

Risk factors affecting the implementation of early childhood education in Lunte district in Zambia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the risk factors affecting the implementation of early childhood Education (ECE) in selected primary schools in Lunte district of Northern province in Zambia. The study used descriptive survey design to collect data. The research instruments used were interview guides, a literacy test administered to pupils and document analysis. The researchers used purposive sampling to select the schools and the respondents. The research was conducted in five primary school sites that also catered for pre-school education. A sample of 24 respondents comprising three [3] head teachers, three [3] deputy heads, three [3] senior teachers, ten primary school teachers teaching at lower primary section (Grades 1-4), five pre-school teachers (2 trained and 3 untrained) were picked by virtue of having taught at the lower primary section (Grades 1-4) and were therefore deemed to have relevant knowledge concerning ECE. The findings were analyzed by qualitative approach. The main findings were that various factors hindered the effective implementation of ECE; these included lack of infrastructure and teaching and learning materials, long distances to ECE centres, poor qualifications of early childhood teachers, and inadequacy of ECE teachers. The authors concluded that current policies and practices still lacked the necessary resolve and action by stakeholders especially government, to effectively implement ECE. They recommended that in order to facilitate service delivery in ECE for the personal development of children at a tender age, government should prioritise ECE through increased funding, establishment of appropriate structures and training of ECE teachers and school managers.

Keywords: *early childhood education, education, professional development, risk factors, service delivery*

Background to the study

Educational institutions like primary schools are important agents of socialisation in society. Schools are expected to play an active role, in preparing children for socialisation and inculcating knowledge and skills needed by the society for economic development. Zambia can achieve economic development if early childhood is effectively implemented. This is so because early childhood provides the foundation for good performance at grade one and other levels of education. In this regard, the national education policy *Educating our future National Policy on Education* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 7) states that, “early childhood education is an organized form of educational provision, for children between the ages of three and six.” The Ministry of Education in Zambia argues that ECE ushers children from birth to six years into the world of education with much of the learning taking place through play. Early childhood education is transitional between learning in the home and learning in the school.

The strength of any building or structure depends on the foundation and footing given to

it. If the foundation and footing are perfect, the building will be strong and last long. Poor foundation and footing of a building leads to the collapse of such a building. So, it is with the early childhood education. The importance of a solid foundation in education is undeniable (David, 2013). Early childhood education is where the education foundation of children is laid. Proper education foundation is beneficial to a sustainable future. Poor performance in the higher levels of the academic ladder can be traced from this foundation level. The social, political, economic, religious well-being of the future generation lies in the education foundation its children attend. The focus of education is the child who has a future in hand to transform the system for the betterment of nations and the world at large. Early childhood education is a branch of education theory which relates to the teaching of young children formally and informally up to the age of six. It refers to the all-round development of a child’s personality. Early childhood education has a global scope, caring for and educating young children, it has

always been an essential part of human society in as far as human evolution and the current regime of educated force managing education systems today are concerned.

In Nigeria, Nkechi (2012) identified ECE as the cornerstone for the child's development and the bedrock of the Nigerian education system. There is need to maintain early childhood education because this is where the entire education system is anchored on. Nkechi explained that there is need for good early childhood education to help children to develop their full potentials. Once a child misses the early stages, it is usually difficult for the learner to get back to the basics. Hence, more emphasis should be given to this form of education. Early childhood education sharpens a child's cognitive domain through rhythms and songs while playing on the slides and swings helps in physical development and build their muscles. In the 1990s, the Government of Tanzania started developing and including ECE in its National Education Curriculum (Seif, 1991). The purposes of ECE Centres were to provide care and supervision for children while their mothers were working in *shambas* for wages or participating in development activities, teaching cleanliness and good social habits. Other purposes were to develop cooperative tendencies in children through play games and other group activities, involving children in imaginative activities, playful encouragement of loyalty to the Nation and preparing them for formal education by introducing them to numeration, reading activities and pictures, and to provide nutrition. The need of ECE increased as a result of the development of education and other human development activities as well as expansion of primary schools.

In Zambia, the government calls for ECE implementation in rural districts like Lunte, has been accepted by most education practitioners. The Minister of General Education pronounced the implementation of ECE in Zambia in the year 2013 (Zambia Daily Mail, 13th February, 2013). Despite government efforts and call to introduce ECE in rural schools, ECE has not produced the desired outcomes in Lunte district. It is for this reason that the researchers aimed to investigate the risk factors affecting the implementation of ECE in the selected primary schools of Lunte district. The problem investigated in this study was that if not handled, risk factors can affect the learning outcomes of ECE. To achieve the

above purpose, the study was guided by the following research question: *What risk factors affect the implementation of ECE in selected primary schools of Lunte district?* In order to address this question, the researchers adopted the cognitive development theory by Jean Piaget (1936) as the lens through which to interrogate the risk factors affecting the implementation of ECE in selected primary schools of Lunte district, Zambia. Piaget begun researching on the reasons behind incorrect answers children were giving to standardized tests. He then concluded that traditional ideas that children were empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, were incorrect. He believed children were active builders of knowledge and little scientists who construct theories of their own world. Piaget believed that children learn in four stages. These are sensory motor stage, this is between 0-2 years. At this stage children learn primarily through their senses. The second stage is pre-operational stage which is 2-6 years, where a child learns to use words and symbols like numbers. The third stage is the concrete stage which is between 6-11 years where children understand how to perform mental tasks like Mathematics. The fourth and final stage is the formal operations stage which is between 11 years and adulthood. Piaget believed that children learn complex and abstract reasoning. ECE provides a constructive learning environment, early in the life stage education of children, so as to provide effective development of a child. This helps to explain how children develop within the context of their world.

In this process of learning, a teacher should serve as a guide, rather than as an instructor. The teacher should be encouraging children to make mistakes and asking questions to aid learning and growth. Children must learn from their peers. Once children learn from their mistakes, they develop knowledge about the world through trial and error. This acts as scaffolding in the children's development. On balance, ECE is transitional between learning in the home and learning in the school. In the classroom situation, children socialise freely which enables them to learn from their friends. This platform provides learning through play hence, children reach distinct stages in development and become capable of logical thought. They are able to think and classify several objects in the classroom and think abstractly, and are able to classify the colours and give hypothesis, hence retaining knowledge. Teachers should take an

active mentoring role towards young children instead of pushing information at them while they sit and listen passively; they should share the learning experiences and encourage children to take an active role in the learning process.

Literature review

The concept of ECE was brought into focus as the nineteenth century began, by Johann Pestalozzi. Working with young children in Switzerland for thirty years and through his theorising, writing and teaching, Pestalozzi became one of the famous and influential champions of ECE in Europe (Colvin & King, 2018; Ldiz & Ahmetoglu, 2017; Pound, 2016). We observe that Pestalozzi's first concern was that of care and education of the poor; most of his students were poor. He felt that education was the key to improving lives of the underprivileged and the neglected children in society (Montessori, 1972). Drawing on Pestalozzi's views, Erden (2010, p. 13) asserted that 'good quality of early education has long lasting effects on the children's later life productivity for the society' and 'that ECE is particularly beneficial for children coming from low socio-economic background.' Quality ECE for children in poverty areas is an effective community investment. Quality early childhood development and school readiness programmes boost academic achievement and social competence for children attending quality elementary and secondary schools (Botta, 2009). The importance of children's environments in order to maintain development in children's education lies in ECE. The effects of early intervention diminish if no adequate environmental supports are in place to maintain the child's positive attitudes, behaviour and to encourage continued learning. Families must recognise and build on cultural beliefs, traditions and practices in order to achieve desired outcomes (Ngode, 2014).

The literature highlights a plethora of challenges associated with the implementation of ECE. In her review of the literature on the subject, Erden (2010) established the absence of comprehensive infrastructure, low levels of teacher qualification and negative attitudes of parents towards ECE as some of the challenges in the implementation of ECE. Another review of several studies by Shoemaker (2005) shows that the family structure in terms of single-parent families and step-parent families have a

significant effect on the behaviour of a child. A key argument in the literature is that because of the economic and financial burden that single-parents endure, single-parents have to work extra hard to cope with the financial, psychological and physical responsibilities that come with single parenthood. Thus, as a result, this leaves little time for the parent to attend to the child's needs and attention to educational matters. The lack of economic and psychological support that the single parent goes through is believed to lead to an unhealthy relationship with their children and less time to discipline them. In Kenya specifically, Murundu et al. (2010) found that lack of suitable teaching and learning resources, inappropriate diet, understaffing, inappropriate medium of instruction, teacher-pupil ratio, among others, hampered the effective implementation of the curriculum in ECDE centres. Further, in the Kenyan early childhood institutions, teacher quality was generally said to be low. This, in addition to lack of supervision to ensure the maintenance of standards, led to increase in the numbers of ECE institutions in the country which offered poor ECE services (Anyikwa & Obidike, 2012). In Ghana, Ntumi (2016) identified a lot of challenges in implementing the early childhood curriculum that ranged from failure by most pre-school teachers to understand the early childhood curriculum, inadequate teaching and learning materials to help them implement the early childhood curriculum, and lack of parental involvement in the education of their children.

In Asia a study conducted by Barnett (1995), identified the curriculum as one of the problems affecting pre-schools. A curriculum is the driving force in which any education programme can successfully be implemented. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children's development and learning, experiences through which they 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. In Nigeria, resource inadequacy was singled out as a challenge to the implementation of quality ECE, leading to the Nigerian federal government, through the Ministry of Education (1987) stipulating that a playground, furniture appropriate for different ages and sizes, book racks, toy storage and a large table with drawers for teacher's use should be provided in every classroom. Similarly, in Zambia,

resource inadequacy has been identified as a factor that has seriously affected the effective implementation of ECE. From the review of literature, it is clear that implementation of ECE in different parts of the world is affected by various factors largely bordering on inadequate teacher preparation, resource inadequacy and negative parental attitudes towards the education of their children at preschool level.

Methodology

The research design used was a case study design. The case study was used in this study as it provided an easy to use design for the in-depth examination and discussion of risk factors affecting the implementation of ECE in Lunte district, Northern Province. This design was used with the intention of conducting an in-depth investigation aimed at getting selected stakeholders' views, attitudes, and perceptions concerning the subject under investigation. The research used qualitative methods of data collection so as to have a deep insight in the research problem through narrative and verbal data rather than by a scaled, calibrated measurement as would be the case with quantitative research designs (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Using this design, interviews and tests were conducted to collect primary data while secondary data was collected from assorted documents. The qualitative approach helped the researchers to solicit views and perceptions of participants about the risk factors of ECE implementation in Lunte district.

The target population for this study comprised head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, and pre-school teachers. The researchers used purposive sampling to select the schools because they have been implementing ECE since its inception in 2015. Education administrators in the selected schools were picked purposively, by virtue of their positions to provide information so that the research question was answered. This approach is most applicable in small populations which are difficult to access due to their closed nature and inaccessible professions (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The research was conducted in five primary school sites. A sample of 24 participants who were available were able to provide information on the research topic were picked by virtue of having taught at the lower primary section (Grades 1-4) and were therefore deemed to have relevant knowledge concerning early childhood

education. The sample comprised three (3) head teachers, three (3) deputy heads, three (3) senior teachers, ten primary school teachers teaching at lower primary section (Grades 1-4), and five (5) pre-school teachers- two (2) trained and three (3) untrained. Considering that this was a purely qualitative study, the numbers of participants for the different subpopulations were conveniently determined. Twenty-two of the respondents had worked for more than 2 years. In terms of qualifications, the majority of the respondents (12) were diploma holders, or certificate holders (8). The rest were one degree holder and three untrained pre-school teachers.

The instruments used in collecting data were an interview guide, a test and document analysis. The school staff responded to interview guides and pupils answered literacy test questions. The basis for the use of interview guide was to find out the expression and views of the participants about the ECE implementation. Face-to-face interaction provided the platform for the researcher to clarify any possible challenge and also created the opportunity to interact with the respondents. The tests administered were in three categories namely: working out simple mathematics questions, writing spellings and reading some words. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Generally, the collected data were coded, sorted, grouped and identified so as to see the related parts that corresponded to the research objectives and questions. The first step in analysing the collected data was transcribing of the recorded views from the interviews and test results. The data was then edited and coded into categories and themes related to the research question to make meaning out of the participants' responses from the one-on-one interviews through three stages namely: assembling of the data in which researchers put together all the data obtained in the field, coding of the data in which the obtained data was refined and categorised into more logical themes that best explained the studied issue and lastly assigning meanings and interpretation to each category ready for a discussion and reporting the outcome of the study. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the credibility and authenticity were ensured through collection of verbatim statements from the participants. Further, the researchers triangulated the data collected through different methods from various participants thereby reducing the risk of a biased

conclusion to the findings of the study.

Research ethical clearance was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University and appropriate permission obtained from the District Education Board secretary, and the head teachers of the five selected schools to carry out data collection and we also explained to the participants the purpose of the study. In addition, school administrators from the selected schools were consulted on the convenient venues for data collection, so as to save time of the participants and travelling costs for the researchers. All the stakeholders were informed well in advance about the study. The researchers personally conducted the interviews with all the participants. This was after the researchers had explained the purpose of the research and provided the guidelines to the participants. The targeted staff members for the interviews were assured of confidentiality of the information they were giving and encouraged to give fair and objective answers. The data collection was done within three weeks. Each participant received a letter outlining the research purpose

and a consent form for their record, as well as the consent form which the researchers kept. Furthermore, protection of participants' anonymity and confidentiality that information obtained would not be disclosed to any third parties or indeed be used for any other purpose other than academic work as initially intended was explained and participants got assured of it. The names of participants were not mentioned. The researchers' self-disclosure to all stakeholders in the study was prioritised. Consent was obtained from all in writing and letters outlining the researchers' input obtained from the respondents.

Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the findings. The research question of the current study was *what are the risk factors affecting the implementation of early childhood education in selected primary schools of Lunte district*. Table 1, shows a summary of the challenges faced in the implementation of ECE.

Table 1: Teachers' and head teachers' perceptions of the challenges in the implementation of ECE in Lunte district

Challenges	Frequencies
No existing infrastructure for ECE	24
Inadequacy of furniture	20
Lack of ECE programme awareness	19
Long distances for children going to school	17
No recreational facilities	17
Irregular and inadequate funding from government	16
Lack of community participation	13
No supervision and monitoring	13
Community poverty	12
Poor sanitation	9
Inadequately trained preschool personnel	7

The study established that the lack of resources was a major risk factor which affected the implementation of ECE. This has resulted into ineffective ECE implementation in all the selected primary schools of Lunte district. The study established that poor funding particularly, in the education sector is a major risk factor in the implementation of the ECE programmes. In response to the question on the challenges affecting the implementation of ECE, 17 of the 24 participants said ECE received poor funding from the government which resulted into dilapidated and poorly designed infrastructure for ECE. One head teacher said that *"my school has no funds to*

run such programmes for it demands much." In the Zambian education system, the ECE sector has experienced a decline in funding. Kelly (1996) states that the education sector in Zambia has experienced a continuing decline in public funding for education and training. Pre-school, primary and secondary education suffered particularly during the recession and economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s. Respondents indicated that poor funding to education negatively affected the teacher-pupil ratio, and the provision of infrastructure which in turn would have a high negative effect on the quality of the output. This view is supported by Browne et al.

(2009). Since no educational policy or programme however excellent, can be effectively implemented without adequate funding, ECE should be fully funded so that all the materials needed in the implementation of ECE were available. In acknowledgement of this, the Ministry of Education (1996) through its policy document *Educating our Future; National Policy on Education* undertook to set aside resources so as to implement early childhood education.

The Ministry of Education (1996, p. 8) states that, “the ministry will also continue to dedicate some of its resources to this level of education through the training of pre-school teachers, cooperation in the monitoring of the pre-school standards, assistance in curriculum formation and the design of materials and support for the development of the policy guidelines.” The funding problem triggers other factors in ECE implementation. Facilities available in the schools affect the implementation of ECE. Stemming out of the inadequate funding, twenty of the participants pointed out the lack of infrastructure as a huge challenge. Regarding the lack of infrastructure, one head teacher said that “*the government is not reconsidering the negative impact it has put us on, pupils are using toilets which are not conducive.*” Poor sanitation such as poor toilet facilities was a constant concern due to overcrowding of pupils. For instance, one combined school (a school running from pre-school to senior secondary), had about 983 pupils against 8 toilets. This was reported as a huge challenge, because the preschool children are still young children who need great care and attention in terms of cleanliness. And yet there is no running water in these rural schools. At most, there is just nearby water points. Most of the wells and boreholes in the rural areas do not last long and become dysfunctional especially during the dry season. Learners have to fetch water from far away streams which are not dependable in terms of sanitation. Furthermore, the other head teacher said that “*pupils have few learning hours due to the school infrastructure not being accommodative.*” Clearly, ECE requires well-built recreation facilities such as good play parks. This is so because education programmes at this level are characterised by play.

Kelly (1996) and Ministry of Education (1996) agree that there is resource inadequacy, that is, a great shortage of desks, few teaching and reading materials, bare classrooms, broken

or faded chalkboards. The infrastructure is dilapidated, temporary, dark and unsafe structures with the leaking roofs, broken windows and no doors. This affects the effective implementation of ECE. The shortages of facilities in the early childhood centres pose a challenge in the effective implementation of ECE. Toilets should be well built and clean to prevent the outbreak of diseases. Additionally, five of the teachers pointed out shortage of teaching and learning materials as a challenge in ECE implementation. This was the reason why many developed nations make provision for the funding of the services for their pre-schools. When resources are available for ECE programmes at pre-school level, it helps the teacher to nurture and support the development of young children, and to successfully implement the curriculum. Overall, according to Chukwbikem (2013), the quantity and quality of resources available for any educational programme are more often than not likely to determine how well the school system implements any of its programmes. Resources like finances, materials and human resource are essential for the successful implementation of any ECE programme. This agrees with Kulbir (1996) who records that poor facilities in the early childhood centres makes it very difficult to effectively implement the early childhood education. There is therefore need to involve all the partners that are networking to provide ECE for the Zambian child. If all the stakeholders can work in collaboration towards providing resources for ECE at pre-primary school level, the issue of lack of resources can be overcome.

Eighteen of the respondents revealed that there was lack of inspection and supervision by district officials thereby posing another challenge in the implementation of ECE. It was observed that district education standards officials did not visit rural and remote schools regularly to inspect how ECE was being implemented. This contributed to making it very challenging for ECE to be implemented effectively. No educational plan however excellent it may be can effectively be implemented if the school inspection and supervision is ineffective. This lack of supervision and monitoring was in part attributed to lack of trained inspectors who had the knowledge of ECE. The importance of trained ECE standards officers is highlighted by a study conducted in India by Kulbir (1996) which revealed that, inspectors and supervisors

as standards officers are the key figures in the reformation of classroom practice because they provide professional leadership to educational workers so as to improve their work and give them correct direction to promote growth of all teachers by providing them guidance. The educational standards of a school are dependent on the work of standards officers who help to clarify education goals. Researchers contend that the situation in Zambia is made worse by the fact that some school managers do not have adequate in-service teacher training on pre-school education. Mwanza (2005) linked teacher disaffection, lack of commitment and low morale to ineffective management practices. She argues that effectiveness in schools is born out of effective leadership since the positive management practices of trained school managers will have a positive effect on the work environment. Mwanza (2005) and the Ministry of Education (1996) further argue that school managers that offer help and pedagogical support to teachers aid the goal of the Ministry of Education in its quest to provide ECE to every pupil with the overall goal of producing well-educated persons who are not only useful to society but are also adequately prepared for the furtherance of their education that leads to self-supporting workers.

In tandem with the above views, Nwagbara (2003) and Ogunsaju (2006) have identified supervision as an indispensable management key of any organization or organizational programme. This then means that supervision should be regular and an integral part of ECE programmes, so that the goals may be achieved. Supervision needs to be tailored towards constructive criticism and guidance so as to develop a sense of confidence and competence in teachers, thereby leading to improvement in ECE delivery. Regular and appropriate supervision in ECE would help in evaluating the programme as well as in decision-making processes (Sooter, 2013). In agreement, Mwanakatwe (2013) argues that the quality of the inspectorate determines the efficiency of the teaching force. Consequently, supervision is necessary to provide both constructive criticism and guidance to teachers. It also helps develop a sense of confidence and competence in teachers, which all leads to improvement in service delivery. However, this position does not agree with the finding established by Wai-Yum (2003 cited in Erden, 2010) who reported that frequent supervision and intervention of

the school principal in classroom teaching actually created problems for teachers. Nonetheless, this situation clearly refers to undue interference in the classroom operations of the teacher as opposed to routine supervision and monitoring that is undoubtedly desirable in any school setting.

In addition, twenty of the respondents revealed that implementation of ECE was affected by economic hardships. Poverty was identified as the single most important barrier effecting ECE best practices. There are strong reasons to think that families and their economic circumstances in particular, influence both parents' and children's education and behaviours. For instance, one head teacher said, "*the rural set up has more challenges economically because some grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren while they are not productive*". And those children were said to have either one or lost both parents. All the twenty four teachers blamed parental failure in the form of parental ignorance about ECE and limited education background. Community participation in the education of their children was found to be very low. This meant those communities did not embrace and appreciate the ECE programme. The school and the community cannot function in isolation. Once such a situation exists it will mean the breakdown of the system in the running of school programmes like ECE. It was found that parents and family were the first people that pupils get to know and what these parents teach them or expose them to is generally adopted to be the best for them. If the environment provided by the parents is wonderful, then there is hope of providing posterity with assets that they would sustain. This study clearly showed the need for parents to give support to their children by sending them to ECE centres and to meet their teachers regularly. Cisneros-Chernour et al. (2000) revealed that pre-school teachers had problems in implementing the ECE curriculum due to the fact that parents believe in early childhood education as a playing ground for the children not as a learning setting. This observation was also made by the MoE in Zambia (Ministry of Education, 1996). This attitude of parents results in poor relationship between the school and home collaboration. Parents are not fully involved in the pre-school provision. They are not willing to help their children in reading, homework and payments. Meanwhile, twenty one teachers expressed the view that such

programmes were tailored for the well to do families in urban areas and were not meant for each and every community. Seventeen of the teachers blamed this on family instability in homes.

According to a study conducted in America by Webster-Stratton et al. (2008), the teaching experience of pre-school teachers and their capacity to implement the ECE curriculum practically can be affected negatively by inadequate inclusive and responsive parenting programmes. We conclude therefore that parental involvement is the best possible means of implementing ECE. The influence on the development and education of the child of the communities in which children come from and live cannot be overemphasised. The neighbourhood is an important context, because it is the place where a wide array of peer and other social interactions take place and where children have access to basic institutional resources. As revealed in the research findings, the community must be fully involved in the implementation of ECE. This would help parents and teachers to work in collaboration and overcome feelings of discomfort by parents with a low standard of education level to interact with teachers and school officials. Another of the challenges that has affected the ECE implementation was inadequate professional development leading to ill-trained personnel who lacked knowledge about the preschool curriculum. The teacher holds the key to successful implementation of any educational programme. Three of the teachers specifically identified lack of in-service teacher training and lack of professional qualifications. Thirteen of the teachers said teachers felt “low” teaching children below the age of six hence they had no interest to train in ECE. Some ECE teachers trained in different pedagogies because they were trained to teach at either primary or secondary school level. This worsened the lack of interest, enthusiasm and commitment to ECE thereby creating another risk factor in the implementation of early childhood education. And yet the preschool teachers are very important in the sense that they lay the foundation of children from their child psychology that they have studied. This is why the pre-school teachers should be given constant professional development. Inadequate preparation of the ECE teachers leads to failure to interpret and implement the content curriculum (Erden, 2010). But, according to the study, it was

revealed that, the type of in-service training pre-school teachers received was not from the field of ECE. In the teaching profession the duties can only be effectively executed if there is total commitment and devotion by teachers. If there is no devotion among teachers, they will be working just because teaching is their only way of surviving; they will not be inspired to do the work.

An assortment of other reasons was advanced for the ineffective delivery of ECE in Lunte district. Twenty of the teachers and all the head teachers said geographical location and long distances from home to ECE Centres has been an issue to many children in the schools under study. Rural and parents living in remote areas cannot manage to send pre-school children to schools, because of long distances. In some areas in Lunte district, people are too scattered for all to be within walking distance of a school. Some of the children who entered preschool were too young to walk long distances, and in most communities of the schools there is no public transport. As already indicated, most parents are poor and therefore cannot afford to supply all the needs for their children including transport. Besides, parents fear to subject their children to crossing rivers, mountainous roads, and thick forests. This led to irregular attendance of pupils at the five ECE centres available in Lunte district schools. Swollen rivers and hazardous routes make it difficult to attend school. Consistent with the findings of this study, the MoE (2005) acknowledges the many challenges that rural and remote schools face such as lack of electricity, suitable buildings, safe drinking water, and satisfactory living conditions, including accommodation for teachers. All these factors combined with the distance from the main road and markets have a negative impact on the implementation of ECE. During month ends, teachers abandon the schools to get their salaries and stock up with necessities. This reduces on teaching and learning time. This is a very big challenge in the effective implementation of ECE.

Conclusion

This section gives the conclusions of the study and corresponding recommendations. The purpose of this paper was to discuss the risk factors in the implementation of ECE in Lunte district. The authors established that various factors hindered the effective implementation of early childhood education. These factors included lack of infrastructure and teaching

and learning materials, long distances to ECE centres, poor quality ECE services, poor qualifications of early childhood teachers, and inadequacy of ECE teachers. The paper argues that the earliest years of a child's life are key to success in school life. The importance of a solid foundation in the educational development of a child, cannot be overemphasised. Their early experiences in the homes, in the neighbourhood, in childcare, and in early education programmes affect how successful they will be later in life. Therefore, the provision of quality ECE service delivery in rural areas like Lunte is imperative if a good start and an effective foundation that promotes their personal development are to be laid. So, a thorough knowledge of how education is being handled at this level is essential so that it can positively affect the goal of the MoE with regard to ECE to enable every pupil become a well-educated person who is useful to society and is adequately prepared for the furtherance of his or her education for becoming a self-supporting worker.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings on risk factors affecting the implementation of ECE in the selected primary schools of Lunte district, the following recommendations are made:

- Government through the MoE should adequately and effectively provide resources to the ECE sector and make ECE universal in schools.
- The MoE should have a specialised Directorate and Standards Officers who are trained in the field of ECE so that there is proper understanding of ECE with consistent monitoring and supervision for effective implementation of ECE to ensure minimum standards for early childhood education centres in the country:
- The MoE should train specialist teachers in Early Childhood Education and ensure the professional development of ECE teachers and school managers from time to time.

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