

# ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE INTEGRATION OF ECD- B CLASS IN RURAL ZIMBABWEAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES.

BY

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## **Abstract**

This survey study sought to investigate the impact of economic crisis on the integration of ECD- B class into the formal primary school in rural Zimbabwe. The researchers focused on the influence of material, financial and human resources. A sample of 18 ECD teachers and 10 administrators was purposively chosen from three conveniently selected primary schools in Zaka rural district, Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Questionnaires, interviews and observations were used in data gathering. The researchers found out that the economic crisis militates against provision of adequate material, financial and human resources for effective integration of ECD-B class into the formal primary school in rural Zimbabwe. Basing on the findings, the researchers recommended that the government should implement policies that allow for social and economic development which eventually promote teacher motivation so as to allow effective integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school.

**Key words:** Economic crisis, ECD-B class, rural areas, material resources, financial resources, human resources

## **Introduction and background to the study**

The government of Zimbabwe inherited a dualistic socio-economic system at independence in 1980. It composed of a white dominating capital intensive modern sector and a largely neglected peasant sector characterized by wide spread poverty and undeveloped infrastructure (Protracted Relief Programmes, 2012:42). Following independence, the government embarked on socialist oriented policies in which priority was given to poverty reduction and provision of social services including education. Like any other form of education Early Childhood Development (ECD) was only accessible to a privileged few during the colonial era. The new post-independence Zimbabwean government realized that pre-school education was essential for the holistic development of children and introduced the then called Early Childhood Education and Care under the ministry of

community development and women affairs (Mavhunga, Madondo and Phiri, 2009:35). Major efforts and researches have been made (Nziramasanga, 1999) and recommendations were made to integrate ECD – B class to the formal primary system to cater for the children of age 4 to 5 years so as to allow for smooth transition into formal education. In 2005, the Zimbabwean government through the ministry of education made a policy pronouncement directing all primary schools to at least attach two ECD classes for children in the three to five categories with the view to integrate ECD into the formal education structure; that is ECD-A and ECD-B. This was done to pursue the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) to increase access to ECD for all the children in the country especially in the rural areas. This was an ambitious programme and its practicability is questionable because of a plethora of challenges which were not visualized at its inception such as material, financial and human resources.

According to Scores, Marongwe, Mavedzenge, Mahenehene, Murimbarimba and Sakume (2010) Zimbabwe's economic decline which started in the late 1990 had cumulative effects which resulted in the complete collapse of state services in 2008. This was the period of the inception of ECD-B especially in rural Zimbabwe. Studies by Mavhunga, Madondo and Phiri (2009) and Robertson (2011) reveal that the rural areas of Zimbabwe are the most affected by poverty. It was therefore the focus of this study to investigate the successes and challenges of the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural Zimbabwe in light of the economic crisis.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study hinged on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory which focuses on how the environmental conditions of the child influence his or her educational opportunities. In this study, major focus was on economic environment and its influence in the integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school with particular reference to material, financial and human resources.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**

Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s put forward the Ecological System Theory to explain that the child's environment and surroundings have a strong bearing on the child's academic performance. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory identified the home, school, work, church, neighbourhood, culture and government as having an influence on the way the child develops (Berk, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (2008) suggests that individual development is a culmination of many direct and indirect influences which either facilitate or impede individual potential. These influences comprise five nested structures; the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and the chronosystems.

The microsystem is the innermost circle in the ecological system theory (Bee and Boyd, 2004). This directly affects the child's development as it comprises all institutions, experiences or influences within the child's development. These include the family, the school, child care centres, religion and peers in the neighbourhood. These elements have a close bearing on the child's social, emotional, physical and moral development.

The second circle in the ecological system theory is the mesosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (2008) this is a set of interrelations between two or more settings. This means that there are supportive linkages that exist between persons or organizations in the microsystem. In this case

what happens in the family or peer group can influence how children respond at school or vice-versa.

The exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the child as an active participant (Berk, 2006). The child is not directly involved but is influenced, for example, the parent's work place or political institutions that make decisions that affect the child's life.

The macrosystem contain the values, laws, ideologies and customs of a particular society (Smith, 1997). The macrosystem influence the interaction within and between meso and micro systems. These forces determine the path the child takes.

The final set in the ecological theory is the chronosystem which focuses on internal and external factors of children. Berk (2006) points out that the internal factors are physiological changes within the child due to age. The external factors include the death of a parent or guardian or change in family structure that can change conditions of the child's life.

The ecological system theory was found applicable as a frame of reference in this study because it focuses on the unfavourable economic climate in a rural geographical location and its bearing on integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school considering material, financial and human resources.

### **Research Problem**

Preschool education is essential for the holistic development of children; hence its implementation is a priority in Zimbabwe as a whole. Unfortunately the rural areas of Zimbabwe suffer from chronic poverty exacerbated by the economic meltdown of 2007 – 8 few years after the inception of ECD-B class in the formal primary education system. It was therefore the purpose of this study to assess the effectiveness of the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school curriculum in light of the economic crisis.

### **Major Research Question**

To what extent do poverty related challenges influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school to rural areas?

### **Research Sub-questions**

To what extent do material needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas?

To what extent do financial needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas?

To what extent do human resources needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas?

### **Research Objectives**

To establish the extent to which material needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas.

To investigate the extent to which financial needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas.

To assess the extent to which human resource needs influence the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas.

### **Motivation for the Study**

Like any other form of education, ECD-B was only accessible to privileged few during the colonial era. Increasing access to education for the previously marginalized African majority, become one of the immediate tasks for the new independent Zimbabwean government, which declared education a basic human right for all its citizen (Mavhunga, Madondo and Phiri, 2009:33).

This culminated in enrolment shot up in both primary and secondary schools. While it is true that many citizens are gaining access to education, it is important to investigate whether they have access to material, financial and human resources for the integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school.

According to Scones et al (2010:26) Zimbabwe's economic decline started in the late 1990s and the cumulative effects of the economic meltdown resulted in the complete collapse of state services in 2008. This study therefore set out to investigate the extent of the damage on the implementation of the ECD-B class whose inception came amid economic crisis in Zimbabwe with specific focus on material, financial and non-material resources.

### **Research Design**

A research design is a strategic plan for a research project, setting out the broad structures and futures of the research (Gray, 2009:581). This study employed the descriptive survey research design. Descriptive Survey research design is a method of investigation which attempts to describe and interpret what exists at present in form of conditions, practices, processes, trends, effects, attributes and beliefs (Sidhu, 2001:107). Specifically, this study employed a cross sectional descriptive survey design in which data are collected at one time only usually for a number of cases (Gray, 2009:575). Typically cross sectional surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared.

The researchers found the cross sectional descriptive survey design more appropriate for this study in the sense that the research involved large scale data gathering process from a wide geographical area which can be generalized to the grand population (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010:257).

### **Population**

Sidhu (2005) defines population as the aggregate or totality of objects or individual regarding which inference are to be made in a sampling study. This study involved 28 participants (ECD Teachers, Teachers in Charge and Heads) in the five conveniently selected schools in Zaka District, Zimbabwe. It is a typical rural and poverty stricken district of Masvingo Province where the majority of its population are extremely poor (Robertson, 2011).

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A sample entails a relatively small number of individuals drawn from a population for inclusion in a study (Bordeus and Abbott, 2088:G8). The researchers used purposive sampling technique in selecting 13 infant class teachers (Grades 1, 2, 3), 5 ECD-B class teachers, 5 teachers in charge and 5 school heads. When using purposive sampling technique, the researcher has to pick up only such

sample which is relevant to the study and leave out all others so that the purpose of the study is not defeated (Sidhu, 2001:265). In this study, the researcher involved ECD-B and infant class teachers for the reason that they were directly involved in the teaching of young learners. Teachers in charge at infant level and school heads were also purposively selected on the basis that they were involved in the administration aspect in the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school.

### **Data Collection Methods**

This study employed questionnaire for teachers (18), interviews for teachers in charge and heads (10) and observation as techniques for data collection. The items for the questionnaire, interview and observation schedules were drawn from the three research questions spelt out earlier in this report.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data gathered was subjected to qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statement about relationship and underlying themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:154). Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2010:463) report that qualitative data analysis is a rigorous and logical process through which data are given meaning. Raw data have no meaning; the interpretive act brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader through the written report. Qualitative data analysis therefore transforms data into findings (Patton 2002 cited in Marshall and Rossman 2006). The researcher gathered overwhelming data in the study. The process of drawing or extracting findings from the gathered data is referred to as data analysis.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study appear in three categories in which answers to research questions are provided. These categories comprise the impact of material, financial and human resources in the integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school in rural areas.

### **MATERIAL NEEDS AND THE INTEGRATION OF ECD-B CLASS IN THE FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN RURAL AREAS**

Teachers and administrators were asked to provide their views on the influence of material needs on the integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas. All the 28 (100%) participants lamented that shortage of material resources militate against effective integration of ECD-B into the formal primary school. The major problem cited was that of lack of infrastructure like classrooms. It is important to note that young children do not only need just a mere classroom for learning but safe and rich environment for they learn best through play. The mere classrooms or 'tree classrooms' they were given were found to be either overcrowded or hazardous to children's play. Very few or no toys for children's play were observed in most schools, a factor that deprived young learners from social, emotional, cognitive and psychomotor development.

### **FINANCIAL NEEDS AND THE INTEGRATION OF ECD-B CLASS INTO THE FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN RURAL AREAS**

All administration and fifteen teachers indicated that schools and parents lack adequate funds to integrate ECD-B effectively in the formal primary school. The respondents pointed out that there was great resistance from rural parents to pay development levy for the construction of ECD-B block as well as the play centres. Those whose parents were reminded to pay tuition fees simply responded by withdrawing their children from school. The respondents indicated that some parents viewed ECD-B as wasted money and time since at this level according to them, the young children

are not taught what they perceive as numeracy and literacy skills. The researcher also noted that most of the para-professional teaching ECD-B class were not on government payroll but were relying on the levies paid by parents. Resistance to pay by the parents implied that the teachers were demotivated to carry all their duties effectively.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDS AND THE INTEGRATION OF ECD-B CLASS IN THE FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOL.**

The researcher observed that most of ECD-B classes were manned by Para-professionals while the infant grades were manned by qualified ECD teachers. Such paraprofessional had a challenge in issues like the curriculum and knowledge of child development which are important in teaching at ECD-B. The 10 administrators averred that those with degrees in ECD shun rural areas for well resources schools leaving most rural schools with under-qualified ECD-B teachers.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Zimbabwe Early Childhood Development policy was originating from a discriminatory and economically weakened background with limited access to the majority of children particularly those in rural farming and mining contexts. The five programme components such as health, nutrition, water sanitation, education, and child protection are all embedded in the various resources such as financial, material and human which are challenges in rural primary schools.

At most rural schools in Zaka have children who do not have appropriate learning space. It is a common sight to find children learning under trees or in small rooms with limited ventilation. As a result these classes are under resourced .If implementers lack resources to do an effective job then effective implementation of ECD-B would remain a mirage. The other challenge is mainly the no participation of the government in the provision of a budget of materials required to deliver appropriate implementation and support parents' effort. Too much is left in the hands of the rural parents who swim in poverty.

The programme kick started without qualified personnel. The fact that the majority of caregivers at ECD centres in rural areas are paraprofessionals tends to dilute the quality of care given to children at these centres. Appropriately qualified teachers are being trained at teachers' colleges and universities, so at present the programme relies mostly on paraprofessionals.

Economic crises militate against the provision of adequate material, financial and human resources to effectively integrate ECD-B class into the formal primary school especially in rural areas. This resulted in failure to provide safe classrooms, play centres, toys and other learning opportunities for child development. Economic crises also resulted in poor funding and retention of qualified personnel for effective integration of ECD-B class in the formal primary school in rural areas.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS STUDY**

- All children covered under the primary school system including ECD-B should be treated the same. The government should not discriminate funding modalities against ECD-B children by demanding that SDS's fund ECD programmes while it provides for funds and loans for the other sections of the education system.
- The government should inject resources to transform the rural early childhood development programme. The programme is not meant to rely on poor communities to fund the ECD-B programmes, it will not transform despite the existence of a good policy.
- The poor communities have not been able to improve their own access to education .and if the funding strategies remain the same, no significant improvement will show in the

integration of ECD-B in the formal primary school curriculum. The government has to significantly contribute through grants- in- aid and redistribution of resources to those communities that are not able.

- The government should implement policies that promote social and economic development and eventually teacher motivation.
- Whilst expecting aid from the government, the schools should tirelessly seek for funding so as to improve infrastructure for ECD in order to enhance effective teaching and learning
- The parents should be sensitized on the importance of their support in ECD so that they can cooperate in various ways in integrating ECD-B to the formal primary school.
- Para-professionals should be encouraged to undertake professional qualifications in ECD so as to increase the number of qualified personnel in the area.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

Other researchers should carry a similar study in comparable rural areas to test the generalizability of these findings to all rural settings in Zimbabwe.

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