loans linked to quality ratings; priority to applications for practitioner wage initiatives; scholarships for providers; and other professional development supports. In Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, and Vermont, for example, programs can receive a one-time cash award when they reach each star level. Montana offers both mini-grants (up to \$1,500) and larger grants (up to \$15,000) linked to their QRIS and other quality improvement efforts. Indiana provides financial support for the accreditation process for providers who have reached the third level and would like to progress to the highest level.

#### **2.45 Parent /Consumer Education**

The introduction of Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, the commencement of training ECE teachers and formulation of curriculum and ECE standards as part of the public education system highlights further progress. In addition, access to schooling has progressively grown since the introduction of free primary education with the primary net enrollment rate standing at 94% (Education Policy Data Center, 2014). However, quality and progression into secondary and tertiary education remain major issues. Further access to clean and safe water has improved with access rates standing at 81% and 94% in rural and urban areas, respectively (UNICEF, 2013). Several other indicators are showing a positive trend.

The establishment of the ECD Action Network Zambia, therefore, provides a ray of hope for building on the progress scored thus far and accelerating improvements in ECD outcomes. With the 7th National Development Plan and the ECD Action Network Zambia now in place, Zambia has the opportunity to connect with the global network and leverage resources including financing as well as experiences and knowledge from other countries, to scale up ECD. If successful, the network would contribute immensely to changing the fortunes of many Zambian children, thus enhancing Zambia's ability to realize the SDGs (Nishi, 2018).

## **2.46 Partnerships**

In the realm of educational scholarship, the pivotal role of parental involvement in Early Childhood Education (ECE) has garnered substantial attention. The nascent stages of a child's educational trajectory, rooted in ECE, serve as a formative period during which parental engagement yields multifaceted benefits. Within the extant literature, scholars have underscored the significance of parental participation in ECE as a means to discern and understand the nuanced strengths and weaknesses inherent in their children's learning journey (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Janssen & Vanderbroeck, 2018; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2001). This involvement not only affords parents a profound awareness of their children's individual interests but also serves as a foundation for informed decision-making in subsequent educational endeavors (Arnold et al., 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Moreover, the symbiotic relationship forged between home and school environments through parental engagement is acknowledged as instrumental in nurturing children's holistic development (Cox, 2005; Moss, 2007). By actively bridging the gap between school curricula and home activities, parents are afforded the opportunity to align their support mechanisms with educational objectives, thereby fostering a conducive learning environment (Epstein, 2018; Pomerantz et al., 2007). This alignment not only reinforces children's academic progress but also cultivates a sense of efficacy and resilience by addressing areas of improvement identified by educators (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017).

Central to the discourse surrounding parental involvement in ECE is the notion of ongoing communication and collaboration between educators, caregivers, and parents (Hujala et al., 2009).

The significance of parental involvement in education has been extensively documented in research literature spanning over five decades (Cox, 2005; Epstein, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Studies suggest that the relationship between parents and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) facilities yields positive outcomes on children's academic achievement throughout their schooling years (Arnold et al., 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hujala et al., 2009; Janssen & Vanderbroeck, 2018; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2001). Establishing a strong rapport with parents not only enhances teacher morale and fosters a positive school climate but also positively influences children's behavior and encourages parental engagement in their children's education (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Furthermore, an inclusive and democratic ethos within ECEC implies active participation of both parents and professionals on equitable terms (Moss, 2007). Particularly in the early years of education, parents play a pivotal role in enriching educational programs, leveraging their close bond with their young children to enhance the quality of learning experiences (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). The national framework that guides the practice of all early childhood educators (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) identifies partnerships with parents as one of the key principles underpinning practice for educators in early childhood education and care settings. At a more local level, in the state of Victoria a framework has been developed to frame professional practice and create a common approach among all early childhood professionals working in Victoria (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009).

While the development of this more localised framework mirrored that of the national, the Victorian framework has included family-centred practice as its model of partnership for engaging and collaborating with families. While family-centred practice as a model focuses on supporting the empowerment of parents as key decision makers, this article argues that it is through empowered professionals that parents are assisted to become active and equal decision makers.

#### **2.47 General Literature on Early Childhood Education**

One of the significant themes in recent literature is the focus on improving the quality and equity of ECE. Studies have explored how high-quality early education can close achievement gaps, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Melhuish and Gardiner (2018) highlight the importance of accessible, high-quality ECE in promoting better educational outcomes and lifelong success. This research underscores the necessity of equitable access to quality education for all children to ensure that no child is left behind (Melhuish & Gardiner, 2018). The past six years have seen considerable attention to the development and analysis of ECE policies.

Burchinal et al. (2021) discuss new directions in ECE policies aimed at improving the quality of early education programs through enhanced funding, rigorous curriculum standards, and professional development for educators. These policies are crucial for creating a solid foundation for young children, setting the stage for future educational achievements (Burchinal, Magnuson, Powell, & Hong, 2021).

Numerous studies have documented the long-term benefits of ECE on cognitive, social, and emotional development. Yoshikawa, Weiland, and Brooks-Gunn (2018) provide a comprehensive review of the positive effects of early education on various aspects of child development, emphasizing the critical period of early childhood for intervention. This body of research supports the argument that investing in early education yields substantial benefits for individuals and society (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2018).

There has been a growing interest in innovative teaching methods and curriculum development aimed at enhancing early learning experiences. Whitebread, Kvalja, and O'Connor (2019) discuss various innovative practices, including play-based learning and inquiry-based approaches, which have shown promise in promoting children's cognitive and social skills. These innovative methods are increasingly being integrated into ECE programs to create more engaging and effective learning environments (Whitebread, Kvalja, & O'Connor, 2019). Another critical area of focus is the role of families and communities in supporting early childhood education. Dearing and Tang (2022) review the evidence on parental involvement, highlighting its positive impact on children's early learning and development. The research indicates that strong family engagement in education leads to better educational outcomes for children, stressing the need for policies and practices that encourage active parental participation (Dearing & Tang, 2022).

## **2.5 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter explored various literature related to the implementation of policy and challenges faced in policy implementation. The next chapter will explore the methodology guiding this research proposal.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1: Overview

The previous chapter presented the review of related literature to Early Childhood Education. This chapter will present the research design, study population, sample size, sampling technique, research instruments, data quality assurance, data collection procedure, data analysis and lastly a summary of this chapter.

#### 3.2 Research paradigm

In educational research the term paradigm is used to describe a researcher's 'worldview' (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This worldview is the perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data. Paradigms or worldviews are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of their environment and are developed throughout a person's lifetime through socialization and social interactions (Hart, 2010).

This study was situated in the social constructivism paradigm which is often aligned and intertwined with the interpretivism paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Cresswell, 2014; Gergen, 2015). The social constructivism paradigm argues that every individual has their own reality of every situation in their lives based on many other things such as personal experiences (Ekpenyong, 2018; Roca, 2018; Dowling and Millar, 2018). In this paradigm individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences towards certain issues, situations, objects or things; leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings in a few categories. The goal of research, then is to rely as much as possible on the participants' subjective views of the situation (Creswell, 2007).

Hence, we located our study in the social constructivism paradigm because we endeavored to understand our participants' individual views or interpretations of their reality of the issue under research, which in our case is exploring the implementation of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP. The researcher was particularly interested in understanding how these individual views or reality affected how this problem under research was interpreted by different stakeholders and how their interpretations affected their engagement in dealing with the problem.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Kombo and Tromp (2006) define a research design as a glue-like structure that holds all the elements in a research project together. It is used to structure and show how all of the significant parts of the study work collectively to try and address the central research question. Orodho (2003) defines it as the scheme, outline, or plan used to generate answers to the research problem. This implies that as a research design, it constitutes the blueprint for the study and determines the specific methods and optimum research procedures such as how to obtain participants, the instrument used, collect data, analyse the data and interpret the results in a manner that aims to combine relevance with the research purpose (Kothari, 2004).

In this case, a narrative research design was utilised in the study to conduct an in-depth investigation aimed at getting peoples' experiences and perceptions concerning certain phenomena under the natural setting. Orodho and Kombo (2002) defines descriptive design as a design used when collecting information about peoples' attitudes, opinions, habits, or any variety of education or social issues. Since the study focuses on the efficacy of early childhood education in primary schools, a descriptive design qualifies to be utilised as it will give a detailed description of head teachers, teachers and other officials from the Ministry of General education. Their attitudes, experiences and opinions on the implementation of early childhood education through the teaching and learning process in schools.

Therefore, the study was purely qualitative, Kombo and Tromp (2006) explain, qualitative research as a form of research that involves description; it seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behavior of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied. It is often used to collect verbatim statements from respondents because open-ended questions allow respondents to offer responses within their unique context. The value of the information provided can be exceptionally high.

In this manner, researchers who use qualitative methods seek more profound truth by aiming at collecting true feelings from the respondents in their natural setting, thereby attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them by using a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behavior (Black, 1994). This approach was appropriate for this study because it sought to solicit information and investigate the attitudes, experiences, views and opinions of head teachers, teachers and other relevant stakeholders in the

realm of education on the implementation of early childhood education in line with the Education Sector Skills Plan.

### **3.4 Study Population**

Kumar and Ranjit, (2013) define a study population as the totality of all subjects that conform to a set of specifications, comprising the entire group of persons of interest to the researcher and to whom the research results can be generalised. In this study, the target population consisted of officials from the Ministry of General Education and the Directorate for Early Childhood Education. These participants were selected bearing in mind that they have a role to play in the implementation of ECE in schools as the policy makers. The researcher was also of the view that the officials were the ones who could have vast knowledge on the work or progress made as they are key in championing ECE in schools.

### **3.5 Sample size**

Kothari (2011) indicates that sample size refers to the number of participants selected from the population. This sample should have the characteristics, know-how and be accessible to help in the study under investigation. However, Sandeloski (1995) points out that there is no specific formula in determining the sample size in qualitative research. It is ultimately a matter of judgment and experience on the researcher's part, and researchers need to evaluate the quality of the information collected in light of the uses to which it will be applied. Therefore, the researcher used her judgment to determine the sample size in this study based on the data saturation point.

Furthermore, Cohen, Manion and Marrison (2000) explain that a small number of samples suffices in a qualitative study, because of the above, the researcher selected thirteen (13) participants to constitute the sample for the analysis. This consists of main officials from the Ministry of General education, including the Chief planning officer, Director of planning and information, Director of Early Childhood Education, Commissioner to UNESCO, program assistant, two Principal Education Officers and one planner from the District Education Board Secretary and subordinates. All the participants who were included had a key role in implementation of ECE in schools.

### **3.6 Sampling Technique**

Sampling entails the process of selecting a study sample from the population. The procedure should be such that, the sample selected contains elements representing the characteristics found

in the whole group (Ghosh, 2011). The study employed purposive sampling that involves purposely handpicking individuals from the population-based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment (Msabila and Nalaila, 2013). However, to be specific, the study used typical sampling among other types of purposive sampling because the study sample included principal officials from the Ministry of General education and The Directorate of Early Childhood Education. These participants were familiar with the realization of the implementation of Early Childhood Education in schools. Orodho and Kombo (2002) state that the power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied.

Black (1999) observes that purposive sampling ensures that those unsuitable for the sampling study are already eliminated, so only the most suitable candidates remain. This means that the results of purposive sampling are usually expected to be more accurate than those achieved with an alternative form of sampling (Orodho and Kombo, 2002).

### **3.7 Research Instruments**

The researcher used semi-structured interview guides which allowed for both open ended and closed ended questions which enabled the research to obtain the necessary information needed and document analysis to conduct research.

#### **3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

Interviews are questions asked orally (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). One to one interviews were used to collect data from head teachers and principal officers for about 40 minutes because qualitative inquiry usually produces in-depth data. From the description, the researcher was able to understand head teachers and principal officers' views towards the implementation of Early Childhood Education through the teaching and learning process in schools. Kombo and Tromp (2006) state that semi-structured interviews are based on an interview guide which is a list of questions or topics to be covered by the interview.

Semi-structured interviews are flexible because they consist of both open and closed-ended questions. However, they are essential because they gather in-depth information, which gives the researcher a complete and detailed understanding of open ended questions. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews enabled the study to get first-hand knowledge from principal officers from the Ministry of General Education about implementing Early Childhood Education in line with the

Education Skills and Sector Plan. The advantage of using semi-structured interview guides as a data collection instrument is that it uses open-ended questions which allowed the participants to air their own voices which was fundamental to the nature and purpose of this study. Thus, participants were able to highlight other important issues that could not have been uncovered by the researchers if closed-ended questions had been used. To enhance analytical clarity, responses were coded by objective: participants addressing Objective One were represented by the letter “M,” those addressing Objective Two by “N,” and those addressing Objective Three by “O.” This coding system facilitated clear identification of the findings’ origins and ensured that other important issues, which might have been missed by closed-ended questions, were effectively captured.

### **3.7.2 Document Analysis**

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research that uses a systematic procedure to analyze documentary evidence and answer specific research questions. Similar to other methods of analysis in qualitative research, document analysis requires repeated review, examination, and interpretation of the data in order to gain meaning and empirical knowledge of the construct being studied. Document analysis can be conducted as a stand-alone study or as a component of a larger qualitative or mixed methods study, where it is often used to triangulate findings gathered from another data source (e.g., interview or focus group transcripts, observation, surveys). In this study, document analysis was used to complement the data gathered from the interviews and included a detailed review of various key documents. These documents comprised the National Budget, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), UNICEF reports, and reports from the Directorate of Early Childhood Education under the Ministry of Education. This broad range of documents provided a deeper understanding of the context and policies shaping Early Childhood Education, helping to triangulate and strengthen the findings from the primary data.

### **3.8 Data Quality Assurance**

The credibility and acceptability of this study as a unique academic contribution are established using Guba’s four trustworthiness criteria, enhanced by the incorporation of peer review, member checking, and data triangulation. Credibility was achieved through a carefully designed research plan and a descriptive methodology that aligns with the study’s objectives. Data triangulation was accomplished by integrating semi-structured interviews and document analysis, which allowed for

cross-verification of findings and provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of the research problem. In addition, member checking allowed participants to verify and validate the findings, while external peer review provided a critical assessment of the study's methods and interpretations. Transferability was ensured by situating the study within the broader context of related research, thereby enriching the body of knowledge. Confirmability was maintained through the use of "bracketing" (epoche), which safeguarded the authenticity of participant responses via verbatim reporting and minimized researcher bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **3.9 Data collection procedure**

Data collection is the gathering of specific information to prove and refute some facts on how a researcher collects data and with what instruments (Kasonde Ng'andu, 2013). Following the data collection procedure, data was collected tentatively in late September and October, 2022. Therefore, in trying to follow the data collection procedure, an introductory letter from the University of Zambia was sought to allow the researcher to go for data collection, she then sought permission from principal officers from the Ministry of General education and focus group discussions among teachers on different days. However, before collecting data from the participants, the aim of the study was thoroughly explained to them, and assurance will be given that the data collected will be purely for academic purposes.

During data collection, a voice recorder was used to record the conversations to capture the participants' opinions and views to help the researcher with data analysis. When this was done, the researcher then categorised the statements and summarised them in narrative form. Key ideas were quoted, and after that, a report was written on each of the individuals. In addition, document analysis was used to collect data from the ministry officials in order to obtain comprehensive information. The importance of document analysis was to provide supplementary information that was gotten through interviews.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

Kasonde Ng'andu (2013) defines data analysis as a manipulation of the collected data to draw conclusions that reflect on the interest, ideas, and theories that initiated the study to uncover the underpinning structures and extract cardinal variables, thereby testing any underlying assumptions. However, the appropriate data analysis methods are determined by the data type, variables of

interest and the number of cases. In this study, data analysis commenced concurrently with the data collection process. Field notes were systematically organized according to the salient themes that emerged in relation to the research objectives. All participants' responses during the interviews were audio-recorded. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim. The transcriptions were then subjected to an initial round of coding, wherein the researcher generated preliminary codes by repeatedly reviewing the text and categorizing sections of the transcripts. Subsequently, the researcher identified recurring themes and refined these codes to develop the final set of themes.

To ensure methodological rigor, data from the three distinct data collection methods were triangulated in alignment with the themes that emerged. During the analytical process, findings were grouped under key themes, which were guided by the study's research objectives. The data analysis process spanned a period of three months, after which the findings and analysis were subject to peer review by the supervisor to ensure that they adequately addressed the research objectives.

Smith and Eatough (2006) argue that a thematic method is a suitable approach to analysing qualitative data when one is trying to find out what experiences of attitudes individuals have towards a particular situation they are facing, and how they make sense of their personal and social world. Furthermore, the method is beneficial when one is concerned with the complexity, process and novelty of a phenomenon; in this regard, the implementation of Early Childhood Education in the education system, especially at the primary school level.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues were highly upheld in the study. Firstly, a clearance letter was obtained from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies. Then, the researcher sought consent from the University of Zambia relevant authorities, and make the needed appointments in the offices of the officials from the Ministry of Education. Participants were assured that the data to be collected will be given the level of confidentiality it deserved and that only be used for research purposes. Furthermore, the researcher assured the participants that names and personal details will not be revealed or published. Instead, specific codes will represent participants; this will ensure anonymity. Further, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to conceal identity and ensure the confidentiality of collected data.

Furthermore, the purpose of the research and its possible benefits to the field of education were explained to the participants. Apart from that, participation in the study was on voluntary basis. This will be done by explaining to them the procedure, relevance and purpose of the study. Ultimately, the researcher was ready to take full responsibility for the research and any unforeseen consequences. All the mentioned activities were done to ensure that the rights of the participants are respected, and their dignity as human beings is safeguarded by the researcher. Further, Cohen et al. (2000) supports this by explaining that ethical issues are matters which are highly sensitive to the rights of others.

### **3.12 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter discussed the methodology employed in this study. Under methods, the following items are captured: the research design, target population, sample size and sampling techniques, research instruments, data quality assurance, data collection procedure, data analysis and ethical issues. The next chapter presents the study's findings from the samples.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Overview**

The previous chapter described the research methodology that was employed in the study. This chapter presents the findings of the current study. The themes that are presented in this chapter emerged from the data collected from interviews and document analysis. In this study, the researcher managed to collect the data, but the chapter only presents the information, which addressed the three research objectives that were stated as follows:

1. To explore the degree to which Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the ESSP in terms of access, quality, efficiency and equity
2. To establish challenges encountered in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP.
3. To ascertain feasible strategies that could be put in place to alleviate the challenges in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP.

This chapter begins with the findings for the first objective with views from the officials from the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Early Childhood Education.

#### **4.2 Biographical Information on Participants**

The biographical representation of the data encompasses the sex, age group, and years of experience of the participants. A significant majority of the respondents were female, while a smaller yet notable group were male. Regarding age distribution, a substantial number of respondents were within the 30-39 age range, whereas an even larger group belonged to the 40-49 age bracket, indicating a mature participant base. In terms of professional experience, a considerable segment of the respondents had accumulated 6-10 years of experience. Additionally, those with 0-5 and 11-15 years of experience each formed a substantial portion of the participants, reflecting a mix of relatively new and moderately experienced professionals. Conversely, those with 16-20 years of experience constituted a very small portion of the respondents, highlighting fewer participants with extensive experience in their field.

### **4.3 How is Early Childhood Education implementation being realised in the ESSP?**

The research considered exploring how Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the Education Sector and Skills Plan. Information from senior education officials under the Early Childhood Education Department was cardinal in obtaining data on the degree to which the Early Childhood Education Implementation is being realised in the ESSP.

Findings reveal that before 2015, the private sector was the main provider of ECE and since then the Zambian government has become and remains the main provider of ECE services. Since 2017, the government has retained its status as the largest provider of ECE services. As of 2020, 258 616 children had any type of ECE exposure, with government-provided ECE services accounting for 62% of this number as compared to 47 317 in 2011.

The Zambian government has committed to increasing the provision of equitable and inclusive ECE through the Education Sector Skills Plan (ESSP). Zambia shows its commitment to quality education and lifelong education and skills training for all through its educational roadmap, the ESSP 2017–2021. This plan integrates policy goals from Education Our Future and Vision 2030, emphasizing education as a primary driver of national development (Ministry of General Education Zambia and Ministry of Higher Education).

#### **4.3.1 Access and Quality**

The following are some of the sentiments that participants shared in line with Early Childhood Education and how much progress has been made in the construction of learning facilities. Participants stated that access although improving has been the biggest challenge in growing Early Childhood Education as a sector. The participants also cited it is important to improve quality in ECE in order for it to grow.

#### **Participant M-1 had this to say:**

Currently, the country has made significant progress in Early Childhood Education (ECE) by employing a total of 4,057 qualified ECE teachers on the government payroll and engaging an additional 768 qualified ECE teacher volunteers. Moreover, efforts to expand access to ECE continue, with 2,170 teachers successfully recruited in 2022 and an additional 560 anticipated to join soon, reflecting a commitment to improving the sector (ECE Director- March 2023).

**On realization of ECE, Participant M-2 added that awareness is important in ECE;**

People need to appreciate ECE and understand that ECE is the foundation of education. They may know and hear about it but the moment we understand that it is the foundation. At the level of cultural dynamism, values, discipline, tolerance can be built at an early age which will stimulate their thinking by the time the children are reaching primary school education. We must actualize important policies like the ESSP in order to bridge the gap between Early Childhood Education and other educational sectors (ECE Director- April 2023).

Another long serving member of the directorate of ECE also added that in terms of the degree to implementation of ECE, the participant M-3 had this to say:

In terms of implementation of ECE in the ESSP, we are still going and it is currently still being done because we are still operating with the ESSP, it is embracing every sector so from implementation we are running with another strategic plan in order for us to meet the goals of ECE in a very timely manner (MoE Planning Officer- February,2023).

The participant was further asked to provide more information on how far implementation has gone of ECE in line with the ESSP. The participant explained that improvement has been made but not on large scale because of challenges that the sector faces. The participant also added that:

We have gone throughout the country, in terms of implementation, all provinces were given directives which were given to all the districts and they passed this down to all the schools. This directive stated that all schools should have an annexed ECE center. Though in some places we face difficulties- one of them being a lack of teachers, this makes achieving ECE goals more challenging (ECE Director- March,2023).

Participant M- 1 was also asked how far they had gone in terms of implementation of the ESSP. The participant said that the vision of the ESSP had come from vision 2030, the Patriotic Front manifesto and also the Seventh National Development Plan. The participant had this to say in terms of ECE implementation as he noted three main achievements:

The ministerial directive that was given that every primary school should have an ECE center or classroom space which should be for the 5 or 6 years old. We also have the community model where every small community or village is being encouraged to have an ECE center where ECE is taught and the supervisory role is done by the nearest primary school and other capacity building activities. We also have quite a number of partners who have come on board to help us build some ECE centres for example Save the Children that constructed about 20 plus

schools in the Eastern Province of Zambia. The former first lady was also a champion for ECE. The ECE centres now go as far as Copperbelt and Lufwanyama. We also have ZOCS- Zambia Open Community Schools in Southern Province which is helping with ECE not to forget the support from Child Fund and UNICEF (MoE Planning Officer- February,2023).

Another participant M-4 explained that in as much as ECE is being championed, it is quite hard to understand why ECE is not growing. The participant had this to say in terms of realization of the sector:

ECE is not growing at the rate at which it is supposed to considering that it is actually free. Honestly parents are not even using that as an encouragement to enroll their children, when we talk about progression, it is slower than I expected. Other sectors like primary and secondary are growing even in terms of enrollment numbers, as opposed to ECE (ECE Director- February,2023)

Participant M-2 also agreed with the sentiments of other participants and also added that:

Yes, indeed, the directive was passed for all ECE centres to be annexed in Primary Schools. We haven't yet gone to check if that is happening in all schools at the moment. In terms of quality capacity building activities have been taking place and we have trained teachers in using various methodologies that we developed as a ministry. We also have VVOP in the Central Province that is helping to support ECE and capacity building. In Lusaka we have a new project under VVOP called "Let's Play" and teachers should start their training very soon. The road map for that has already being laid out (MoE Planning Officer- March,2023)

The participant was also asked if they could further comment on quality of Education in Early Childhood Education. The participant had this to say:

Quality assurance is done by standards of the curriculum in collaboration with the Directorate of Early Childhood Education by going into the field and making sure policies are being regulated as well as giving advice to ECE teachers, but not having enough teachers, books has led to quality being compromised (MoE Planning Officer- March,2023).

**Table 4: ECE access shown by number of ECE centres in Urban areas vs Rural areas**

	Government Annex	Government Stand alone	Private	Community
Urban	376	3	254	177
Rural	3 596	72	413	859
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 972</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>1 036</b>

Source; Ministry of Education: Number of ECE centres, urban vs rural regions, 2023

The table shows the distribution of ECE centres in urban and rural areas, with annexed centres predominating in both regions. Currently, Zambia has a total number of 5 350 ECE centres, with 810 in urban and 4 540 in rural areas. (UNICEF, 2023) revealed the Zambian government's intention to establish an additional 500 ECE centres and hubs across the country.

#### **4.3.2 Equity and Efficiency**

In the past years the Zambian government allocated 0.1% but they have increased to a max of 2% of its total education budget to ECE Services. The construction of 20 standalone ECE centers, along with those funded by the World Bank's Zambia Enhanced Early Learning (ZEEL) project, signifies efforts to expand access. However, the ECE budget as a proportion of the education budget has averaged only 0.4 per cent between 2016 and 2020, falling short of the recommended 10 percent. Participants further revealed that there are also donor-funded projects focused on improving the quality of education in the early learning years (not just limited to ECE and including early primary school years). This financial support amounts to a total of ZMW15 billion over the planned period and an average amount of ZMW3 billion annually, six times higher than the current annual government allocation for ECE.

They also added that ECE is still being developed in Zambia and it still needs attention where Equity and Efficiency are concerned however a few strides are being made.

Participant M- 5 postulated that:

Equity is an aspect that one would not be able to look at in terms of proportion, we take it as a by the way thing because genders are balanced even though the Zambian setup allows for more girls in schools as compared to the boys. Most schools in urban areas now have ECE centres as opposed to rural however, development is only taking place now because a few years ago, even Lusaka only had a handful of schools in town. This means rural areas are also now improving in terms of equality in ECE centres (DEBS Officer- March,2023)

Participant M-6 also added that:

Most Teachers prefer to work from the urban side of town which means there is a lot of neglect in schools that are based in rural areas making Equality a challenge in the ECE sector (Snr Ed Officer- February,2023)

When asked about funding allocated to ECE; one participant (M-3) from the Directorate of Early Childhood Education had this to say:

Money that is allocated to ECE is less than 0.001 of the national budget, it makes it difficult to allocate money to all the other provinces that need attention as some of the lack proper ECE centres in primary schools. This now tends to affect the quality of Education in schools. With the new budget at least the sector will have a little more (ECE Director, February,2023).

#### **4.3.4 Document Analysis on the Level of Realization of Early Childhood Education.**

Document analysis was done in order to verify the awareness of ECE and the level of implementation as this sector is cardinal. The researcher checked the ECE plans which included the National budget as well as the Education Skills and Sector Plan.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) plans under the Ministry of General Education budget received 14% from the National budget, However Zambia's government spending on education has declined in recent years. Between 2017 and 2021, almost 70% of the MoE budget was allocated to primary education, followed by secondary education and management support services. However, from 2022 there was an allocative shift from Primary education in favour of secondary education. ECE spending also saw an increase from ZMW 37 Million in 2017 to ZMW 462 Million in 2023, equivalent to only 0.4% and 2% of the MoE budget, respectively. This increase in ECE allocation can be attributed to the governments introduction of ECE centres in primary schools and recruitment of ECE staff, thereby becoming the largest provider of ECE in Zambia.

Despite the increase, the allocation for ECE is still significantly lower than the 10% of the total education spending that is recommended, this is an indication that Zambia is well below the target of achieving equitable and inclusive quality ECE across the country. This underscores a significant focus on ECE. Additionally, the policy plan (ESSP) outlined a robust four-step policy priority plan which includes: increased access to ECE services for disadvantaged children, integrating nutrition interventions at ECE centers, improving water and sanitation facilities, and strengthening multisector coordination mechanisms to ensure holistic delivery of ECE services.

Additionally, an article in the Daily Mail Newspaper on 17<sup>TH</sup> July 2024, highlighted that the President of Zambia; H.E Hakainde Hichilema announced the government's plans to prioritize early childhood education. He stated that the increased Constituency Development Fund aims to improve accessibility to education for all Zambians. The President also emphasized the critical

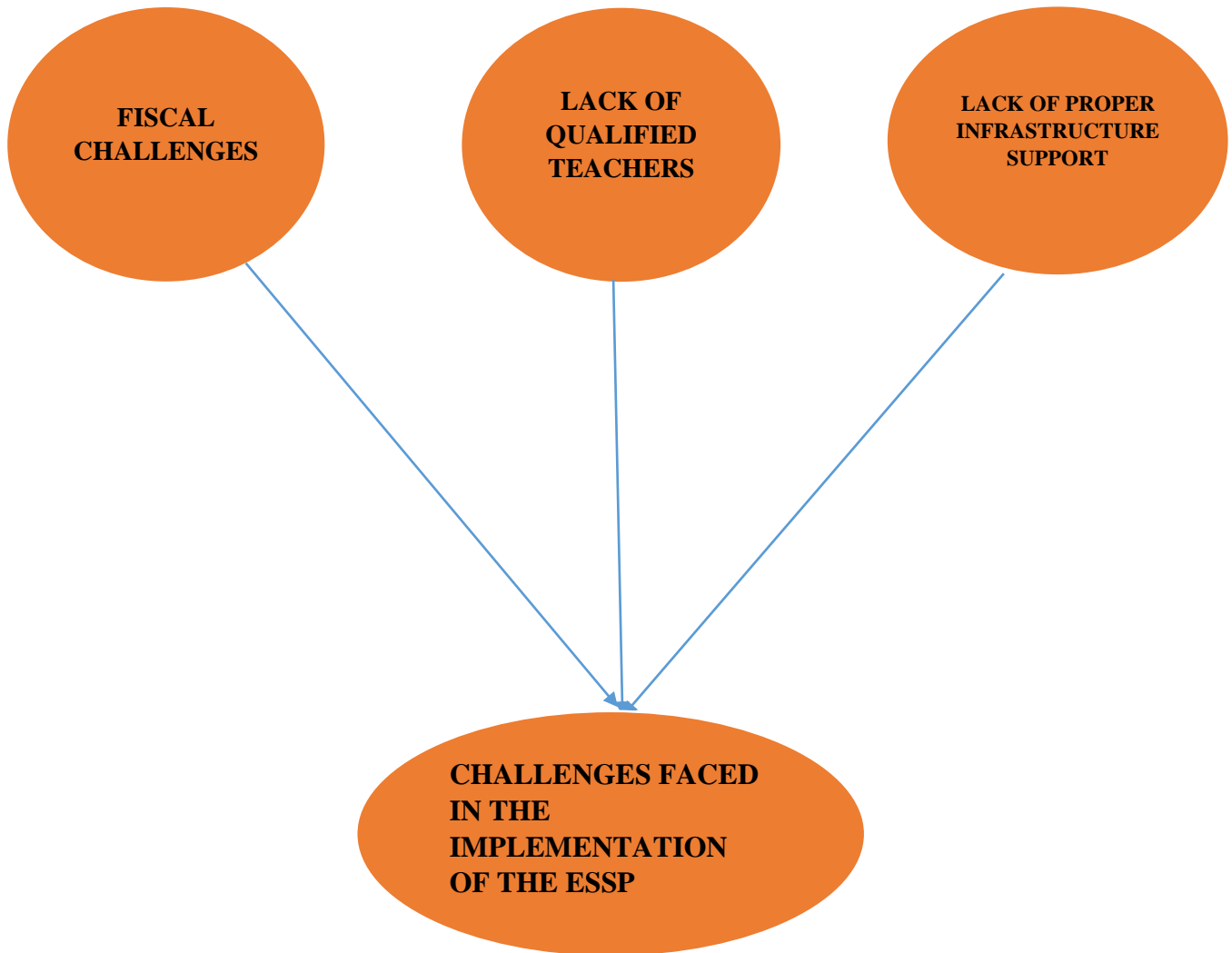
role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools, particularly at the elementary level, to enhance the quality of education from an early age.

**Table 1: Showing emerging themes**

<b>KEY WORDS</b>	<b>NEAR THEMES</b>	<b>EMERGING THEMES</b>
Progress towards implementation	Realisation of ECE in government	Increase in ECE realisation
ECE schools being built	Enrolment of Children	Increase in ECE Access
Efficiency in ECE	Budgeting matters	Increase in ECE budget
Equality in ECE	Access to ECE	Annexing of ECE to primary schools

#### **4.4 What challenges have been encountered in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP?**

The research considered establishing the challenges faced by the Directorate of Early Childhood Education in implementation of the ESSP. The study used interviews to collect data concerning challenges that are faced by the directorate. Participants interviewed indicated divergent views of challenges with implementation of ESSP. The major challenges which came out of the interviews were as follows: Fiscal challenges, Lack of teachers in schools, unavailability of data on progress of Early Childhood Education.



**Figure 3: Challenges faced during Implementation of the ESSP.**

#### **4.4.1 Fiscal Challenges**

The findings revealed that Early Childhood Education gets the least amount of money in terms of allocation from the National Budget. This was evident from responses that indicated that most times it is hard to meet goals aligned with Education because of a lack of money. Participant N-1 had this to say:

Money that is allocated to ECE is less than 0.001 of the national budget, it makes it difficult to allocate money to all the other provinces that need attention as some of the lack proper ECE centres in primary schools. This now tends to affect the

quality of Education in schools. With the new budget maybe the sector will have at least two percent (ECE Office Administrator- March,2023).

Equally from the Senior Education Office, participant N-2 had this to say:

Financial resources from the government are a little and makes it hard to move at a fast pace but even with the strain we have partners coming in to help, for the provinces without help coming in, we had some funds that we used in order to develop selected areas in Zambia. Luapula, Northern and Copper belt needed more help than others (ECE Officer- March,2023)

In agreement to what was said above, Senior Education Officer also brought out the degree to which financial challenges have affected the Early Childhood Education Sector. He stated that:

Fiscal challenges have made logistics very difficult as transport is not catered for. It makes it very difficult for us to inspect more schools hence slowing down the development of ECE in Education. In most districts there is usually just one car to carry out movements for the board (DEBS Officer- March,2023).

In the same vein, participant N-1 stated that the fiscal challenges have led to slow or no construction of schools in the sector. He stated:

We do not have enough schools for ECE because we have very few ECE centres in certain districts where ECE is needed. Construction works should be the first thing we tackle when funds are released in order for other stepping issues like quality, equity, equality to finally be realised in the sector (MoE Planning Officer- March,2023).

In addition to that participant N-3 stated that:

In the ECE centers that are already in existence, we are not using age appropriate infrastructure, this interferes with quality delivery because ECE centres should be a safe and child themed environment that is full of color to enhance imagination, at the moment we have not achieved many of those (ECE Snr Ed Officer- February ,2023).

#### **4.4.2 Document Analysis of Fiscal Challenges**

According to the 2024 UNICEF Budget Brief, most of the education budget continues to be allocated to primary education, while ECE is allocated the lowest amount. In the 2024 National Budget, primary education accounts for 57.4 per cent of the education allocation. Meanwhile, secondary education accounts for 23.8 per cent of the education budget, a reduction from 24.5 per cent in 2023. Tertiary education was allocated 8.7 per cent and ECE is set to remain constant from 2023 as the lowest funded sector with a 2.3 per cent allocation. The report further shows that in 2023, 69 out of 115 unfinished schools were completed, with the remaining 46 scheduled for

completion by 2025. For 2024, the Government targets the construction of 202 additional secondary schools. Investment in early childhood education (ECE) is crucial for addressing inequality and improving literacy levels.

While the Government has shown commitment by increasing funds for ECE from K12 million in 2021 to K528 million in 2024, this allocation remains relatively low compared to international recommendations. The construction of 20 standalone ECE centers in 2024, along with those funded by the World Bank's Zambia Enhanced Early Learning (ZEEL) project, signifies efforts to expand access. However, the ECE budget as a proportion of the education budget has averaged only 0.4 per cent between 2016 and 2020, falling short of the recommended 10 per cent.

#### **4.4.3 Lack of Qualified Teachers**

One of the reasons that have challenged the implementation of ECE in schools is the lack of qualified teachers. The interviews revealed that the ECE sector is lacking qualified human resource to support the teaching and learning of Early Childhood Education. In affirming this challenge participant N-4 had this to say:

Most teachers that teach ECE are not even qualified, we do not have a number of teachers that teach ECE, remember we must take into account that ECE is different from Primary Education and though similar, the approach is different, this has hindered the progression of ECE because we do not have the labor force that is in tandem with the demand (MoE, ECE- Directorate Officer, February,2023).

The study further revealed there has not been a deployment of teachers in Early Childhood Education for over seven years. This was learnt from an official who confirmed by saying:

The last time the government deployed teachers that belong to the Early Childhood Education Sector was in 2013 and since then we have not had any kind of recruitment in the ministry for ECE. There were 1000 teachers in total and sent to all kinds of districts however that number is still not enough as compared to the ECE centres that need attention ((MoE Planning Officer- March,2023)

The above statement was in agreement with what the study got from the response made by an officer of ECE- N-5 who said that:

We have care givers who stand in the gap but these could most just be grade 12 school leavers who offer to help with ECE. These past years we have primary and even in some very rare cases secondary school teachers that teach ECE (MoE Planning Officer- March,2023)

Another participant added that failure to understand how best to implement policies by stakeholders is another challenge faced in implementing ECE. He stated:

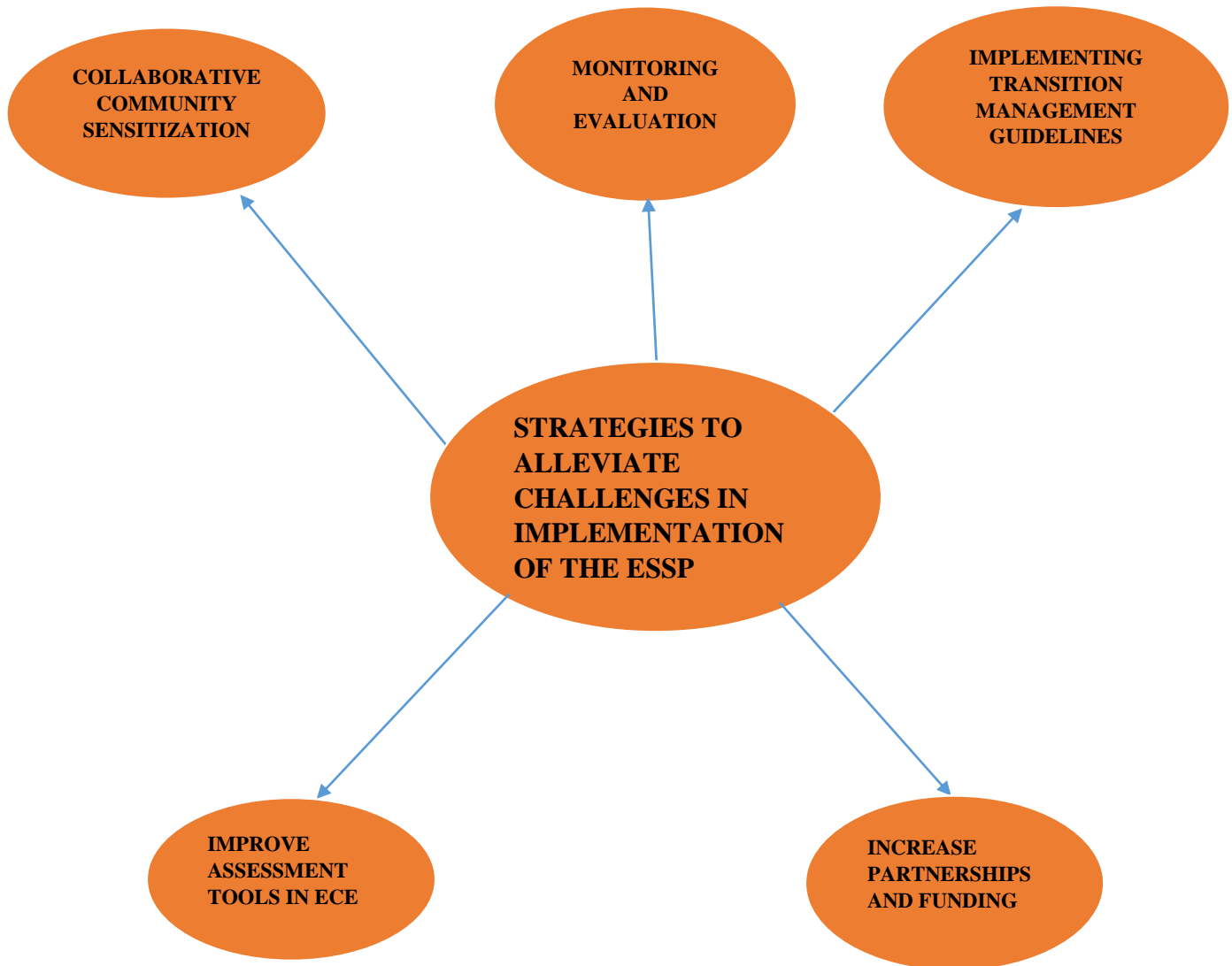
Failure to contextualize the policy by people not only from the education sector but also general stakeholders and researchers in the country, this also slows down the awareness of ECE across the board.

**Table 2: Showing Emerging Themes**

<b>KEY WORDS</b>	<b>NEAR THEMES</b>	<b>EMERGING THEMES</b>
ECE is not accessible to all	Lack of sufficient funding	Fiscal Challenges
Caretakers substitute teachers	Teachers are not available	Lack of Qualified teachers
ECE environment in schools is not conducive	Child- friendly environment	Lack of Proper Infrastructure Support
No logistical arrangements made at district level	Lack of ECE transparency	Lack of a monitoring and Evaluation system

#### **4.4 What strategies have to be put in place to alleviate challenges in Implementation of ECE?**

This research considered coming up with comprehensive strategies that can be used to alleviate challenges in Implementation of Early Childhood Education. During interviews with different participants, the study came up with some strategies which include collaborative sensitization, increase budgetary allocations and increased partnerships with other partner organizations.



**Figure 4: Strategies to be put in place to alleviate challenges in the Implementation of the ESSP**

#### **4.4.1 Collaborative Community Sensitization**

One participant revealed that more has to be done in terms of awareness of early childhood Education. It was therefore proposed during the interviews that there is need for every stakeholder to make sure they join hands in bringing awareness to ECE.

One way of doing this was proposed by a planner- O-1 who said:

We need to do more in terms of collaboration and we need to engage other stakeholders like churches to participate. Churches also have a role to play in

spreading awareness of ECE to its members through various programs that can be initiated (DEBS Planning Officer, April,2023).

In support of the views above, another participant from the Directorate O-2 also said that:

In my own view, we as the administration also need to make effort in engaging standards officials to visit schools and increase sensitization. We need more people to understand that ECE is very important in the foundation of a child's upbringing (ECE, Director, April,2023).

#### **4.4.2 Monitoring and Evaluation**

On the other hand, some participants stated that monitoring and evaluation should be enforced. The participants proposed the change in the monitoring and evaluation system. This came from one official 0-3 who emphasized that there should be a different approach:

As a ministry, we do not work alone but part of the mandate is to monitor Early Childhood Education, we monitor ECE material, the curriculum, the language and we go as far as checking if the toilets are child friendly for the learners (Debs Officer- March, 2023)

In agreement with the above statement, during interviews, another official O-4 also suggested that:

Monitoring in ECE centres should be more frequent in order for it to achieve its intended purpose which is seeing how progressive ECE is and better ways of improving this very important sector (Debs Officer- March, 2023)

#### **4.4.3 Implementing Transition Management Guidelines**

One participant proposed that Transition management guidelines have been in the works for some time. The participant proposed the change in the transitioning from Early Childhood Education to Primary Education. This came from an official O-5 who proposed:

We need to do more sensitization around children transitioning from infancy to ECE, this is because transition times are important because they can make the day seem smooth and well organized, or rushed and unpleasant. Allowing enough time so children make the transition gradually is the best way to avoid stressful situations (MoE Officer- March, 2023)

In agreement with the above statement, another participant O-6 also added that:

We have to do more as the body of ECE in conjunction with the government in order to allow smooth transition of children by picking a very pivotal workforce. We must realize that these children are still very young and should be given the utmost care and attention (Snr Ed Officer- March, 2023)

#### **4.4.4 Improve Assessment Tools in ECE**

One participant revealed that the pre-existing assessment tools for ECE are not implemented in centres because of the lack of knowledge among the caregivers. It was therefore proposed that there is need to make sure that ECE is assessed correctly in the centres in order to get the intended results. One way of doing this as the participant O-3 stated is by:

You know ECE is not assessed like these other sectors where there are exams and the like, for ECE we need to have specific ECE tools in place like CDAZ simply to observe how children are transitioning, this will greatly grow the sector as we will see results. Teacher ratings are also used to assess ECE (Debs Planner- February, 2023).

Senior official O-2 equally indicated that we need broader assessment tools for ECE and we need to make sure we have a strong benchmark as indicated in the following interview:

Continuous Professional Development is very important for ECE teachers in order for us to track and notice which areas need more attention in this sector (Debs Inspector- March,2023)

#### **4.4.5 Increase Partnerships and Funding**

The last but not the least suggestion as a strategy proposed by participants is increasing partnerships with various donor organizations that have come on board to support ECE. The participants proposed the need to have support other than government funding to cushion the challenges in ECE. One of the participants O-3 when asked about the strategies said:

We also have quite a number of partners who have come on board to help us build some ECE centres; for example, Save the Children that constructed about 20 plus schools in the Eastern Province of Zambia. The former first lady was also a champion for ECE. The ECE centres now go as far as Copperbelt and Lufwanyama. We also have ZOCS- Zambia Open Community Schools in Southern Province which is helping with ECE not to forget the support from Child Fund and UNICEF (ECE Snr Ed Officer- February, 2023).

Another participant O-2 also agreed by highlighting some partnerships that are already in progress with certain organizations which champion the growth of ECE, she said:

We also have VVOP in the Central Province that is helping to support ECE and capacity building. In Lusaka we have a new project under VVOP called Let's Play and teachers should start their training very soon. The road map for that has already being laid out (ECE Snr Ed Officer- February, 2023)

**Table 3: Showing Emerging Themes**

<b>KEY WORDS</b>	<b>NEAR THEMES</b>	<b>EMERGING THEMES</b>
ECE Awareness	Collaboration in ECE	Collaborative Community Sensitization
Teaching Materials in ECE	Effective teaching and learning	Monitoring and Evaluation
Child- Friendly Examinations	ECE Curriculum	Improve Assessment Tools in ECE
Partnerships	Increased Access	Increased Partnerships and Funding
Infantry to ECE	Continuous Professional Development	Implementing Transition Management Guidelines

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter presented the findings as they were collected from the field. The findings were based on information from the officials of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education. The findings indicated that little has been achieved when it comes to the implementation of ECE in the country. It was further indicated that divergent challenges were experienced while implementing ECE. Officials charged that there are not enough funds for ECE implementation to successfully be completed and that there are not enough teachers. Going forward, participants brought out various strategies that could help alleviate challenges in implementation of ECE.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Overview

This chapter comprises the discussion of research findings that have been presented in the previous chapter. The discussion is done in conformity with the findings from the participants. In this study, the researcher used the following objectives to discuss the findings:

1. To explore the degree to which the Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the ESSP.
2. To establish challenges encountered in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP.
3. To suggest feasible strategies that could be put in place to alleviate the challenges in the implementation process of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP.

#### **5.2 Discussion on the degree to which the Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the ESSP.**

As indicated by objective one, the study sought to explore the degree to which Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the ESSP. The study revealed that while progress in terms of access and quality has been made, the overall picture is that more emphasis needs to be placed on the implementation of ECE.

##### **5.2.1 Level of Realisation**

Despite concerted efforts to increase the level of realization, access to early childhood education remains very low in Zambia, especially among vulnerable groups especially in rural areas. Only 17.3% of children enrolled in primary education, enjoyed any kind of early childhood education. The research findings under this theme indicated that there is still more to be done to increase access of Early Childhood Education; Coverage of ECE in Zambia by 2014 was 15% of children in grade 1 with school preschool or nursery school experience and mostly limited to urban areas. This is evidenced by Cabinet Memos No.CO.101/19/21 of August 2014 and that of September 2014, MFB/53/1/1 where it was recommended that a new Department of Early Childhood

Education be created in the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MoE, 2016).

Participants reported that access or realization of ECE is hampered due to many reasons for example; that in terms of construction nothing new has been done because Early Childhood Education receives the least amount of funding and there are immediate needs that need to be taken care of including buying and distribution of learning materials. Aside from that, the funding given to ECE is not sufficient resulting to challenges when it comes to building new infrastructure.

Participants reported that most schools need to have a separate ECE center as opposed to using primary classrooms for the learning and teaching of ECE. This includes establishing ECE centers, particularly in underserved areas, and integrating ECE into the national education system. This in line with the sentiments from another participant who expressed that realization of ECE will improve when parents begin to appreciate Early Childhood Education (ECE) and understand that it serves as the foundation of education. While many may have heard of ECE, it is crucial to recognize its fundamental role in shaping a child's future. At the level of cultural dynamism, ECE instills values, discipline, and tolerance at an early age, which significantly stimulates children's thinking by the time they reach primary school.

To bridge the gap between Early Childhood Education and other educational sectors, it is essential to actualize important policies like the Education Skills and Sector Plan (ESSP). This approach ensures a cohesive and comprehensive educational framework that supports the development of young learners and prepares them for future academic success. A study on scaling up early Childhood development interventions done in Mauritius in 2018 also finds that realization of ECE is delayed due to socio economic disparities which also play a role, where children from poorer households and marginalized communities are less likely to attend ECE programs.

### **5.2.2 Limited Access and Quality**

The study established that both access and quality in ECE still require substantial improvement to achieve the desired outcomes. Consistent with the views of Edwards III, who emphasizes that policy implementation is as much about the “how” as it is about the “what,” the findings reveal that insufficient implementation processes undermine the benefits of well-intended policies. The study’s findings are in line with research conducted in Tanzania by Kweka et al. (2000), which

reported that most ECE centres were neither registered nor attached to primary schools—factors that detrimentally affect quality and access. Similarly, in some areas, the same Grade One teacher is tasked with teaching an ECE class, further illustrating a systemic inadequacy in translating policy into practice.

Similarly, Paula Polk Lillard (2011) explains in his study that an educational environment tailored to basic human characteristics, to the specific characteristics of children at different ages, and to the individual personalities of each child is important as the function of the environment is to allow the child to develop independence in all areas according to his or her inner psychological directives. Furthermore, the findings from the study revealed why access to ECE is cardinal because ECE exposes children to the school environment at an early age, where they develop social, physical, mental, aesthetic and emotional capacities.

Children also develop spoken and written language early and hence can breakthrough in reading at primary school easily. This assertion conforms with the study by Cohen and Bagshaw (1973), who carried out a study in Britain and found that the attendance of two and a half hours a day at a British nursery school appeared to result in children attaining greater improvement in language proficiency and concept formation than those of a similar social economic background who had not attended nursery school.

The benefit of exposing children to school environment cannot be over emphasized. Familiarity with school at an early age gives confidence in learners as they socialize freely with fellow children and teachers. Such foundations can be laid through early childhood programs which serve as a supplement to children's home environments. Such programs create an awareness about school institutions and procedures which have a positive impact on formal schooling later on.

### **5.2.3 Need for Equity and Inclusion.**

Interview results indicate that equity and inclusion remain underdeveloped in the implementation of ECE in Zambia. While some participants observed that the current gender balance in schools is satisfactory, equity must be understood not merely as a proportional representation issue, but as ensuring that every child has access to fair, just, and high-quality education and care. Hyland (2010) argues that diversity is inextricably linked to equity, and that policy implementation should

actively address the underlying inequalities that hinder equal opportunity. Edwards III's insights remind us that effective public policy implementation must also be responsive to local contexts and social dynamics. In practice, this means designing ECE policies that incorporate mechanisms for identifying and overcoming unseen barriers to learning, thereby ensuring that marginalized groups, particularly those in rural and disadvantaged communities, are not left behind.

Countries like Australia have adopted a more proactive approach—underscored by its adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and implemented through comprehensive legislative frameworks like the Equal Opportunity Act (2010) and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (2006)—serves as an exemplar of equity in action. Such frameworks provide clear guidelines that not only outline children's rights but also set a standard for inclusive and equitable education much like what Zambia needs to adopt to improve ECE. Edwards III's model supports the idea that when central policies are effectively “translated” into local practice through detailed and context-sensitive operational guidelines, the outcomes are more likely to reflect the intended goals of equity.

### **5.3 Discussion on challenges faced in the Implementation of ECE**

It is clear from the findings of this study that the ECE sector in Zambia faces various challenges. Although mitigating these challenges requires the efforts of different stakeholders, sometimes stakeholders face various challenges. The study established that most challenges that were faced were as a result of fund deficit in terms of allocation to the ECE sector, lack of enough qualified teachers in ECE centres, failure from stakeholders to understand policies among others.

#### **5.3.1 Lack of proper infrastructure**

Despite Fiscal challenges hampering construction, Zambia has made significant efforts to enhance its Early Childhood Education (ECE) infrastructure through initiatives such as the Zambia Enhancing Early Learning (ZEEL) project. Participants reported that this project, supported by the World Bank, aims to construct 110 ECE hub centers across the country, especially in areas with the greatest need. These hubs are designed to provide a safe and conducive learning environment for young children and include facilities for both education and community engagement (Global Partnership for Education) (UNICEF,2024). Participants further recognized that efforts to pump into infrastructure are paramount however it should be noted that these programs are designed for

Additionally, UNICEF's efforts in Zambia have led to the establishment of community-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) hubs known as "Mphalas." These centers provide multisectoral services, including health, nutrition, and early learning, which are crucial for the holistic development of children (UNICEF, 2023).

The findings are consistent with other African Countries like Ghana that have made strides in improving ECE infrastructure through its Kindergarten Expansion Project, which aimed to build and renovate kindergartens nationwide between 2018-2020, although no progress has been noted from this key development. This initiative ensures that children have access to well-equipped learning environments from an early age, Kenya's government has prioritized ECE by integrating it into the national education framework (Gratz, 2019). Investments have been made to construct and upgrade ECE centers, especially in rural areas, to provide equitable access to quality early childhood education.

### **5.3.2 Fiscal Challenges**

The study revealed that, fiscal challenges were the top reason among challenges faced in implementing ECE successfully, for example, participants explained that most of the existing primary schools had very old buildings; with structures characterized by broken glass panes, cracked dirty walls, with little light inside, very dirty and with high stare cases or without ramps, making preschoolers crawl to reach classrooms every school day. Additionally, the education budget continues to be allocated to primary education, while ECE is allocated the lowest amount. In the 2024 National Budget, primary education accounts for 57.4 per cent of the education allocation (UNICEF 2024). Educating our Future (MOE, 1996) clearly states that provision of desirable education involves prescribing specifications for furniture, equipment, aids and infrastructure. If not quickly checked, the undesirable infrastructure may hinder access and full participation by children below the age of seven in the already existing government primary schools.

Participants also explained that there are not enough teaching and learning materials due to financial challenges in schools. According to a study done by the Ministry Of Women and Child Development, Government of India (Curriculum Framework, 2012), an effective Early Childhood Education program should exhibit some essential play and learning materials that include adequate supply of developmentally appropriate materials for play, materials and equipment which are safe,

clean and in good conditions, sufficient quantity of materials to enable learners work in small groups and should be easily accessible to the child, materials which promote gross and fine motor development and help the child to discover and explore including constructing and reconstructing. It should promote sensory exploration and social interaction along with creative expressions through arts, painting, etc. It is worth noting that play is more important than academic endeavors at pre-school; no wonder the 2013 Zambia Curriculum Framework for ECE indicates that play should have 60% and academic 40% at pre-school.

The implications of such imbalances are profound. Edwards III's framework posits that for any policy to be successfully implemented, fiscal resource allocation must be commensurate with the policy's ambitions. In the case of Zambia, the results showed that limited financial commitment to ECE not only leaves physical infrastructure in a state of disrepair but also hinders the development of a robust educational foundation. This may be viewed as particularly concerning given that the early years of schooling are critical for establishing the basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills that underpin lifelong learning. Without adequate investment in these formative stages, the cumulative effects are likely to manifest in persistent educational inequities and suboptimal learning outcomes (Edwards III's framework, 1980).

Further compounding these challenges, recent research from the World Bank highlights that although the budgetary allocation to education in Zambia has increased—from 10 percent to 15 percent between 2022 and 2024—this increment still falls short of the financing required to fully realize the Education for All (EFA) policy objectives. Such findings suggest that even as the government endeavors to expand access to primary education, the systemic underinvestment in ECE and essential infrastructure remains a critical bottleneck. These deficiencies are not only reflected in the physical state of schools but also in the broader operational capacity of the education sector, where shortages of materials and qualified personnel continue to impede progress.

In response to these challenges, international organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF have recently called for a renewed focus on building strong foundations in primary schools, emphasizing that quality education must begin in the early years. Their joint initiatives underscore the necessity of an integrated approach that addresses both infrastructural deficits and curriculum quality. They argue that without substantial, sustained fiscal investment—particularly in the often-

neglected ECE sector—efforts to improve educational outcomes and promote equitable access will remain fundamentally constrained.

### **5.3.3 Lack of Qualified Teachers**

Qualified teachers are another component of quality education in education. In ECE, there has been reportedly a shortage of quality teachers. This important level of education has been, for a long time, at the mercy of private service providers and some who may not possess adequate knowledge and expertise in Early Childhood Education provision. They have however employed qualified teachers in ECE.

A study done Berlin (2018) corresponds with the findings that there is a critical relationship between staff experience, high quality training, commensurate compensation and the effectiveness of a program. He stated that staff, teachers, social workers, and administrators, must have in-depth knowledge of child development and how young children learn. He went on to say that all teachers providing instruction in pre- school must have a certification valid for service in the early childhood grades. He further made a recommendation that governments should adequately deploy ECE teachers with valid qualifications in all the ECE centres, with a minimum of at least a Diploma. Manning, M., et. al. (2017) also carried out a study to provide an up-to-date analysis of the correlation between teacher qualifications and the quality of the early childhood learning environment. Based on published research studies since the 1980s, the review provides an in-depth understanding relevant for current practice and policy. The review was able to draw upon information from a number of countries, demonstrating that the relationship between teacher qualification and enhanced quality of the learning environment was not dependent on context or culture.

This meta- analysis provides evidence of a significant and positive correlation between teacher qualification and quality with respect to the learning environment for all young children in ECEC settings, including infants and toddlers. Mandating qualified teachers (with tertiary education) may lead to significant improvement for both process and structural quality within centre-based and home- based ECEC settings. Results from this study are important for policy makers wanting to enhance policy and practice within ECEC settings to improve children and family outcomes.

### **5.3.4 Lack of an efficient Monitoring and Evaluation System**

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Zambia is a budding structured process involving various stakeholders. The Ministry of General Education, in collaboration with international organizations like USAID and DevTech Systems, has been actively working to gather data and evaluate the impact of ECE programs, however, participants explained that limited financial resources allocated to the ECE sector affect the ability to conduct regular and thorough monitoring and evaluation. Budget constraints often lead to the prioritization of other educational levels over ECE. Participants further explained that due to financial limitations at the district level, it is impossible to monitor and evaluate ECE in Zambia consistently as there are not enough vehicles to facilitate such trips.

Many African countries, including Zambia, lack robust data collection systems, making it difficult to gather accurate and comprehensive data on ECE enrollment, attendance, and learning outcomes. The absence of centralized databases and standardized indicators hampers the ability to track progress and identify areas needing improvement (Boyd,2021).

Additionally, the Brief Early Childhood Quality Inventory (BEQI) pilot project, conducted in partnership with the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) and ECD Measure, aims to produce reliable data on the quality of early learning environments. This project helps in identifying areas needing improvement and supports stakeholders in making informed decisions (ECD Measure).

## **5.4 Discussion on the strategies to put in place to alleviate challenges in Implementation**

Participants were asked to suggest the strategies that would help to mitigate the challenges in Implementation of ECE in schools. The following were brought out:

### **5.4.1 Need for Collaborative Community Sensitization.**

As can be noted from the findings of the study, a lot needs to be done in terms of collaborative community sensitization and the role which parents play in ECE implementation. The study realizes the importance of this as it will encourage more stakeholders to take part in ECE. There is a notable consensus across education policy statements and practice guidelines in many countries that parents are children's first and most enduring educators (OECD, 2012). Parents play

a critical role in supporting growth and development of their children. When parents are involved in their child's early education and form strong partnerships with their teachers and child-care providers, it makes a significant positive impact on the child's growth and development.

In early childhood programs, parents are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of the program, such as planning, implementation, and evaluation. Parent involvement can be a major component of school improvement and planning (Capper, 1993). Parent involvement activities include, attending meetings, classroom participation, training sessions, parent- teacher conferences, weekly communication with other families and informal gatherings. Parents are encouraged to share their ideas, interests and concerns to support their child's development and to enhance early childhood services. Therefore, when parents are involved, schools get a lot of support from families and teacher morale is also seen to improve. Even schools where children fail, improve dramatically when parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education (Henderson and Berla, 1994). Therefore, ECE is not just about working with children, it is also about working with and supporting families, and ultimately about how societies function.

#### **5.4.2 Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation.**

The study noted that more needs to be done in terms of monitoring and evaluation. In support of this, the study by Matafwali & Munsaka (2011), however, revealed that there were no standard norms of practice for ECCD in Zambia, and that quality control and monitoring was non-existent. This was exacerbated by lack of policy and curriculum framework to guide implementation of Early Childhood Education in Zambia. The Ministry of Education, with the help of UNICEF, had been working on the Early Childhood Education policy since 2006, but results could not easily come forth.

During the in-depth interview with the education authorities, the researcher noted that it was difficult for the DEBS officials to reach rural/remote ECE centres due to lack of transport and roads are impassable during rainy season. Hence, monitoring of ECE centres is not being done to ECE centres far from the district administrative centre. Deployment of ECE trained teachers was another challenge faced by the education authorities. The DEBS mentioned that there were very few colleges offering training to Pre-school teachers in the country, and so very few were sent to the district. The DEBS admitted that the current primary school infrastructure was not suitable for the provision of ECE; and informed the researcher that the government had not yet started funding

ECE centres for construction of appropriate infrastructure and supply of necessary teaching and learning materials.

### **5.4.3 Implementing Transition Management Guidelines**

The study revealed that transition management guidelines are cardinal for all ECE going children as it will allow a smooth transition for all children. In support of this, the participants agreed that transition management guidelines are important from either infancy to ECE, or ECE to kindergarten and lastly to primary school. This is consistent with a study done by; In Education and Care Services (2012) where they explained the importance of transition management guidelines as the child benefits more as they are trained to know what to expect meaning they are better prepared and less afraid of the ‘unknown’.

### **5.4.4 Improve assessment tools in ECE**

The study noted that there is need for streamlined process of assessment for ECE. This entails that progressive measures have to be enacted in order to improve the quality of ECE being offered in schools. In line with this is, a study done Shikwesa (2014) where he outlined that assessment occurs within the context of everyday experiences; beginning with the information and observations shared by family members. As the child moves from home to the pre-school, assessment continues as teachers and other staff members observe and record behaviours throughout the day. These systematically collected observations inform instructional practices about how to support children’s strengths and abilities and provide the foundation for meaningful parent-teacher conferences about a child’s progress. An assessment tool with a clear protocol that measures children’s progress in all learning domains is critical.

In Montessori schools, assessment is done through teacher observations, anecdotal records, and parent-teacher conference forms. The results of Roemer’s study (as cited in Dunn, 2000) indicated that besides those methods, 90% of Montessori schools used some form of standardized tests. In ‘Montessori House’, early childhood education settings, anecdotal records, informal conferences with students, observation of students, one-to-one interviews with students, checklists of lessons, demonstration of skill mastery and standardized achievement tests are used to assess each child’s development areas independently (Dunn, 2000).

In early childhood years, development is so rapid that it is very difficult to assess development of young children appropriately (Gober, 2002), and because of this reason assessment in early childhood education is different from the concepts of education in older ages. Finding out appropriate ways to assess development of young children might be very difficult for both teachers and researchers. There is, however, need for the MoE to provide guidelines on assessment of pre-school children in the ECE centres annexed to government primary schools.

#### **5.4.5. Increase Partnerships and Funding**

The study noted that more organizations should come in and help with implementation of ECE in Zambia. Increased allocation of funding to ECE was heavily suggested as another way of alleviating implementation related challenges in ECE. In support of this Shikwasha (2014) explained that policy and funding responsibility for Early Childhood Education and the licensing of education and care providers has resided with state and territory governments, Commonwealth of Australia (2011). They have continued to make substantial investment in the early childhood sector, including in providing or funding preschools/kindergartens, early childhood intervention services, child and maternal health services and family support services.

### **5.5 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study. The discussion was done under themes that emerged from the findings of the study, which are informed by the objectives and conceptual framework. The themes presented what the study established from the findings. These emerging themes were the degree to which implementation of ECE is being realized, challenges faced in implementation of ECE and lastly the strategies proposed towards implementation of ECE successfully.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Overview**

The previous chapter focused on discussing the findings that were presented in chapter four. This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study. It also presents the researcher's recommendations that will guide future research.

#### **6.2 Conclusion**

The main objective of this study was to explore the degree of implementation of Early Childhood Education in the ESSP. This study was guided by Edwards theorizing approach or policy implementation theory which emphasizes the importance of implementing education effectively, in this case successful implementation of Early Childhood Education. It is anticipated that the vital information from this study will heighten comprehension of the degree of implementation, its challenges and strategies to ameliorate the challenges faced from ECE. It is further hoped that the findings of this study will help relevant authorities to see the missing links in prior implementation and most importantly channel new processes of implementing ECE with the assistance of key stakeholders in the country. Data Collection was done through interview schedules to the participants in the study and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. The objective was fulfilled and the research questions answered.

This study was guided by three specific objectives. The first objective sought to explore the degree to which Early Childhood Education implementation is being realised in the Education Sector and Skills Plan. Information from senior education officials under the Early Childhood Education Department was cardinal in obtaining data on the degree to which the Early Childhood Education Implementation is being realised in the ESSP. Findings from the participants showed that in terms of construction, nothing had been done as in the past year's money allocated to ECE in the National budget was not enough. Furthermore, parents in rural areas are still not convinced of the importance of Early Childhood Education. Participants further added that partnerships were being formulated with International Organizations that have come on board e.g UNICEF, VVOP and Save the Children which are starting to work closely with the Early Childhood Education sector.

The second objective established the challenges faced by the Directorate of Early Childhood Education in implementation of the ESSP. The major challenges which came out of the interviews were as follows: Fiscal challenges, Lack of teachers in schools, unavailability of data on progress of Early Childhood Education.

The last objective this research considered was coming up with comprehensive strategies that can be used to alleviate challenges in Implementation of Early Childhood Education. During interviews with different participants, the study came up with some strategies which included collaborative sensitization, increase budgetary allocations, monitoring and evaluation, implementing transition management guidelines and increased partnerships with other partner organizations.

The study in line with other studies therefore concludes that there is need to approach the implementation of ECE in line with the ESSP differently. The findings show that the implementation of ECE or lack thereof has been due to a number of reasons. Various measures in the past have been employed to implement ECE, despite this, the implementation has not been successful. In view of this, the findings from this study show that the lack of awareness to ESSP guidelines has delayed successful implementation of ECE in Zambia.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

**1. Construct Appropriate Infrastructure for ECE:** The government should prioritize constructing facilities specifically designed for young children in ECE programs. Using infrastructure meant for older children (above six years) does not cater to the developmental and physical needs of younger children. Purpose-built ECE centers can provide age-appropriate learning environments that enhance early childhood development and educational outcomes.

**2. Optimize Class Sizes and Child-Teacher Ratios:** Class sizes and child-teacher ratios are crucial for providing quality ECE. Smaller class sizes and favorable ratios ensure that each child receives adequate attention and support from the teacher. This personalized approach is essential for fostering a conducive learning environment that can lead to better educational results.

**3. Foster Active Partnerships with Parents:** ECE centers should establish active partnerships with parents, addressing their childcare needs and promoting the health and wellbeing of children. Involving parents in the educational process can enhance the learning experience and provide comprehensive support for children’s development. Effective communication and collaboration between ECE centers and families are vital for creating a supportive learning community.

**4. Focus Resources on Disadvantaged Children:** Allocating resources to disadvantaged children is essential for bridging the achievement gap. Recognizing that low income is not the sole risk factor for poor educational outcomes, the government should ensure that ECE centers, especially in rural and remote areas, receive adequate funding. This support can help provide necessary preschool resources and improve access to quality education for all children.

**5. Articulate ECE Policy to Stakeholders:** The government must clearly communicate ECE policies to all stakeholders, including educators, parents, and community members. Enhancing understanding and awareness of ECE’s importance can lead to better implementation of practices and improved program outcomes. Community sensitization efforts are necessary to emphasize the value of early childhood education and garner support for these initiatives.

**6. Deploy Highly Qualified ECE Teachers:** To ensure the effectiveness of ECE programs, the government should employ teachers with specialized training in Early Childhood Education. Highly qualified teachers are better equipped to address the unique developmental needs of young children, implement appropriate pedagogical strategies, and create a stimulating learning environment. Investing in teacher training and professional development is crucial for the success of ECE initiatives.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix i: Informed consent form for the officials in the Ministry of Education**

I have been invited to participate in research about the Implementation of early childhood education in the Education Sector and Skills Plan.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had also the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

**Print Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day/month/year**

## Appendix ii: Interview Guide for the Ministry of Education Officials

MALE \_\_\_\_\_

FEMALE \_\_\_\_\_

1. For how long have you served in your position?
2. As a member of the Directorate of planning of the ESSP (Education and Skills Sector Plan):
  - a. In terms of Implementation of the Policy document, how far did you go?
  - b. What major keys do you think have been achieved where implementation is concerned in terms of access, quality?
  - c. What major keys do you think have been achieved where implementation is concerned in terms equity and efficiency?
  - d. How is the implementation of the ESSP being carried out?
  - e. Would you say it has achieved the key issues in which it set out to achieve under the Early Childhood Education sub sector?
3. I noticed some challenges that were faced in implementation, would you shed more light on that?
  - a. In what way would you classify the challenges you faced? Financial? Human challenges?
  - b. Which main challenges do you feel hindered the implementation of the policy?
4. What effect has the implementation of the ESSP had in formulating other ECE related policies?
5. Going forward, what strategies are being put in place to expedite the implementation of ECE in the country?
  - a. What appropriate requirements have you put in place for the provision of ECE?
  - b. What ways have been introduced in order to ensure monitoring and evaluation is taking place during the implementation of ECE in the ESSP?
6. Lastly, do you have any reflections or general comments you may have about ECE in the ESSP?

**Appendix iii: Document Analysis for the officials**  
**DOCUMENTS**

Revised Education Sector and Skills Plan

Evidence of challenges in implementation

National Budget

UNICEF Report 2023

Education Skills Sector Plan / 2021 National  
Budget

# OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

## Education Sector Performance

**Teacher recruitment and secondary school construction are ongoing efforts in 2024.** The Government plans to hire 5,400 educators, aiming to improve the quality of education by reducing the teacher-pupil ratio. Additionally, a new curriculum framework is proposed to diversify education. Under the Education for All policy, numerous secondary schools have been constructed and completed in recent years. **In 2023, 69 out of 115 unfinished schools were completed, with the remaining 46 scheduled for completion by 2025.** For 2024, the Government targets the construction of 202 additional secondary schools.

Investment in early childhood education (ECE) is crucial for addressing inequality and improving literacy levels.

**While the Government has shown commitment by increasing funds for ECE from K12 million in 2021 to K528 million in 2024, this allocation remains relatively low compared to international recommendations.** The construction of 20 standalone ECE centers in 2024, along with those funded by the World Bank's Zambia Enhanced Early Learning (ZEEL) project, signifies efforts to expand access. However, **the ECE budget as a proportion of the education budget has averaged only 0.4 per cent between 2016 and 2020, falling short of the recommended 10 per cent.** Consequently, many children miss out on early learning opportunities, entering primary education at a disadvantage and lacking adequate preparation for grade one.

## Appendix v: ECE Nutrition Policy- (Excerpt)

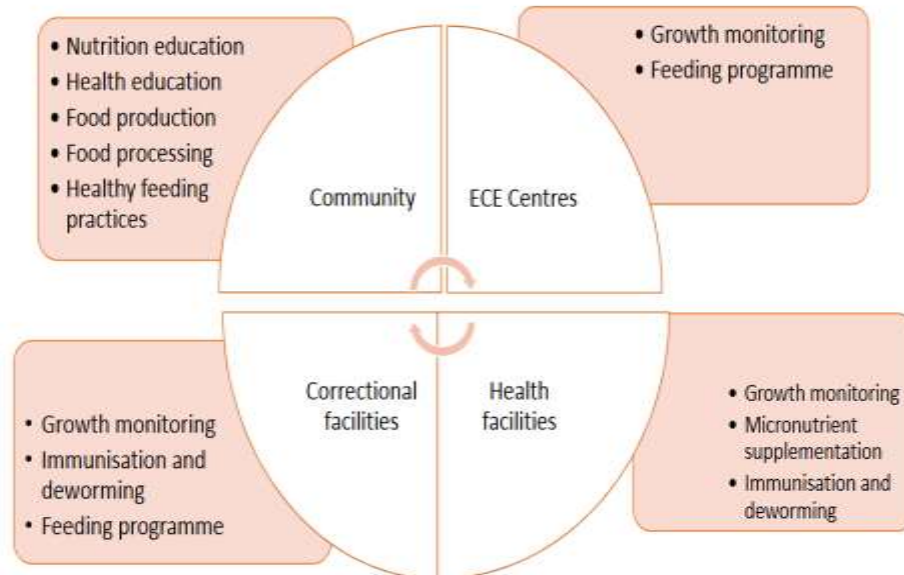
### INTEGRATED LOW-COST ECD MODEL

- **Nutrition-sensitive interventions**
- School feeding programme
- Micronutrient supplementation
- Community sensitization on:
  - Food production and crop diversification
  - Food processing and preservation
  - Healthy feeding practices



## Appendix vi: ECE Implementation Mechanism (Excerpt)

### Implementation mechanism



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## Appendix vii: Government to Prioritise Early Childhood Education (Daily Mail Excerpt)



## Appendix viii: ECD National Strategic Plan, 2017-2021 Logframe



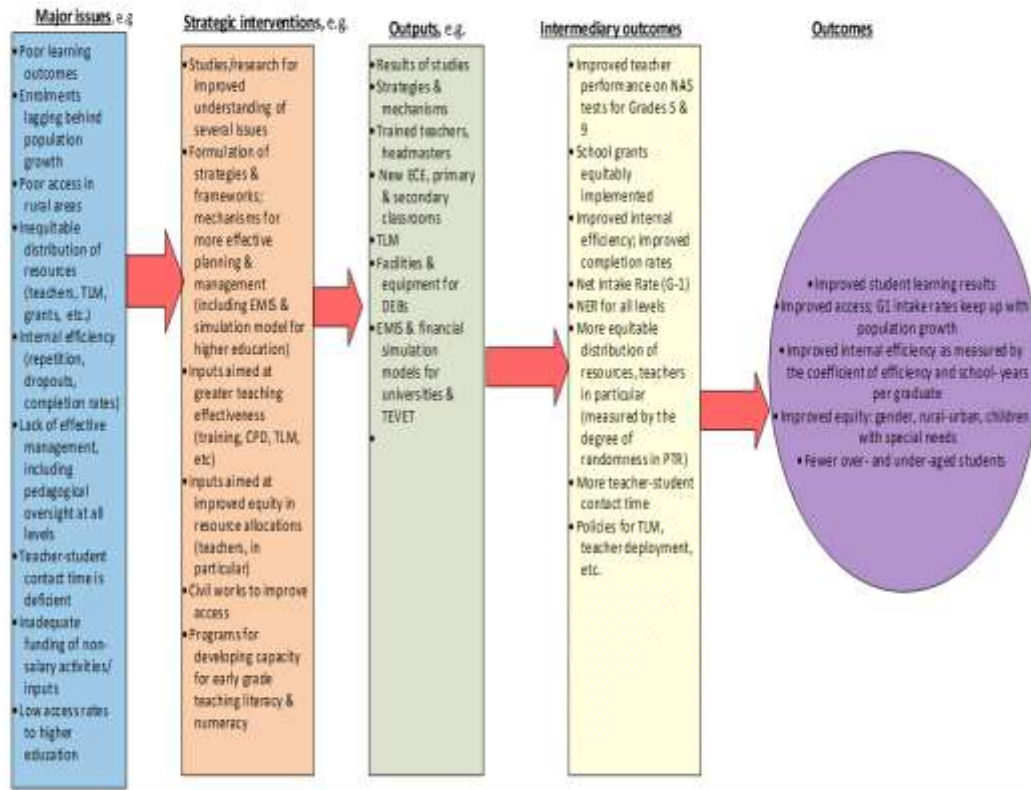
### ECD National Strategic Plan, 2017-2021 Logframe

Impact	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
Children have the foundation necessary to reach their potential in terms of rights to survival, holistic development, protection and participation. Contribute to improved cognition, language, socio-emotional health, education, and employment and labor market outcomes for youth and adults ECD cohorts. Contribute to reduced poverty and inequality and improved life satisfaction and happiness for youth and adult ECD cohorts.		MDI	MICS, LFS, CPA	Strong inter-sectoral collaboration; Improved culture of human rights; Rights of children are respected, protected and fulfilled; Requires resources allocation
		Child poverty rate (head count)		
		Youth poverty rate (head count)		
		Youth employment rate		
		Gini coefficient		
Outcome 0.0	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
	Cross-cutting ECD Supports	ECD Policy Index - ECD Data and M&E systems integrated (MDI in use) - % of ECD programmes embedded (systemic ECD programme co-integration) - ECD service gap - ECD Act - Effective ECD socialisation activities featured - Strong partnerships (public-private) - Effective steering of the ECD Strategic Plan	MICS, Date of entry into force of Act, Annual Budget Estimates NCPC MoE Sub-com+H12	Effective ECD socialisation structures Side effect (embedded vertical organisational culture partners)
Output 0.1	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
	Legal framework for ECD services enacted	ECD Act	Date of entry into force	Political will
	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources</b>
		2017 2018 2019 2020 2021	Ministry Dept/Unit	Financial Human Technical
	0.1.1 Seek Cabinet's approval to develop ECD Act	x		
	0.1.1.1 Establish a committee to develop a draft Early Childhood Act	x		
	0.1.1.2 Conduct meeting with AGM to develop a work plan	x		
	0.1.2 Implement work plan	x		
	0.1.2.1 Conduct national consultation		x	
	0.1.2.2 Submit draft proposal to CEO's MOH-MHD-MOE		x	
	0.1.2.3 Submit draft ECD Act to AGM (joint session)		x	
	0.1.3 Passage of ECD Bill		x	

Output 0.2	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
	Children, aged 0-35 months, receive appropriate stimulation	Percentage of ECD providers trained (certified) in early stimulation of young children	Admin_ECD TWG/NCPC MoE Sub-Com	Strengthened and expanded coverage of early stimulation programmes Parents have positive attitudes and are accepting of stimulation programmes at their homes
	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources</b>
		2017 2018 2019 2020 2021	Ministry Dept/Unit	Financial Human Technical
	0.2.1 Conduct national joint training of trainers in CCD; 12 new trainers	x	x	x
	0.2.2 Conduct 2 joint CCD training for providers per district, per year		x	x
	0.2.3 Conduct 2 district joint CCD training for Community Health Workers per year		x	x
Output 0.3	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
	Children attend quality, regulated daycare and preschool centers	Percentage of day care centers licensed Percentage of preschools licensed	Admin_MOE	ECD Inspectorate established and adequately staffed National standards developed and established
	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources</b>
		2017 2018 2019 2020 2021	Ministry Dept/Unit	Financial Human Technical
	0.3.1 ECD inspection, accreditation and reporting standards defined and legal framework refocused to include essential of licenses		x	x
	0.3.2 Stakeholders and roles public licensed or nationally defined standards		x	
	0.3.3 ECD standards are applied (periodic monitoring & reporting)		x	x
Output 0.4	Logic Narrative	Indicator	MOV	Assumptions/Risk
	0.4: Children with disabilities receive appropriate specialized services	Percentage of children diagnosed with disabilities receiving health, social and educational assistance	Admin_TWIG	Universal screening in place SSN schemes and basic social services effectively targeted and implemented Disabilities registry functional
	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources</b>
		2017 2018 2019 2020 2021	Ministry Dept/Unit	Financial Human Technical
	0.4.1 Design and development of a national disabilities registry (PAMCare based)		x	
	0.4.2 Stakeholders trained in use (entry, referral and outcome) of the registry		x	x
	0.4.3 Disabilities registry roll-out		x	x

## Appendix ix: Excerpt from the Education Sector and Skills Plan

### ESSP's results chain



## Appendix x: Approval of Study



# THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

## DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES

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(+260)-211-290 258/253 952 | E-mail: [director.drugs@unza.zm](mailto:director.drugs@unza.zm) | Website: [www.unza.zm](http://www.unza.zm)

### APPROVAL OF STUDY

13<sup>th</sup> December, 2021

**REF NO. HSSREC-2021-OCT-033**

Rita Nsamya  
The University of Zambia  
P.O. Box 32379  
**LUSAKA**

Dear Ms. Nsamya,

**RE: “THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN THE  
EDUCATION SECTOR AND SKILLS PLAN IN ZAMBIA”**

Reference is made to your submission of the protocol captioned above. The HSSREC resolved to approve this study and your participation as Principal Investigator for a period of one year.

REVIEW TYPE	ORDINARY REVIEW	APPROVAL NO.
		<b>HSSREC-2021-OCT-033</b>
Approval and Expiry Date	Approval Date: 13 <sup>th</sup> December, 2021	Expiry Date: 12 <sup>th</sup> December, 2022
Protocol Version and Date	Version - Nil.	12 <sup>th</sup> December, 2022
Information Sheet,	<input type="checkbox"/> English.	To be provided

Consent Forms and Dates		
Consent form ID and Date	Version - Nil	To be provided
Recruitment Materials	Nil	Nil
Other Study Documents	Questionnaire.	
Number of Participants Approved for Study		

Specific conditions will apply to this approval. As Principal Investigator it is your responsibility to ensure that the contents of this letter are adhered to. If these are not adhered to, the approval may be suspended. Should the study be suspended, study sponsors and other regulatory authorities will be informed.

**Conditions of Approval**

- No participant may be involved in any study procedure prior to the study approval or after the expiration date.
- All unanticipated or Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) must be reported to HSSREC within 5 days.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address.
- All protocol deviations must be reported to HSSREC within 5 working days.
- All recruitment materials must be approved by HSSREC prior to being used.
- Principal investigators are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings. HSSREC will only approve a study for a period of 12 months.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to renew his/her ethics approval through a renewal application to HSSREC.
- Where the PI desires to extend the study after expiry of the study period, documents for study extension must be received by HSSREC at least 30 days before the expiry date. This is for the purpose of facilitating the review process. Documents received within 30 days after expiry will be labelled “late submissions” and will incur a penalty fee of K500.00. No study shall be renewed whose documents are submitted for renewal 30 days after expiry of the certificate.
- Every 6 (six) months a progress report form supplied by The University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee as an IRB must be filled in and submitted to us. There is a penalty of K500.00 for failure to submit the report.
- When closing a project, the PI is responsible for notifying, in writing or using the Research Ethics and Management Online (REMO), both HSSREC and the National Health Research Authority (NHRA) when ethics certification is no longer required for a project.

- In order to close an approved study, a Closing Report must be submitted in writing or through the REMO system. A Closing Report should be filed when data collection has ended and the study team will no longer be using human participants or animals or secondary data or have any direct or indirect contact with the research participants or animals for the study.
- Filing a closing report (rather than just letting your approval lapse) is important as it assists HSSREC in efficiently tracking and reporting on projects. Note that some funding agencies and sponsors require a notice of closure from the IRB which had approved the study and can only be generated after the Closing Report has been filed.
- A reprint of this letter shall be done at a fee.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC by way of an application for an amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address or methodology and methods. Many modifications entail minimal risk adjustments to a protocol and/or consent form and can be made on an Expedited basis (via the IRB Chair). Some examples are: format changes, correcting spelling errors, adding key personnel, minor changes to questionnaires, recruiting and changes, and so forth. Other, more substantive changes, especially those that may alter the risk-benefit ratio, may require Full Board review. In all cases, except where noted above regarding subject safety, any changes to any protocol document or procedure must first be approved by HSSREC before they can be implemented.

Should you have any questions regarding anything indicated in this letter, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at the above indicated address.

On behalf of HSSREC, we would like to wish you all the success as you carry out your study.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. J.I. Ziwa

ACTING CHAIRPERSON; THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH  
ETHICS COMMITTEE - IRB

cc: Director, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies Assistant Director (Research), Directorate of Research and Graduate  
Studies Assistant Registrar (Research), Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies