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A NODE FOR AFRICAN THOUGHT

**EXPLORING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING
THROUGH EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE RURAL
VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Ramabulana Lufuno, hereby declare that this dissertation on “**Exploring Early Childhood Development teacher training through Expanded Public Works Programme in the rural Vhembe East District**”, which is submitted to the University of Zululand in fulfilment of the academic requirement for the award of Doctor of Education, is my work, both in conception and execution. I also declare that the work has not been presented for the award of any degree at any other university. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged both in text and in the list of references.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father, Pastor Muvhango William Mpeiwa Mulaudzi (Netshimbupfe), who so much desired to see me acquiring this qualification when he was still alive. Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus far, the Lord has helped me.

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Education's training for Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers at centre-based sites, such as creches and pre-schools, is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes for children nearing school age. This training is facilitated by the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), a government initiative aimed at poverty alleviation through job creation and training, with ECD as a focus area. This study investigates the effectiveness of ECD teacher training provided by the Department of Education through EPWP in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa, underpinned by Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Employing a qualitative research design, this study captures the lived experiences of ECD teachers. Data were gathered through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with ten purposively sampled teachers who received EPWP-facilitated training. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was utilized for data analysis, organizing findings into thematic categories. The training was generally valued by participants; however, several challenges were identified in the implementation of the ECD curriculum. These included disruptions in daily activities, insufficient support from supervisors, and inadequate infrastructure. Additionally, it was observed that many teachers lacked essential resources such as lesson plans and assessment documents, which are critical for the effective application of training and curriculum delivery. Despite the appreciation for the training, there is a significant gap in the practical implementation of the ECD curriculum among trained teachers. The study concludes that while EPWP's involvement in training is beneficial, there are critical areas of support and resource allocation that need addressing to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. It is recommended that ECD teachers obtain higher-level qualifications (NQF level 6 and above) before commencing work in ECD sites. Further suggestions include more focused training on the National Curriculum Framework, increased parental involvement, the development of supporting documentation, and the establishment of an effective remuneration structure for ECD teachers to improve curriculum implementation and overall teaching quality.

Keywords: Centre-based sites, Early Childhood Development, parental involvement, poverty alleviation, teacher training, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DOBE:	Department of Basic Education
ECED:	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD:	Early Childhood development
ECDE:	Early Childhood development education
ECE:	Early Childhood education
ECEC:	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECED:	Early Childhood Education Development
EELC:	Equal Education Law Centre
ELDA:	Early Learning Developmental Areas
EPWP:	Expanded Public Works Programme
ETDP-SETA:	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
IBE:	International Bureau of Education
IPA:	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LTSM:	Learning and Teaching Support Material
MCYS:	Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
MKO:	More Knowledgeable Other
MOU:	Memorandum of Agreement

NCF:	National Curriculum Framework
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQF:	National Qualification Framework
NSNP:	National School Nutrition Programme
PCF:	Pre-primary Curriculum Framework
PQAC:	Pre-school Qualification Accreditation Committee
SACE:	South African Council of Education.
SAQA:	Standards which are South African Qualifications Authority
SMC:	Site Management Committee
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXPLORING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING THROUGH
EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE RURAL VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT ..i

DECLARATION ii

DEDICATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT vi

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS vii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ix

CHAPTER 1 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY 1

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT 2

1. 3. AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS 3

1.3.1. Aim..... 3

1.3.2. The objectives:..... 3

1.3.3. Research questions: 4

1.4. INTENDED CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE 4

1.5. CHAPTER DIVISIONS 4

1.6. CONCLUSION 5

CHAPTER 2 6

LITERATURE REVIEW 6

2.1	INTRODUCTION	6
2.2.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
2.3.	EPWP AND TRAINING	9
2.4.	OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT	11
2.4.1.	The concept of Early Childhood Development	11
2.4.2.	ECD teachers' professionalism (towards the training aims).....	11
2.4.3.	Status quo of Macro and Micro Early Childhood Development policies in South Africa.	13
2.4.4.	Importance of Early Childhood Development	14
2.4.5.	Benefits of ECD	16
2.4.6.	The role of the trained teacher in Early Childhood Development	18
2.5.	LITERATURE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING. ...	19
2.5.1.	Global overview	20
2.5.2.	Continental	23
2.5.3.	ECD teacher trainings in South Africa.	26
2.6.	CHALLENGES FACED BY ECD TEACHERS WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE ECD CURRICULUM.....	29
2.6.1.	Lack of properly trained ECD teachers.....	29
2.6.2.	Infrastructure	31
2.6.3.	Environmental poverty.....	32
2.7.	WAYS OF IMPROVING THE ECD TEACHERS' TRAINING.....	33
2.8.	ESTABLISHING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECD CURRICULUM BY TRAINED TEACHERS.....	35

2.9. CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER 3.....	37
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	37
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	37
3.2. BACKGROUND TO THE CHOICE OF DESIGN.....	37
3.3. FOCUS OF THE STUDY	39
3.4. THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS.....	39
3.5. QUALITATIVE- INTERVIEW	39
3.5.1 Reason for the investigation	39
3.5. 2 Instrument used.....	40
3.5.3 Sample design and sampling method.....	41
3.5.4. Data collection methods and fieldwork practice	42
3.5.5 Data capturing and data editing	43
3.5.6 Data analysis.....	44
3.5.7. Measures of trustworthiness.....	46
3.6. ETHICAL AND SAFETY ISSUES.....	48
3.6.1 Informed consent:.....	49
3.6.2 Confidentiality:	49
3.6.2. Potential for harm	49
3.7. Conclusion	50
CHAPTER 4.....	51
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	51

4.2	DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF PARTICIPANTS.....	51
4.3.	RESULTS	53
4.3.1.	Training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.	54
4.3.2.	Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in rural Vhembe East district:	80
4.3.3.	Ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in rural Vhembe East district.....	118
4.3.4.	Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.	135
4.4.	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THEORY.....	148
4.4.1.	The More Knowledgeable Other.....	148
4.4.2.	Scaffolding.....	149
4.4.3.	Social interaction.....	150
4.4.4.	Linking ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners with the theory.....	151
4.4.5.	Linking strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers with the theory. ...	152
4.5.	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	152
4.6.	CONCLUSION	153
CHAPTER 5.....		154
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		154
5.1.	INTRODUCTION	154
5.2.	LINK BETWEEN DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	154
5.3.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	154

5.3.1. Main findings.....	154
5.3.2. Main conclusions and recommendations	160
5.3.3. Recommendations for further studies	166
REFERENCES	168

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Training of teachers for Early Childhood Development (ECD) by the Department of Education is critical for the promotion of teaching and learning of children in the centre based ECD sites, commonly known as creches or pre-schools. Training of teachers ensures that teachers gain skills for promoting teaching and learning of children who are about to start schooling. Training becomes critical for teachers so that they can offer relevant support to children early in their lives (Adamson & Litjens 2016; Beckmann & Phathudi, 2012). To ensure that children are relevantly developed, the department of Basic Education saw the need of training teachers in the ECD community sites.

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is a government initiative strategy to alleviate poverty among poor communities through creating short term jobs and providing training (Mtapuri, 2014; Glen & Mearns, 2021). ECD was prioritised as one of the EPWP's area of focus which needed immediate attention on work opportunities and training.

Early Childhood Development encompasses children from birth to nine years; how they grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, and socially (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). By the age of 2 years, the growth of the child's brain weight is said to be 80% that of an adult. By the end of 5 years, brain size is approximately 90% of adult size (Gilmore, Santelli & Gao, 2018; Lenroot & Giedd, 2006). It is therefore important that by the time the child reaches this age, they are in the hands of the trained ECD personnel who will be in a better position to intervene with the needed holistic development.

To fulfil the training mandate of the EPWP, the Department of Education contracts service providers who offer the training for ECD National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 4 and 5. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and other private institutions who are accredited by the Education, Training

and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) are contracted to offer those qualifications. The ETDP SETA is the custodian of the ECD National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 4 and 5 qualifications (September 2007; Ilifa Labantwana, 2018). As such, all the training providers (TVET colleges NGOs and other private providers) who wish to offer training for these qualifications should first acquire accreditation with this SETA.

However, from my professional experience as a coordinator of ECD activities in Vhembe East district, I observed that teachers trained in ECD NQF levels (level 4 certificate, level 5 certificate, and level 5 diploma) through EPWP seem to be struggling to demonstrate sufficient competency in classroom management of early childhood teaching and learning activities (0-4.5 years). During monitoring visits, I observed that trained teachers are found to be not implementing the ECD curriculum. In their classrooms, mostly the learning areas are not furnished with relevant toys. Furnished learning areas are central in ECD activities.

I have also observed that many practitioners who are trained on ECD NQF level 4 and 5 are without the lesson plans entailing the activities and assessment documents. In cases where those documents are found, they are mostly incomplete or incorrect. Failure to implement all those learning areas by trained ECD teachers result in failing to develop learners holistically. I could not find any literature indicating why teachers seem to be still struggling whereas they have been trained. There is dearth of literature on the impact of training provided by the EPWP which was meant to change the way in which learners develop in their early training.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

After ECD teachers have received training, the Department of Education continues to monitor the ECD activities carried out by those trained teachers in their ECD sites. Learning areas are supposed to be furnished by relevant toys to ensure that structured play takes place (Hadebe, 2015). Curriculum implementation involves children having fun and using different materials to learn (Weiland, 2021).

Failure to implement all those learning areas by trained ECD teachers result in failing to develop learners holistically.

Training of teachers for Early Childhood Development (ECD) by the Department of Education is critical for the promotion of teaching and learning of children in the centre based ECD sites. To ensure that children are relevantly developed, the department of Basic Education saw the need of training teachers in the ECD community sites. The government initiated a training strategy which employed EPWP to train teachers for EDC development. However, teachers trained through EPWP seem to be struggling to demonstrate sufficient competency in classroom management of early childhood teaching and learning activities (0-4.5 years). During monitoring of the practitioners, I found out that many practitioners who are trained on ECD NQF level 4 and 5 are without the lesson plans and assessment documents. Those documents are critical for the success of ECD holistic training and an indication that training has been successful. They are evidence pointing to the implementation of ECD curriculum by the trained teachers.

1. 3. AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1. Aim

The aim of this study was to explore Early Childhood Development teacher training through Expanded Public Works Programme in the rural Vhembe East District.

1.3.2. The objectives:

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

- (i) To explore how ECD teachers are trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district,
- (ii) To establish challenges experienced by teachers trained through EPWP when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East District,
- (iii) To explore ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by EPWP trained teachers in the rural Vhembe East District, and

- (iv) To establish strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

1.3.3. Research questions:

Following the above-mentioned objectives, below are the research questions:

- (i) How are ECD teachers trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (ii) What are the challenges experienced by the trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (iii) How can the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners be enhanced in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (iv) How can the training of ECD teachers through EPWP be improved in the rural Vhembe East district?

1.4. INTENDED CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.

The study outlined strategies which enhance the trainings of the ECD practitioners as well as the manner of implementing curriculum in the classroom set up. The strategies will benefit the ECD practitioners who are practicing in the ECD sites, the implementing departments (Education and Social Development) in their planning as well as the training service providers.

1.5. CHAPTER DIVISIONS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the background of the study. It serves as the introduction of the study. It includes the problem statement, aim, objectives and research questions.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

This chapter gives a review of literature as outlined by other researchers on the key concepts of this study. It looks on matters around ECD which are its meaning, importance, and benefits. It further dwells on EPWP and how it is related to ECD teacher training. The theory underpinning this study will also be looked at in this chapter. This review is done from the global point of view, continental and lastly from the South African point of view.

CHAPTER 3: Research methodology

Research design and methodology is explained in full in this chapter. Step by step details of the study is unfolded here. This includes population of the study, sampling, data collection methods, and data collection procedures as well as data analysis. The issue of trustworthiness is also attended to in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Presentation and discussion of findings:

This chapter presents the findings from the data that was collected. The discussion on the findings is supported with relevant literature.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions and recommendations

The study is summarized and concluded, and recommendations for further studies are made in this chapter.

1.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter gave the background of this study and an outline of the whole study. The following chapter presents the theoretical framework as well as the literature reviewed for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the background, the aim, objectives, research design and methodology of the study. This chapter focuses on review of related literature guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To explore how ECD teachers are trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district,
- (ii) To establish challenges experienced by teachers trained through EPWP when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district,
- (iii) To explore ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the rural Vhembe East district, and
- (iv) To establish strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district

The chapter presents literature reviewed on the nature of training which are available for ECD teachers and the challenges which they face in the implementation of the ECD curriculum after they have received such teacher trainings. Ways of improving ECD teacher training as well as strategies of enhancing implementation of ECD curriculum by trained teachers is also reviewed. The chapter highlights the importance of training in the EPWP. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is discussed in this chapter.

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the theory underpinning this study. Vygotsky (1978:86) described ZPD as:

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”.

Vygotsky (Dolittle, 1997) believed that when children are associated with the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) such as their teachers, their more advanced peers and adults; they grow in mental functions like logic, language, morals and problem-solving skills. In this theory, a learner is more reliant on the knowledgeable others in the early stages of learning than on the self. The learners accomplish more work with the assistance of the more knowledgeable other than on their own. For the learners to accomplish the task, they seek more assistance at first than later. As they mature in learning, their level of unassisted performance increases as their level of assisted performance decreases. To Vygotsky, the good instruction which is received in childhood is the one which precedes and guide development (Dolittle, 1997). The teacher is considered as the most knowledgeable other who assists the learners in their early stages of learning to discover new things (Kendra 2021).

Xi and Lantolf (2021), are of the view that ZPD is a concept which is beyond a learning situation offered to a child wherein adults or older peers have influence on the child. Leading adults are therefore expected to be exposed to the developmental needs of the children together with the dynamics around them. Since children learn through playing, leading adults should be aware that playing activities do change in the course of history of mankind.

If the leading adult is to guide children in their structured learning play, the teacher as the leading adult is therefore supposed to be competent in the guidance of the young ones. For the teachers to be competent in the formal environment such as the ECD sites, of course, they must undergo a process of training (which in this case is either ECD NQF level 4 or 5 done through the EPWP). Their competencies are of prime importance since the young ones are going to rely on them more, especially on tasks which they cannot do without assistance (Kendra, 2021).

To move a child through the zone of proximal development, teachers are expected to focus on the important components which assist the learning process which includes the presence of someone who has knowledge beyond that of the learner (teacher).

They are therefore the knowledgeable other. They should be skilful enough to assist learners to practice their skills as well as supporting the learners with activities as they are led through the zone of proximal development (McLeod, 2019). When the learners become competent, the teachers gradually reduce their assistance until the learners can do it on their own. When the ZPD and the concept of scaffolding are done correctly, learners can be able to solve problems which would otherwise be beyond their capabilities. To scaffold successfully, the ECD teacher needs to be well trained and being able to take the learners' individual needs into account. Scaffolding can be used in both indoor and outdoor activities (Yetman, 2020).

Since the ZPD is about learners developing in close association with the knowledgeable others (trained ECD practitioners), this theory becomes the preferred one because of its expectation that trained teachers should show competencies in what they have been trained for, as they practice in the classroom, demonstrating what they were trained to do, that should lead to ECD learners' development in the phenomena of skills and knowledge.

Interviewing Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners about their initial training and their experiences in implementing ECD curriculum is linked with the Zone of Proximal Development theory. The interviews are on how they were trained to be the knowledgeable others as well as how they are delivering or implementing the ECD curriculum. Their curriculum implementation is part of their position in the proximal distance. Researchers can uncover the interactions between practitioners and young learners, shedding light on the scaffolding processes inherent in the educational context.

Furthermore, practitioners' reflections on their training experiences provide critical insights into the effectiveness of professional development initiatives in enhancing their capacity to scaffold learning effectively. By probing into the strategies employed by practitioners to support children's learning journeys, researchers can identify instances where the ZPD is effectively leveraged to foster optimal cognitive development. Additionally, practitioners' narratives offer rich qualitative data, offering a holistic understanding of the ZPD dynamics within ECD settings.

In employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for the study, elements of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) spread through the entire research process. The selection of IPA as the method is in line with the ZPD's emphasis on understanding individual experiences within social contexts. IPA enables researchers to reach the subjective experiences of ECD practitioners, shedding light on the dynamic interactions between educators and learners.

2.3. EPWP AND TRAINING

Training is considered an important aspect within the EPWP which ensures that beneficiaries gain skills while they work on EPWP projects. EPWP trainings aim at enhancing beneficiaries' chances of being considered on other viable programmes when they exit from EPWP projects. The trainings include Skills Programme, Learnership and Artisan Development, (Department of Public Works, 2018). EPWP intends through its trainings, to enhance the participants' ability to earn a living in future. It is in the aspiration of EPWP to improve its trainees who enter its process unskilled to come out of it with skills that attract a permanent employment at a later stage.

In EPWP, training is mostly offered by service providers who focus on training or skills development required to perform the tasks at hand. Formal training is expected to be 2 days for every 20 days of work (McCord, 2005). One is to ask if such kind of training is enough to move an unskilled person to the intermediate level of skills. This type of training is dominant in the infrastructure sector. This training is unlikely to provide workers with sufficient skills to face the demand in the labour market. The approach of the EPWP is to include training in the programme to provide a sound basis for sustainable livelihood opportunities in communities (Department of Public Works, 2019).

During its 1st phase, the understanding was that job creation without skills development would not lead to sustainable employment and as such it will not have economic impact in the lives of the unemployed. The programme was obliged to provide training which is of a higher level than they would normally get from another place of work. SETAs are involved in EPWP trainings in terms of developing those

trainings accordingly. The Skills Development Act dictates that a skills programme should be occupationally based and should provide credit towards a qualification registered in terms of National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In view of this understanding, the exiting EPWP candidates were not expected to return to their initial poverty level (Department of Public Works, 2019). They should be coming out being better people employable in the working market after being 'transformed from unskilled to skilled workers. In social sector there should be accredited high level trainings for workers (Altman, 2004).

ECD falls in the Social Sector within the EPWP. It is already stated that the Departments of Social Development, Health, and Education fall under this sector. ECD and HCBC are two of the components within this sector. This is the sector which preferred to combine all its work opportunities with training or education or skills development with the aim of increasing the ability of people to earn income once they leave the programme. Special to this sector is that learnerships are the main vehicles of formal training offered (September 2007). It provides in-service experience, stipend and training which leads to NQF qualification. Unfortunately, not all beneficiaries receive such a level of education. Fewer than many qualify for the learnerships. Another problem is that the training resources available are very limited and to provide accredited training in South Africa is very expensive (Department of Public Works, 2019).

EPWP training also partners with various Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in terms of funding and training compliance matters (Department of Public Works, 2018). In ECD, in particular, the Education, Training and Development Practice Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP-SETA) continues to be the primary partner in the roll out of the EPWP. It continues to use the learnership implementation strategy. As is already indicated before, learnership is for the lucky few. It is estimated at 3% of those employed in the EPWP. One may not be wrong to state that although in ECD workers are receiving NQF accredited courses through learnership, many other ECD teachers are left out of the process. In most cases the need for training is informed by the nature of the project, the selection criteria of the learners and the availability of funding (Department of Public Works, 2013).

2.4. OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

It is important in this section to give a clear understanding of the concept of Early Childhood, which is what it entails as well as the benefits thereof. This section will furthermore give insight on the benefits of ECD as well as the role of the teacher in the ECD.

2.4.1. The concept of Early Childhood Development

Early Childhood Development refers to the way children from birth to nine years develop physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and morally (Department of Education, 2001). Children from ages five to nine years are educationally developed in the primary schools whereas those between zero and four and half years are being developed in ECD centres (Atmore, 2012). The ECD centres are mostly referred to as crèches or pre-schools. In some countries they are referred to as 'kindergarten' or 'pre-primary' (Aboud & Proulx, 2019). The majority of such ECD centres in Vhembe East are community based. It is in such ECD sites where we find the teachers who start crèches out of the zeal without having received prior training in relevant qualifications.

It is during this stage that children are said to be developing very rapidly. These are important years of life such that positive or negative experiences have lasting implications for children's well-being, school readiness and later success in life. It is therefore very important for rearing adults to see to it that only what is good and acceptable is practiced when with this age group. Early Childhood Development takes care of the children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects through services provided by centres (Department of Social Development, (Mead, 2017). The ECD teacher training qualifications are meant for achieving those developmental aspects to attain holistic development. The department of education, through the EPWP, ensures that teachers are trained for that purpose.

2.4.2. ECD teachers' professionalism (towards the training aims)

In the ECD sector there is a challenge of low recognition of the ECD teachers' professional status. This challenge stems from amongst many factors, lack of common qualifications for ECD teachers and low or no income in the ECD sites. Communities

who send their children at times also perceive ECD centres as nothing more than just a playing centre (Bipath, 2022). There is some kind of frustration and helplessness in the ECD teachers' environment which seeks attention of universities and other training institutions. Although there has been an increase on studies conducted on the professional identity of teachers (Bipath, 2022), not much has been done on ECD. It is therefore important that some studies be channelled into the professionalism of ECD teachers in particular.

Mentoring teachers should first receive training on mentorship before they embark on mentoring new teachers or student teachers. Finland is an example of this process. During their initial training, preschool teachers are exposed in practicum which they do in preschools. The student teachers do three practicums aiming at different goals such as: observation of the educational environment, pedagogy and curriculum work as well as being part of the multiprofessional work and parental involvement. During their stay in the preschools, trained mentoring teachers are model professional teachers who guide the student teachers in all activities (Ukkonen-Mikkola & Turtiainen, 2016).

Fonsén and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) emphasize the fact that professional development of ECE teachers has a positive bearing in the development of the children under their care in the ECD sites. Many countries are as such aiming at improving the training of ECD teachers (Ukkonen-Mikkola & Turtiainen, 2016). Through its National Agency for Education, Finland started funding further training for ECE teachers in 2015.

Professional development for ECD teachers is beneficial over and above the teachers' initial training, considering the complexity and the demanding nature of the work of ECD teachers. Countries like Finland invest in both initial training of the ECD teachers and teacher development during ECD teachers' work in preschools. Both the training courses are imperative, and countries should aim at the quality provision of both trainings. It is as such important that after the initial training of ECD teachers, there be further development in terms of furthering their studies. Continuing professional training is essential for the enrichment of ECD teachers in sites.

2.4.3. Status quo of Macro and Micro Early Childhood Development policies in South Africa.

In South Africa, ECD emerges as a priority of government policies and programmes (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017). ECD is prioritized in the government's National Development Plan 2030. There are policies and legislations such as the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy and the Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development (Zulu, Aina & Bipath, 2022).

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy focuses on the availability of ECD services and the access thereof. It aims at reforming ECD services in South Africa and closing the identified gaps by providing comprehensive and equitable Early Childhood Development services (Department of Social Development, 2015).

Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development focuses on the minimum standards required in the training of the ECD teachers. It sets the standards needed for the qualification and training in the ECD field. Although there is this policy on training of the ECD teachers, there are still ECD teachers who are not yet in possession of those anticipated qualifications and relevant experiences (Zulu, Aina & Bipath, 2022). These teachers who are still wanting in terms of qualifications and experience are already in the ECD sites interacting with children who are there for the holistic development who should be in the capable hands of well qualified and competent ECD teachers.

National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development of Teachers in South Africa is inclusive of the ECD teachers (Department of Education, 2006). This policy sees teachers as responsible for a good quality education system. The policy speaks to the Initial Professional Education of Teachers (IPET), and the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD). The ECD teachers are also obliged to register with the South African Council for education (SACE) after completing their qualifications.

Besides the policies mentioned above, there are guidelines for Early Childhood Development services. The guidelines for ECD services came as a review of the draft of the guidelines for ECD services. The review of the draft was meant to strengthen the guidelines document so that it could address the challenges which included poverty (Department of Social Development, 2006).

Although government in South Africa has identified ECD as one of its priority areas and also developed relevant progressive policies and legislations, there are still challenges on the implementation of those policies. ECD facilities are still of inequitable quality and accessibility (Venter, 2022) with those of rural areas being at the disadvantage. The inequality between the rural and the urban ECD services are in terms of amongst others: remunerations, resources, infrastructure and teachers' qualifications and their career pathing (Zulu, Aina & Bipath, 2022).

2.4.4. Importance of Early Childhood Development

Radical growth of children takes place during the first six years of life (Gilmore, Santelli & Gao, 2018; Onu, Obiozor, Agobo & Ezeanwu, 2010). During this period, if children are well taken care of, they come to benefit more in later education and become more productive law-abiding citizens. In support of this view, Ngware (2019) records that research confirms that ECD education is a contributing factor to better adjustment at school and higher levels of achievement. The early years are said to be critical for establishing a strong foundation for human growth in all developmental areas (Gregg & Hall, 2020). The period between the last trimester of pregnancy and the first two years of life are said to be the most critical for brain growth. At this time of life, about 80% of the adult brain weight is gained (Gilmore, Santelli & Gao, 2018). Because of this rapid brain growth, there is more need of stimulation and learning opportunities which should be done by relevant teachers. Training of ECD teachers in relevant integrative and innovative thinking strategies is necessary at this stage for them to be able to deliver quality ECD activities which will ensure that children are stimulated and developed holistically at an early age.

Berg (2008) and Bullough, and Hall-Kenyon, (2018) echoes the same sentiments by stating that during this period critical factors include the nature of relationships with

caregivers, the degree to which they are stimulated and their access to nutrition and health care. If development is delayed, the rest of their schooling is affected negatively. The gaps caused by delayed development widen as they progress with their schooling. It is therefore important for children to access childhood services early in their lives and be exposed to practitioners who indeed will develop them holistically. Such kind of practitioners should be teachers who are trained in ECD qualifications.

What takes place during the earliest years of a child's life, from birth to three years, is said to have an influence on how the rest of childhood through adolescence to adulthood develops. Because of this reason, the quality of early care and nurturing has a lasting impact on how children grow, learn, and develop their capacities into adulthood (September 2007; Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). Ansari (2019) confirms that investing in pre-school programmes has long lasting benefits for children which is evident even after a decade. It is due to reasons such as this that no author has ever disputed the importance of ECD. In support of September's view, Naudeau, Kataoka, Valerio, Michelle, Neuman, and Elder, (2011) maintain that in the longer run, ECD services will produce citizens who will better the economy and break the poverty cycle. These authors emphasize the fact that delays in cognitive and overall development before a child enters primary school often have long-lasting and costly consequences for both families and societies.

In emphasizing the importance of ECD, Hertzman (2010:1) records that "Investment in early childhood is a powerful economic strategy, with returns over the life course many times the size of the original expenditure. ECD programs promote the quality of human capital; that is, individuals' competencies and skills for participating in society and the workforce". This suggests that countries which are investing in ECD are making a fruitful expenditure which will benefit the country at a longer run. Of course, there is a need for ECD to justify economic investment by proving its effectiveness, particularly in securing 'school readiness (Wood & Hedges, 2016).

Ntumi, (2016) supported by several authors, concludes that it is important to have learners accessing ECD services for them to get socialized, active and to acquire some basic skills in life. He confirms that children who received Early Childhood Education (ECE) become emotionally, and socially competent adults compared to the

ones who did not receive early education. Similarly, Manduku, Ruto, and Maritim (2017) confirm that ECD is important as it lays the foundation in terms of the intellectual and physical development.

ECD Education is a strong foundation for the later formal education and working environment. Since this is a critical foundational level, it is important for any country to provide quality ECD education to produce responsible citizens at a later stage. Naudeu, Kataoka, Michelle and Elder (2010) records that without access to quality ECD, poor children often fall behind their more advantaged peers before they even begin school. Children who participate in quality ECD programmes are more ready to learn at school entrance and are less likely to repeat grades. When grown up, these children become successful and do not become problems to society. They are less likely to participate in crimes.

Bakken, Brown, and Downing (2017) confirm that children who are from poor families, when placed in quality pre-school programmes, they experience long lasting primary and secondary positive effects. Their improvement intellectually, emotionally, and socially goes beyond their schooling years into their adult years wherein they become responsible adults who contribute to wealth and welfare assistance. At the same breath, Wood and Hedges (2016), articulate that the ECD programme is a site through which children achieve educational goals and school readiness which will later contribute to their longer term economic and socio-political goals.

For the children to benefit from ECD centres, there should be trained ECD teachers who know what to do. Without the trained workforce, children may enter the ECD sites but end up not getting the benefits. Poor children who are referred to in the previous paragraph are mostly enrolled in community ECD sites. If it is important for those children to be enrolled in the ECD sites, EPWP training which targets the community ECD teachers becomes important as well.

2.4.5. Benefits of ECD

Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), outline many ECD benefits which include language, cognitive and social development. Other benefits as outlined by Motala (2012), are in

relation to school attendance, academic performance, decline in antisocial and at-risk behaviours, higher rates of high school completion, increased agricultural production yields and even higher income earning potential. This clearly shows that ECD contributes to all aspects of life be it socially, economically academically and others as is already alluded to in this document.

Parents also benefit from the ECD process. Good quality childcare enables parents, especially women, to continue with full-time education, to take up employment and to advance in their work and professional lives. In turn, parental participation in work benefits household economic status and improves financial security for children. In many countries, mothers are joining the workforce and as such the institution that takes good care of their children is vital. (Richter, Biersteker, Burns, Desmond, Feza, Harrison, Martin, Saloojee, & Slemming, 2012; Bleses, Jensen, Slot & Justice, 2020). In Denmark, almost all parents are part of the workforce hence the reason the country's high enrolment in Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres (Jensen, et al., 2020).

ECD services and programmes provide ideal opportunities for prevention, early identification, and timely provision of assistance for children with disabilities and children requiring additional support for health, development, and social problems. The skills developed in early childhood form the basis for future learning which is lifelong (Bassok, Markowitz, Bellows & Sadowski, 2021) and labour market success. ECD enhances a child's ability to learn, work with others, be patient, and develop other skills that are the foundation for formal learning and social interaction in the school years and beyond. Failure to develop these foundational skills can lead to long-term, often irreversible effects on educational attainment, health, fertility, and productive earnings, which later result in significant costs for both individuals and society (Naudeau, Kataoka, Valerio, Michelle, Neuman, & Elder, 2011).

Children from lower income households benefit from being in good quality ECD centres since at home they have no access or limited access to books and other educational toys. Lack of such school readiness material in lower income families may result in limited readiness for school readiness. Their social life is also affected since they will not have exposures such as educational trips from their early age. Economic

deprivation is indeed a harmful aspect in the development of children (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). Chikonde (2018) also made mention of the fact that ECD can bridge the gap of educational performance between the high-income families and the lower income families, way before they start schooling.

The lower income children have the community sites as their chances of benefiting from the ECD. Those are the sites which, if well-resourced and capacitated by trained teachers, become the solution to the poor children.

2.4.6. The role of the trained teacher in Early Childhood Development

McDonnel (2007), and Phajane (2014), regard pre-school teachers as central players in the education of the young ones. They are perceived as having crucial role in curriculum implementation for this age cohort. Their roles include child guidance, discipline and adoption of teaching methods amongst others. The quality of education and learning is more associated with the competence of the teacher since teachers are key implementers of the prescribed curriculum. It is also important to note that the positive relationship between the ECD teachers and learners is also very important. High quality individual relationships with their ECD teachers benefit them in their later schooling classroom environment (Tutran, Ansari, Pianta, Whittaker, Vitiello & Ruzek, 2020). The teacher's competence and confidence levels are associated with the quality of the learning environment (Jones, Hampshire & McDonnel, 2020). The teacher is as such an important component of the learning environment of the young children, especially because he is supposed to take a lead as the knowledgeable adult.

Amongst many responsibilities of the ECD teacher are the following: developing schedules and enforcing routines, maintaining safe and comfortable environment, providing supervision and discipline, planning, and implementing lessons, observing, and communicating as well as addressing cultural and or special needs (Measom, 2018). Miels (2020), on the other hand outlines the role of the ECD teacher as that of one of the communicators (same as Measom's view), facilitator, coach, model, storyteller, timekeeper as well as being a researcher. All these differently named roles of the ECD teacher show that what they must do in the ECD site is a mammoth task as compared to what can be seen at face value.

Currently the ECD teachers are also expected to submit gathered evidence of the children who are in their care (classroom or playroom) which indicates how the learners have achieved their expected levels of performance academically. They should also know what activity to do next with a child to lead a child to independence when doing their tasks. ECD teachers are expected to bring along expertise and commitment to reach the high expected levels in the ECD programme. Their work is demanding and exhausting (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2018) and as such it needs quality teacher training. Teacher training is of importance since it has influence on the teachers' efficacy in the holistic development of the children (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021).

In cases where children are found to be not competent as expected in their entry level in primary schools, blame is associated with competency of teachers in the pre-school. Poor background in pre-school is recorded as a concerning setback as it is associated with causes of class repetition and poor-quality education being provided in public schools. This is believed to be the result of the ineffective curriculum implementation in pre-schools where the teacher is regarded as a key stakeholder. The preparedness of the teacher in the ECD curriculum is regarded as crucial (Kimosop, 2019).

2.5. LITERATURE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING.

Teacher education is regarded by Kasemsap (2017) as a continuous process which starts at pre-service training, continues to in-service training as well as continuous education. This section investigates how teacher training in Early Childhood Development is perceived and conducted in different countries abroad and here at home. The unfolding of early childhood requires professionals who are developed and are equipped with relevant training and enough resources for the development of the wide scope of the children's needs (Macy & Szente, 2021).

Different countries have different qualifications set as minimum levels required for teachers to have for them to qualify as practicing teachers in ECD. Harrison (2020) believes that the quality of ECCE offered to children is much associated with the relevance of the training received by the ECD teacher. The qualification thus has an

influence in the way the ECD teachers understand their work and their ability to handle the challenges which come with the ECD classroom environment.

2.5.1. Global overview

This section seeks to highlight how countries abroad are conducting their training for ECD teachers. Generally higher qualifications of teachers in ECD are related to performance of those teachers in assisting on child development, supervision arrangement of activities and playrooms as well as creation of warmer environment conducive for interactions. It is therefore important to review how countries globally are doing as far as teacher training on ECD is concerned. Training services are provided by Universities, Colleges, and Non- Governmental Organisations. The different institutions for training of these teachers result in different levels of qualifications: certificates, diplomas, and degrees (Mitter & Putcha, 2018).

Aboud and Proulx (2019) affirms that the ECD sector in America is composed of variety of program models, staffing organograms as well as qualifications. The differences create chances of inequality in terms of quality provisions. Some models are less strong and therefore less effective whereas some are stronger and therefore demonstrate significant learning benefits on children.

Educational requirements for teaching in ECD differ from one country to another, and some indicate the period of specific trainings whereas others require diplomas or college degrees. There are no criteria followed on selecting countries for this review. Countries were randomly selected for their different types of ECD teachers' training. Attempt is hereby made to show those differences in the following countries:

2.5.1.1. England

England offers equal qualifications for teachers responsible for younger children and for those teachers who are responsible for older children. ECD teachers with degrees are found to be the most effective in terms of stimulating their learners and engaging learners with meaningful activities in their classrooms. In England highly educated teachers are found to be the key factors contributing to high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes. With their qualifications and long

experience, they come to be beneficial even to the lesser qualified staff members. The highly educated ECEC teachers give support to the lesser qualified teachers while working alongside (Adamson & Litjens, 2016).

2.5. 1.2. Singapore

Singapore's emphasis is on well-qualified and trained ECE principals and teachers as contributing to high quality preschool education. Minimum qualifications for teachers are set. Subsidy schemes for training of practitioners are put in place. Such funding is employer based. Government pays a larger percentage of training fees, and the employer pays the rest (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2006).

According to the International Bureau of Education (IBE) (2006), in Singapore the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) is responsible for kindergartens (2-6 years) and the Ministry of Education is responsible for childcare centres (4–6 years) jointly set up a Pre-school Qualification Accreditation Committee (PQAC). This committee is responsible for assessing and accrediting the certificate and diploma courses in pre-school education. Singapore is committed to training of pre-school teachers to an extent that they have variety of pre-school qualifications which includes catering for those teachers who are interested in management or leadership in pre-schools. Singapore offers the following qualifications for pre-school teachers:

- Certificate in Preschool Teaching
- Diploma in Preschool Education-Teaching and
- Diploma in Preschool Education-Leadership.

Training agencies seek accreditation for their courses and approval for their trainers to teach specific modules of the course from the PQAC. There are subsidy schemes for training in early childhood education available to pre-school teachers and such funding is employer-based. For example, the government may be able to subsidize up to 90 percent of the course fees, while the employers pay the remaining 10 percent. This governmental responsibility results in teachers being better qualified at the state's

expense. When working in ECD sites, the better qualified and most experienced teachers assist in leading staff development programmes in their schools in Singapore and New Zealand (Mitter & Putcha, 2018).

2.5.1.3. Slovak Republic

According to Misra, Pupala and Gadusova (2018), teacher training in Slovakia aims at producing graduates who should effect positive changes in professionalism, skills, and attitudes. Pre-primary schoolteachers are expected to be graduates with bachelor study programme. The pre- primary teachers are therefore university graduates from faculties of education. Qualifications are linked with performance and promotions. Slovakia as such, developed a good teacher appraisal system.

The Slovak Republic goes for highly educated teaching professionals. It believes that they are central to the delivery of high quality ECEC which ensures the country's desirable social and emotional outcomes. To them, such kinds of ECEC staff can produce better working environments and can raise efficiency on their counterparts or colleagues in the same working environment. This country is in support also of the in-service training that should be on going during the professional life span of staff members in order to ensure best practices. Although teachers in Slovakia earn less than other professionals with tertiary qualifications, attractive salary and other benefits are considered as contributing factors to the high-quality care and education of the young ones (Taguma, Litjens, Kim, & Makowiecki, 2012; Misra et al., 2018). Salaries also play a role in attracting young people into the teaching career.

Looking at the Slovakian picture one may conclude that the last part referring to remunerations indeed does contribute to better service delivery professionally since good working conditions can be a serious motivation for any staff member. As a researcher I fully agree that better educated or trained personnel are a good chance for reasonable professionalism which secures quality curriculum delivery. In general, one would agree that Slovak Republic is one of those countries that have good practice in terms of providing professional development because they have in service training for their trained teachers which is vital in the professional developed of the trained

teachers. It is worth noting as well that qualification is not the only element which impacts on desired outcomes. Of equal importance is the ability of qualified personnel to produce the desired quality learning environment (Sheridan, 2009).

From the above discussions it shows that most of the developed countries have in place high teacher qualifications as a prerequisite for being an Early Childhood Development teacher. Beneath here follows the African continental experience for ECD teacher training.

2.5.2. Continental

The continental teacher training for ECD teachers will focus on the following randomly selected countries which focused on ECD training: Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

2.5.2.1. Nigeria

Nigeria is one of African countries which still experience Early Childhood teacher training related problems. They still lack highly qualified teachers for Early Childhood (Oluwafemi, Nma, Osita & Olugbenga, 2014). Their challenges include undefined curriculum and management of scarce resources. To address such challenges, the National Policy on Education indicated the responsibility of the government as being to promote the training of qualified pre-primary teachers and to develop a suitable curriculum. The observation is that teacher training for ECD is not happening in Nigeria as was promised in the National Policy on Education. The country's ECD programme is faced with challenges of training, recruitment, and certification of ECE care givers. There are a good number of nursery schools in Nigeria which are privately run. Even in those nursery schools they are still faced with challenges of provisioning of quality training and recruitment of teachers as well as age-appropriate material. In both private and public ECEs, teachers are found to be mostly old females who are without qualifications (Onu, Obiozor, Agbo & Ezeanwu, 2010; Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016).

2.5.2.2. Kenya

Kenya regards ECD teachers as among the most important persons in the children's interpersonal relationships (Sinyei, Mwonga & Wanyama, 2012). The training of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) teachers in Kenya remains a priority in recognition of the vital role well-trained professionals play in the quality of early childhood experiences for children ages 0-5. Most ECD teachers have either a certificate or diploma in the teaching of ECD. The content is said to be sufficient to make teachers competent in this field (Andiema, 2017). For teachers to fulfil their roles effectively they need adequate and sufficient education. Their teacher training programmes vary from the ECD until the tertiary level. The training which is specific to this context is the Early Childhood Development teacher education which is done through the national or district training and development systems. The district ECD centres are the most active in terms of ECD teacher training. The two types of ECD teacher qualifications in Kenya unfolds as follows according to Andiema (2017):

a. Teacher certificate in ECDE

This qualification can be done as an initial training or in-service teacher training. In both cases this qualification should have 810 contact hours. When done as an in-service course, it takes two years and takes place during school holidays. One of the requirements needed for admission to this course is three years' experience of teaching in a pre-school. Competencies acquired in this qualification covers teaching methods, assessment and development of material fit for this age cohort.

b. Diploma in ECDE

This diploma is aimed at those teachers that are taking care of the children who are geared for school going. It also gives one access to a degree qualification. According to Andiema (2017) the diploma can also be done as a pre-service or an in-service. In both cases the contact time should be 780 hours. Teaching practice is an important part of both programmes and the teachers in training are assessed when doing those practical teachings. In the diploma teachers conduct some research as part of their

training. A product of this course comes out of it with competencies in terms of lesson preparations, classroom interaction and management as well as assessment.

Andiema (2017), further indicates that some parts of Kenya are having most of their ECDE teachers as qualified even above the diploma level whereas some areas have fewer number of qualified ECD teachers. However, the time spent in teacher training in Kenya has been relatively low. They were mostly trained for a year or two except for the few cases which are gone beyond two years. As of now Gitahi (2022) updated that a diploma is done over a period of three years and there is a Bachelor of Education in ECD which is a four-year degree. The degree can be accessed from several universities which include Kenyatta University and many others.

In her study which focused on the effect of the ECDE teacher training, Andiema (2017) found that most of the trained ECDE teachers who are working on sites have never attended a refresher course since they got their initial training. In her recommendations she made mention of the fact that ECD teachers should be facilitated by educational officials as well as by other stakeholders to also see to it that their condition of service is improved. Good teacher training is regarded as essential since it forms part of the education system which contributes to the social development of the country.

2.5.2.3. Botswana

Botswana is one of the countries which believes that training of the ECD teachers is vital although some factors like lack of resources may interfere with the teachers' ability to deliver the curriculum as anticipated. The government of Botswana (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021) believes that well educated teachers are beneficial to the country's sustainable economic development. Countries which implement training of teachers with high regard are likely to benefit from their trained workforce.

Initial ECD teacher training takes place in the university college, Botswana Open University as well as colleges of education. Teachers are employed into ECD services after completion of qualifications from those tertiary institutions (MOESD, 2015). After employment, Botswana ECD teachers are further trained through the Professional Development to interpret their curriculum which is guided by the Pre-primary Curriculum Framework (PCF). Mavidou and Kakana (2019) regard teachers as 'main

drivers' of the curriculum implementation and for them to deliver curriculum well, they should be well trained.

2.5.2.4. Zimbabwe

According to Dozva and Dyanda (2012), soon after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, many ECD centres were established in Zimbabwe. During that era, day centre caregivers were just picked from local communities regardless of their level of education or professional training. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) District Trainers were appointed by the government to in-service some of those teachers who were already working in registered centres. The training was done in six phases each covering a period of two weeks; thereafter they were awarded certificates of attendance. However, the in-service training could not cover much ground. The low level of training was attributed to inadequate resources. While the Government through ECEC District Trainers had been offering in-service training for teachers already working in centres, there was a need to provide professional training for ECEC teachers.

Professionalization of ECD training in Zimbabwe achieved some measure of success through its inclusion in teachers' colleges and in university education programmes. The training of ECD teachers by colleges and universities in Zimbabwe is a good example of how quality teacher training can be improved in African countries. So far there are four universities offering ECD degrees as well as ten colleges offering ECD diploma accredited by the University of Zimbabwe (Mbugua, 2009; Nyarami & Ntuli, 2020). Those institutions produce from paraprofessional qualifications up to postgraduate qualifications. Although the training is done on a much smaller scale, Zimbabwe becomes a good example of a country taking ECD teacher training seriously. The formal qualifications engaged on are to be desired. Much appreciation is put to the fact that there are colleges dedicated to training ECD teachers.

2.5.3. ECD teacher trainings in South Africa.

According to Zulu, Aina and Bipath (2022), ECD teacher training in South Africa shows some systemic gaps and inequalities. The ECD practitioners are mostly without enough education for the provision of quality education for the young ones.

Practitioners in the rural areas are largely earning very low wages which cannot afford them chances to further their studies or any other professional development. This lack of qualifications and training experience affects the practitioners' ability in the holistic development of learners.

Amongst other ways of traditional professional development is formal education, in service training and credentialing (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). In South Africa, ECD qualifications are established on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). The ECD teacher training is largely resting in the hands of TVET colleges and private service providers. The service providers must be accredited by the ETDP-SETA in order for them to provide the ECD qualification. The qualifications obtained through this process are the following (Atmore, van Niekerk & Cooper: 2012; ETDP SETA, 2018):

ECD L1:

This qualification targets teachers who work in ECD setting who previously were not exposed to such training opportunities and are without grade 12.

ECD L4:

This is a Further Education and Training Certificate which now serve as an entry level in ECD qualifications: This qualification provides ECD teachers with required skills to facilitate the holistic development of young children inclusive of learners with barriers to learning.

ECD L5:

This level is offered on two levels: a higher certificate and a national diploma. Both qualifications offer a better higher level of education to ECD teachers who are experienced. EPWP, through the Department of Education, provides for the last two qualifications (level 4 and 5).

Of concern is that there are fewer service providers offering NQF Level 5 training in ECD, although a need exists. Generally, it can be said that there are insufficient

training providers to deal with both the skills backlog and continuing expansion of the sector. Many areas do not have access to accredited providers who offer ECD qualifications and overall, relatively few providers are accredited for current qualifications. The NGOs have dominated the training of ECD services and many of those NGOs focus on rural areas (Harrison, 2020).

Despite the development of ECD levels 1-5, there are quality issues regarding standards of training. Training should be done with either the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) or training providers who are registered with ETDP-SETA. Problems were encountered during the monitoring of quality training and implementation. Lack of accreditation application coupled with 'dysfunctionality' on the ETDP-SETA's side resulted in training providers being unable to issue certificates to those that were trained. This of course end up frustrating student teachers who hoped to benefit from those qualifications. Another problem is the gap between ECD L4 and 5 and the entry to universities which makes it less easy for the teachers to access universities for degrees after completing their level 4 and or 5. Some of them even acquire the levels without having matric and that makes it impossible to access universities for higher learning (Harrison, 2020).

For those who wish to study further there is a lack of graduate and postgraduate study opportunities specialising in the birth to 4 years' age group. This is a significant barrier to professionalising and raising the status of the ECD sector (ETDP SETA, 2012). ECD teachers who studied from TVET colleges are found to have difficulties accessing universities due to issues such as having insufficient credits and having difficulties coping with the degree work (Harrison 2020). The very same author recorded that universities in SA do not have focus on pre-school education as in 0-4 years.

However, there are universities that are said to be in preparation for pre-grade R teacher qualifications. Some institutions are said to be considering a diploma on the basis that it is a less demanding qualification as compared to a degree. So far there is one University offering ECD NQF levels 4 to 7 which is a way which can lead a practitioner to a higher level. Some universities are said to be including some ECD modules in their Foundation phase courses. Some provinces do not have universities which include those modules (Harrison, 2020). Given the information on our TVET and

universities it shows that so far, the ECD qualifications are still resting in the hands of training providers and the ETDP-SETA. Even after the completion of the programmes by the said universities, funds might still be a determining factor to the ECD practitioners who are already in the teaching field.

2.6. CHALLENGES FACED BY ECD TEACHERS WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE ECD CURRICULUM.

There are many challenges which the Early Childhood sector faces more, especially the ECD teachers themselves. It might be the reason which made Phajane (2014) state that the ECD teaching is not for the faint hearted or passive individuals. It is meant for the front liners in the education of the young ones which comes with different challenges. For the sake of this study, the challenges faced by ECD teachers shall be categorized as follows:

2.6.1. Lack of properly trained ECD teachers

ECD teachers are expected to have great understanding and demonstration of ECD matters and as such provide meaningful services to the young ones. Whereas the expectation is that high, the resources and professional support are limited. The competencies of ECD teachers are imperative in ensuring the extent of how much a young child learns as well as the school readiness of that child. ECD teachers are to have deeper understanding on child development and early education matters and to offer advanced educational experiences for the young. When teachers are exposed to quality and comprehensive training, they impact positively in the learning and development of children (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009; Nyarambi & Ntuli, 2020).

Although ECD quality education is regarded as important for the adults working with young children, Phajane, (2014) records that ECD teachers in South Africa are still struggling with the challenge of educating the young children and are also faced with issues involving gathering and documenting evidence for the continuous individual assessment while actively coupled with children supervision.

Research evidence (Aboud & Proulx, 2019), points to the fact that longer training programs are more intensive and offer practitioners or teachers deeper knowledge in their respective fields. Further than that, specialised training programmes have a positive bearing on the teaching practices of the young ones. Those are trained on the specific topics of ECD. Teachers who are products of such training are said to be good at meaningful engagement with children in terms of interaction, comforting, praising questioning, and responding to children.

Although some teachers are meaningfully trained, there are still some ECD teachers who are found wanting on curriculum matters. According to Ntumi (2016:55) knowledge in early childhood curriculum is “more challenging and heavier as greater responsibility creates on the shoulders of the early childhood educators. It appears that despite what is planned and documented in the early childhood curriculum, practices of teachers and events going on in the classroom settings are not being realized”. This finding made by Ntumi on the study conducted in Ghana, is an indication to the fact that it is not in Vhembe East district only where ECD teachers are faced with issues around implementation of the ECD curriculum. Other countries like Ghana are also facing the similar curriculum implementation issues among trained ECD teachers.

Teacher preparedness seeks to produce personnel which are empowered with new skills, knowledge, and attitude. To close the gaps that occur when the trained teachers are now in the classroom, there is a need for in-service training which is in most cases the responsibility of the employers. Macharia, as cited by Kimosop (2019) suggested that there should be continuous in-service training more especially when there are changes in curriculum matters. This should take place at the ECD levels as well. In Kenya, Chebet (2016) found out that teachers are usually undertrained in public ECDE centres. In cases like this curriculum implementation faces challenge since teachers are the ones to interpret and put in practice the ECD curriculum teachers. Teacher qualification is a factor which influences ECD teachers in implementing the curriculum.

The type and nature of the training is not the only contributing factor that can lead either to good implementation or poor implementation of the ECD curriculum. There are a few possible reasons as to why training does not necessarily guarantee quality

care and teaching. These could include lack of practical demonstration and instruction during training, lack of on-site support to assist with implementation of theoretical training, and lack of follow-up support after the completion of training to ensure consistent implementation (Atmore 2012; Aboud & Proulx, 2019). All these aspects should be considered when developing a strategy or model to be followed or considered when training ECD practitioners.

Quality teacher training effects go beyond the classroom situation. It goes to an extent of contributing to a good quality education system which is responsible for raising the standard of living for its country's citizens. Inceli (2015) as cited by Toraman, Aydin and Ulubey (2016) maintains that the quality education system can only be realized through the training of teachers who are of higher quality.

2.6.2. Infrastructure

There is a notable concern about inadequate infrastructure across the ECD sector. In rural setups it starts with the nature of buildings (Madondo, 2020). The availability and the quality of infrastructure affects the service rendered in the ECD centres. Those in urban areas with better infrastructure and good management always perform better compared to those in poor areas (September 2007). In many countries this infrastructure problem features more in ECD than in the primary schools and secondary schools (Aboud & Proulx, 2019).

In Pakistan, Khan (2018) records that they have good ECD curriculum documents, but public implementing bodies are not showing interest on proper implementation of the documented curriculum. According to her, lack of infrastructure results also in many problems such as overcrowded classes, demotivated teachers, and others. The pre-schools lack spacious rooms with adequate facilities. According to this author, classes lack even local learning materials such as stones and bottle caps which can be used for counting by learners.

Children who live in areas without registered centres, many of which are poor and generally under-serviced, do not receive subsidy support. The per-child subsidy model does not provide for infrastructure development or maintenance, but prescribed

infrastructure is required to meet specified standards for registration (Richter et al., 2012).

As part of the findings in their ECD study which explored the growing of ECD in the rural areas, Hannaway, Marais, Govender and Meier (2018) also found infrastructure as one of the main issues facing the ECDs in the rural parts of South Africa. Baloyi and Makhubele (2018) also recorded infrastructure as the first challenge in the ECD sector. Infrastructure is identified as a particular problem in the South African context and regarded as the biggest challenge to the provisioning of ECD in the country. Many ECD centres function without basic infrastructure such as running water, electricity, and reasonable sanitation (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018).

In a study conducted by the national Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Social Development, and UNICEF, researchers found that the infrastructure in the community-based facilities was of a poorer standard than that of the public schools. The study found out that the unregistered facilities had a significant number of buildings that were rated as those that are in bad state. These bad conditions lead to non-registrations by sites with the Department of Social Development (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018).

Poor infrastructure at ECD facilities not only presents significant health and safety risks to children attending these facilities but can also point to poor quality ECD service provisioning (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018). The researchers found that unsafe and impoverished learning environment often is associated with substandard ECD with limited development opportunities. This condition is a result of government spending very low on ECD. It is estimated that South Africa spends almost three times less on learning in the preschool years (excluding Grade R) than on primary education and nine times less than on tertiary education (Richter et al., 2012).

2.6.3. Environmental poverty.

More than a million children are said to be born per year in South Africa. A bigger percentage of those children are born in rural areas which are largely characterized by poverty (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019).

It seems particularly difficult to implement quality ECD services to scattered homesteads in poor rural communities. In a context where basic needs such as nutrition, clean water, sanitation, health, and other services are inadequate, ECD and education are often not seen as priorities. Parental support in such areas is becoming very minimal. As such it becomes very difficult to implement quality service since parental contribution is a key factor in ECD. Mostly ECD sites are run by funds paid by parents. Because of poverty and unemployment levels parents are in no position to pay enough to run quality ECD services (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018).

The environmental poverty also affects lack of remuneration on the part of ECD teachers. As unpaid workers, it is difficult for them to provide quality service. In support of this view, Baloyi and Makhubele (2018) as well as Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, (2019) confirm that the ECD sector is faced with numerous challenges to quality, a workforce with low pay and poor conditions of service. If the sector is to grow and be upgraded, it will need to become more attractive as a career option, with incentives to improve qualifications.

The ECD Costing Study undertaken with ECD centres in the Western Cape found that salaries paid to ECD practitioners ranged from levels below minimum wages, to in very few and extreme cases acceptable levels (Carter 2009). Wage levels and conditions of employment must improve as these are critical factors in attracting and retaining skilled personnel in the 0-4 age ECD sector, particularly younger people. South Africa must adopt a strategy of improving wage and employment conditions as one of several strategies for enhancing quality in ECD. This sector could attract young people if it could be well remunerating. Although this study was conducted a long time ago, no other study has contradicted this finding.

2.7. WAYS OF IMPROVING THE ECD TEACHERS' TRAINING.

According to Atmore, van Niekerk and Cooper (2012), there are a few possible reasons as to why training does not necessarily guarantee quality care and teaching. The following can be contributing factors in the ECD trainings undergone by the ECD teachers: lack of practical demonstration and instruction during training, lack of on-site support to assist with implementation of theoretical training, and lack of follow-up

support after the completion of training to ensure consistent implementation (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019). Since there are no performance guarantees attached to any training, it is therefore important to explore the available ECD teacher trainings and come up with ways of improvement where need be.

According to Mead (2017), ECD is a highly skilled work which needs teachers to be properly trained. They need to be exposed to the science of childhood development and practical skills which afford them competencies to engage with children as well as assessing them properly. ECD teachers who are better trained could implement effective ECD practices. ECD programs which are run by specialised teachers and those with bachelor's degrees demonstrate lasting educational gains.

The qualifications that are offered so far by state and community colleges are not designed to cover the ECD classroom competencies according to Malkus (2017). They lack relevant classroom practical. A matter of concern has been the lack of opportunity for university qualifications in ECD except for Grade R, which comprises a small part of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Foundation Phase curriculum or specialised certificates and diplomas (Motala, 2012). Because of this condition there is almost a complete absence of Degree and Post Graduate training opportunities in ECD.

It is for reasons such as this that Hadebe (2015) suggested that universities be tasked with the responsibility to provide professional training for ECD teachers. They need proper educational training which will enable them to teach the ECD cohort. Learning through play should be thoroughly mastered by student teachers so that they do not disadvantage learners by struggling to do their part in the classroom.

There is a need for the training and development strategies of the ECD sector to be aligned to the specific conditions of ECD practice. Such an ECD training strategy should be with built-in career pathing for ECD qualifications. From the study that was conducted by September (2007), the training institutions expressed concern about the training that they provide, which is sometimes not implemented because of a lack of management capacity, and facilities and resources, such as training materials and equipment. Another perspective on the same issue was whether the training that is provided is appropriate for the context and settings in which the caregivers operate. It

was also cautioned that training, equipment, and facilities provided for poor children and their communities should never be of inferior quality just because these children live in disadvantaged environments. The study further indicates that for the EPWP to work in the ECD sector, well designed implementation strategies, which take into consideration the elements of recruitment, assessment, and screening of candidates; job readiness training; sector readiness; and orientation, placement, and retention, should all be in place long before the individuals begin the training.

To improve quality in the training of ECD teachers, there is a serious need for good initial preparation of the staff. There is also a need for consistency across all professional preparation programmes (Elliot, 2006). The improvement of the initial training alone cannot be a standalone solution to this matter. Ongoing education and training are also needed as part of the solution. Throughout their teaching years, teachers would need professional development to top up on their initial trainings (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018). Such training services can be provided by training institutions or through workshops which can be implemented by employers. Teachers who attend workshops and other professional development courses are found to be better than their counterparts who do not attend. However, professional development processes should consider the different backgrounds teachers are coming from. As such their training methods and content should address such variety (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018).

2.8. ESTABLISHING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECD CURRICULUM BY TRAINED TEACHERS.

It is very important for trained ECD teachers to implement the curriculum correctly and appropriately. Ntumi (2016) affirms by stating as follows: “once the teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented, then the performance of the pre-school teachers in the real classroom setting is affected positively during implementation”. Ntumi (2016) fully confirms that curriculum is designed to be followed for its desired result to be realized. Once it is not appropriately implemented, the teaching outcomes cannot be related to the said curriculum. As such much is to be done to ensure that the ECD curriculum is correctly implemented.

Important as the level of education of the ECD teacher is, there is however the understanding that the teacher quality in ECD cannot be a result of teachers' education level alone. Researchers agree that formal acquired education should be supplemented with in-service training (on-the-job coaching) (Baloyi & Makhubele, 2018). Some studies have assessed the impact of training on participants' implementation of targeted training content in work settings.

Proper curriculum implementation in ECD appears to be a problem in most parts of Africa since Kimosop (2019) also records that the Early Childhood Education Development (ECED) curriculum is not properly implemented in public pre-schools across the whole of Kenya. This author also recommends the use of frequent in-service training for the curriculum implementing teachers. So far, this suggestion cannot be over emphasized since the current workforce in the teaching of the young children is characterised by low education level. There is a need for mentoring and coaching which will result in application of new knowledge to everyday practice.

2.9. CONCLUSION

The above discussions reflected that almost all countries recognize training of the ECD teachers as important although they do it in different measures. It is also noted that countries which are not characterised by poverty do longer and quality teacher training in university degrees as compared to the poorer countries. The African countries are seen to be still on their way to quality ECD teacher education as compared to their overseas counterparts. However, it is a positive thing to realise the fact that no country undermines the training of ECD teachers out of its own perception. The children attending the ECD sites are as such expected to be in the capable hands of trained ECD teachers in the level of that country's affordability. The EPWP programme can as such be commended for having brought this ECD teacher training to those teachers who could not afford to do it by themselves. So far it is the main way of government training for ECD teachers in the community ECD sites. One wishes that in South Africa government could put more effort in the training of the ECD teachers since it appears like it is the backbone of the ECD implementation. The coming chapter will outline and detail the methodology as used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter was on Literature review. This chapter focuses on methodology as followed in this study. This section covers the research paradigm, methodology, design, and data collection methods that this study followed. The chapter outlines the background of the chosen design which is phenomenological. It furthermore gives the focus of the study and the unit of analysis. It also goes into the details on the instrument used for data collection, sampling, data collection methods, data capturing, data analysis, measures of trustworthiness as well as source of error.

3.2. BACKGROUND TO THE CHOICE OF DESIGN

Terrell (2012) refers to design as a road map which determines the route to take when conducting a study. The design provides the appropriate framework for the study (Sileyew, 2019). The research design can therefore be concluded to be a plan on how the study will be undertaken. In this study the design was phenomenological since it seeks to describe first-hand experience on the phenomenon under study.

Williams (2021), regards the meaning of phenomenology as the study of that which can be experienced. In phenomenological research the researcher tries as much as possible to allow the participant to tell what it is like to live in their personal world. Van Manen (2017) affirms that phenomenology attempts to answer the question 'what it is like to live a certain experience, to experience a phenomenon or event'. However, Zahavi (as cited by Williams, 2021, emphasizes the fact that phenomenology is concerned with more than just describing what different experiences are like. Further than that there is a need for some systematic and argumentative analysis.

In concurring with Zahavi's view, Qutoshi (2018), sees phenomenology as the philosophy of enquiry which is 'an intellectual engagement' in interpretations and meaning. Phenomenology is further referred to as a guideline which assists researchers to understand a phenomenon at the level of subjective reality by the same

author. The outcomes of a phenomenological study “broadens the mind, improves the ways of thinking to see a phenomenon, and it enables to see ahead and define researchers’ posture through intentional study of lived experiences” (Qutoshi 2018: 215). From the two views outlined here, there is more than describing lived experiences in phenomenological research.

According to Smith (2018), Husserl is the philosopher who established the discipline of phenomenology which has become known as descriptive phenomenology or transcendental phenomenology (Neubauer, Witkop & Varplo, 2021). Experiences are described without the involvement of the researcher’s perceptions to get into the world of the participant without presuppositions. The experiences involve the participant’s perceptions, memory, and emotions amongst many other things. In this approach, I ask questions which involve what an experience is like, what the experience means as well as what the experience presents to both the participant and the researcher.

Phenomenological research emphasizes personal perspectives and interpretations (Qutoshi, 2018). It seeks to describe more than to explain. It starts from a free perspective without hypothesis or preconceptions. One of the advantages of phenomenological research is that it is good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard (Lester, n.d). To achieve that, phenomenological research uses a variety of methods which include interviews, observations, conversations, and focus meetings.

When analysing the data within phenomenological research, some researchers find it as a disadvantage the fact that it is characterised by large volumes of interview notes, and audio recordings which must be analysed. At times analysis becomes messy because data is not necessarily neatly categorised (Qutoshi, 2018).

When reporting, findings are grouped according to themes and sub themes (topics) and draw key issues raised by participants. The main aim in reporting is to describe than explaining what was discussed by participants. I am expected to be faithful in conveying the participant’s message and be careful even when editing what is necessary. In this stage of the study the ethical issue is of prime importance to avoid elements such as treachery (Lester, n.d).

When discussing the findings, I intrude more into the study by interpreting and linking the findings with previous research and commentaries. When relevant to the discussions, theorisation can happen at this stage of the study. Theories developed here need not be assumed to be more concrete than they are (Lester, n.d).

Based on the description of phenomenology as an approach of enquiry in a study which seeks to describe the lived experiences of the research participants as well as interpreting those lived experiences and finding their meaning, I adopted this version of descriptive phenomenology as I considered it most suitable to this study.

3.3. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The study focused on the training of ECD teachers by the department of Education through the Expanded Public Works Programme and how they implement the ECD curriculum in the ECD sites after their training. The study sought to look at the experiences encountered by trained teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum. Further than that the study investigated how to improve the ECD teacher training as well as the curriculum implementation.

3.4. THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis on this study were the ECD teachers at the community ECD sites in the Vhembe East District of the Limpopo province. The participants acquired their ECD teacher training (ECD NQF level 4 and or level 5) as part of the implementation of the Expanded Public Works Programme within the Department of Education.

3.5. QUALITATIVE- INTERVIEW

This study is qualitative in nature and below are the procedures as they unfolded during the research process:

3.5.1 Reason for the investigation

This study intended to investigate the trained ECD teachers in the community sites who are trained in ECD level 4 and or level 5. The study investigated the nature of their training as well as challenges encountered by those teachers after training when

they are implementing the ECD curriculum. The study sought to understand the challenges they face as and when they are in their teaching and learning environment after they have been trained in their qualifications. Such challenges, after being brought to light by the participants themselves, were analysed and became the basis of the recommendations made on this study.

3.5. 2 Instrument used

The instrument used in this study was the semi-structured interview guide. This guide was composed of four questions which are linked to the four research questions of this study. The questions were all open-ended and are as follows:

- (i) How are ECD teachers trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (ii) What are the challenges experienced by the trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (iii) How can the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners be enhanced in the rural Vhembe East district?
- (iv) How can the training of ECD teachers through EPWP be improved in the rural Vhembe East district?

Pretesting the instrument

According to Hurst, Arulogun, Owolabi, Akinyemi, Uvere, Warth and Ovbiagele (2015), pretesting involves simulating the formal data collection process on a smaller scale to identify practical problems regarding data collection instruments, sessions, and methodology. Pretesting exercise can lead to detecting errors in language dialects, word ambiguity, as well as discovering possible flaws in variables. Pretesting can also provide advance warning about how or why a main research project can fail by indicating where research protocols are not followed or not feasible. Conducting a pre-test does not guarantee success in the main study but it does increase the likelihood. The information obtained from pretesting will be used to refine the interviewing process (Riet & Durrheim, 2016).

Although the phenomenological approach purports that data is generated by listening to unique lived stories, I deemed it necessary to conduct pre-testing the instrument to identify problems and find possible solutions. This was for the purpose of finding out if participants will find the questions meaningful and unambiguous. Their ability to answer the research questions meaningfully and successfully indicated that the interview questions were meaningfully formulated in such a way that they could answer them without struggling.

In this study, three practitioners were participated in the pretesting of the instrument. I first administered the instruments with this small sample in their ECD sites before doing the main study. They answered the questions in the interview guide, I checked for the correctness of the questions themselves with the aim of correcting where necessary. There were no ambiguities in the questions, as such no corrections were needed on the instrument. Since all went well in this process, the instrument was administered with the ten sampled participants without alterations. Questions were asked as per the interview guide and probing where necessary. The first collection of data was sent to the supervisor who then responded by saying that what was done was a simple question and answer session instead of it being an interview.

3.5.3 Sample design and sampling method

Sampling is regarded by Elfil and Negida (2017), as the representative of the targeted population. It is the selection of the portion of the population being studied. It is the ability of the researcher to select a portion of the population that truly represents the said population. Sampling becomes necessary because it is usually not possible for the researcher to research all cases due to the needed time and resources (Hamed, 2016). As such a representation of the affected population is to be sampled. The sample should be representative in the sense that each sampled unit represents the characteristics of a known number of units in the population (Hamed, 2016).

For this study, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling procedure is regarded as the most important kind of non-probability sampling (Groenewald 2004). It is referred to as judgmental or expert method. Doherty (1994) confirms that the purposive method of sampling involves

some judgment. A purposive sample is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a non-random manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population. In this study, I was guided by the purposive sampling procedure.

Guided by the nature of purposive sampling procedure as explained above, the sample was selected as follows: Out of all the ECD practitioners who have been trained in ECD NQF L4 and or L5 with assistance of the Department of Education through EPWP, ten (10) practitioners were selected for the purpose of participating in this study. All of them were in possession of grade 12. They all were from rural ECD community sites. Those that were selected were trained at different venues and different times. They have a variety of working years after training. Some of them are managers on their sites while some are just ECD teachers. It was considered right to include both managers and ordinary teachers to get views from the two categories. Sampled participants were given codes to identify them. The first participant was coded as 001 and was sequenced in such a manner that the last one (the tenth) was coded as 010.

3.5.4. Data collection methods and fieldwork practice

In phenomenological design information is generally obtained through interviews. Semi-structured Interview was conducted with the same sampled practitioners. The choice of interview method was also motivated by the fact that it allows the researcher to conduct those interviews face to face with the research participant and it gives a chance wherein the participant can raise issues which the researcher did not anticipate. It also gives a chance to know the in-depth of the participant's environment. It also allows the researcher to ask questions and assess the phenomena in question from a different angle and understanding (Sileyew, 2019).

Sampled participants were contacted telephonically and were invited to a common venue for a briefing about this study. The room used for the meeting was big enough for the participants to sit apart with 1, 5 meters amongst them. All of them were having their face masks on and were regularly sanitized during the meeting. Their temperatures were screened, and all COVID-19 protocols were observed. It was

during this meeting that their consent was sought. In that meeting, a visit schedule to their sites was developed. Upon the agreed dates, participants visited their ECD sites to conduct individual interviews. The participants signed their consent forms on the day of the interview wherein they agreed to participate in the study and to feel free to withdraw from this process whenever they felt no longer comfortable to continue. The interview guide with four research questions was used to give directions to the interviews. The contents of the interview guide were explained to the participants and the questions were read out to them. They were advised to feel free to answer those questions the way they saw fit. It would be fine for them to not follow the questions chronologically wherein their responses would cut across the questions. They were allowed to respond in their meaningful way.

During the interviews, in their responses to the research questions, the research participants were encouraged to express themselves of their own ECD experiences in the way which best suited them. They did so without distortion. There were no unnecessary interjections made. The participants flowed in expressing themselves when giving their responses.

During the interviews clarification and empathetic listening were employed (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). I explained again the purpose of the study and reminded them of the contents of the consent form. I also requested that I be allowed to record their interviews and take photos where necessary. When taking photos, I ensured that there were no identifiers such as names of school or individuals. I conducted the interviews. All conducted interviews were individually audio taped using two smart phones. The reason for using two phones was to have an immediate backup of the interviews. Each interview was then labelled with an assigned code.

3.5.5 Data capturing and data editing

All recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim. A research assistant assisted in transcribing. The research assistant is an experienced one who does similar work to some researchers. The transcribed material was printed into hard copies for ease

reading. I read through the printed Tshivenda transcribed material. When reading them I would mostly pause and listen to the audio to ascertain that indeed what is on the paper is what is in the audio. I then translated the transcribed interviews from Tshivenda to English. Interviews were conducted in Tshivenda to allow the participants to say all which they wanted to convey instead of reserving some responses because of the language barrier.

The translation activity was a bit tedious and overwhelming. At some point I felt that it would have saved me the translating time if participants were interviewed in English. It would also have reduced the volume of work utilised for the translation. I decided to do the translation on my own, since I have some translating and versioning experience. I did translations for various curriculum documents for the department of basic education and for The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). As such I decided to do the same with my studies. Another reason for translating on my own was that I saw it as an opportunity to read through all the transcribed information, which was an opportunity to familiarise myself with the data. However, I gave one of my translated documents to a reputable translator to check for accuracy and that translator checked the translated document against the Tshivenda transcribed document.

The familiarisation done through the whole process of translation becomes a light or initial analysis (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020) wherein researchers will take notes of the ideas or experiences shared by participants in the audio tapes, observation notes or description documents.

3.5.6 Data analysis

In this study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been identified as the most suitable analysis method. Alase (2017), is of the view that Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) gives the researcher a chance to understand the deliberations of the lived experiences of the participants. According to Love, Vetere and Davis (2020), IPA is a qualitative thematic approach found within the

phenomenological philosophy which originated from health psychology. It is part of the phenomenological psychology approach (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA studies is conducted on small sample sizes since it analyses in detail what is given by the participant in the interview. It avoids jumping into generalization by making in-depth interpretative accounts (Mole, Kent, Hickson & Abbot, 2019). The main objective of the IPA is therefore to explore the lived experiences of the participants on the participant's own terms.

Data in the form of audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated from Tshivenda to English as already indicated earlier. The English version was then printed so that it would be easy to read through. The analysis adopted five of the steps indicated by Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar, & Fielder, (2016):

a. Reading and re-reading

I read and re-read the transcribed record to familiarise myself with the content of the data. It was easier to understand what I was reading because I collected the data on my own and as such, what I was reading and rereading was not new. I highlighted points of interest and wrote some notes on how I understood those points.

b. Initial coding

As I read through the data again, I started coding the data. I started giving meaning to data which was relevant to my research questions by writing codes on the margin of the printed data.

c. Developing emergent themes

After assigning codes to data items, I grouped together codes which were having similarities to make one theme. I reread the data and went through my emergent themes and saw that they captured the entire data set. No important data was left out. Only the data which was not relevant to the research questions were not captured as part of the themes. Some of the excluded data was already coded whereas some of it was not even coded in the first place.

d. Searching for connections across emergent themes

Themes which were related were integrated.

e. Taking interpretations to deeper levels

Under each research question, themes were named, described and analysed. Data was presented and interpreted. Quotes were cited from the data in support of the analytic points extracted from the data. More extracts were selected, presented and analysed showing coverage of the themes. Literature was discussed as either supporting or negating the arguments. Writing and analysing was done through themes which were presented logically and meaningfully. Most of the themes connected well and that contributed to the flow of the narration.

In line with the phenomenon of learners' development learning from the 'experts', Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), data was analysed using themes developed from the study objectives/ questions.

3.5.7. Measures of trustworthiness

Gunawan (2015) regards trustworthiness as the level of confidence in the data, interpretation and methods used in ensuring the study's quality. To ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I sought to satisfy the four criteria which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.5.7.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to "the truth and the value of the data" (Helmbold, 2021:25). To satisfy credibility, I ensured that a true picture of the phenomenon is demonstrated. They were encouraged to give accurate information free from any intimidation and fear of losing credibility with their managers (Shenton, 2004). Probing was employed to get details on answers given by the respondents. This ensured credibility since it improved chances of getting clearer and accurate meaning. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The recording ensured accuracy of the findings because what the participant said in the interview can still be revisited for accuracy from the recorded voice clips.

3.5.7.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Connelly, 2016). A thick description was employed to ensure transferability. The results of this study can be transferred to all ECD sites who find themselves in the same rural environment even outside Vhembe East district. The results of this research are applicable to those rural sites who did not participate in this study. Detailed descriptions which took place in this study, make this study to be transferrable to other situations. Many sites will identify themselves with the details given by the participants.

3.5.7.3. Dependability

Dependability criterion relates to the consistency or reliability of findings (Gunawan 2015). Connelly (2016) states that dependability refers to the stability of data over time and conditions of the study. He further likens it to reliability in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that there are close ties between dependability and credibility and that getting the other in place ensures the presence of the other. The same authors advise that processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work. I adhered to the above advice and made sure that details on processes are fully given. During data analysis all details of the findings were given to an extent that anyone who would like to do a similar study can follow the trail.

3.5.7.4. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to neutrality which is the ability of the findings of the study to reflect the participant's opinions and experiences without bias (Kyngas, Kaariainen and Elos, 2020). Confirmability requires that "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004: 72). To attain that, the first step is that I kept all audio recorded tapes intact as evidence of what and how the informants responded. Secondly, the non-electronic documents (transcribed documents) of the collected data are kept in the

form of printed hard copies. The two ways of storing the collected data serve as reflective journal.

3.6. ETHICAL AND SAFETY ISSUES

Researchers continually face ethical issues throughout their research journey. Amongst those issues are confidentiality and informed consent. Teachers are amongst other professionals who should be well informed of such issues when engaged in qualitative research (Sanjari, Bramnazehad, Fomani, & Cheraghi, 2014).

Institutionally there has been presentation of the proposal before the panel which was comprised of personnel from the Department of Early Childhood and Foundation, other staff members from the faculty of education including my supervisors and fellow students. I presented my proposal using the format provided by the supervisors. It was a slide presentation. After the presentation, the audience made input in the form of advice which I had to follow to improve the proposal. The improved version of the proposal was submitted to the supervisor for presentation before the Faculty of Education's Higher Degrees Committee for quality assurance. After the two presentations the Faculty of Education's Higher Degrees Committee submitted the proposal to the University's Higher Degree's Committee for approval. After the approval by the University's Higher Degree's Committee, the proposal was submitted to the ethics committee for ethical clearance. The ethical clearance was finally issued and served as one of the attachments when applying permission to conduct research from the Department of Education in the Limpopo province.

Externally permission was sought from the Department of Education, Limpopo Province, to conduct interviews with sampled candidates (teachers) from the ECD sites. The understanding is that informed consent to participate is one of the major hallmarks of modern ethical research. It was my responsibility to maintain the dignity and welfare of all participants. This obligation also entailed protecting them from harm, unnecessary risks, or mental and physical discomfort that may be inherent in the research procedure.

3.6.1 Informed consent:

Before participating in interviews, participants were requested to give their consent to participate in writing. The consent was signed by the participant. This was done because it is important for the participants to understand what is requested of them. They were made aware of the fact that they as well will get the result of this study when dissemination of the study takes place. It was made clear the fact that they are allowed to decline and not participate in this study if they are not comfortable with the process. They understood the fact as well that there will not be any remuneration for the interviews.

The consent form indicated that the participants who agree to participate in this study were free to discontinue the process should they feel like doing so. Their permission was also sought to record the interviews and the purpose of recording was made clear to them and the fact that it will not be used for any other purpose except this one only.

3.6.2 Confidentiality:

To ensure confidentiality, participants' names were not used throughout data collection and data processing. The participants were identified by allocated codes. The other identification details such as names of their ECD centres are also not recorded in any stage of this study. I safeguarded all information entrusted to me (recorded voice clips and photos) and did not misuse or wrongfully disclosed it.

3.6.2. Potential for harm

The nature of this study posed minimal risk to participants. The risk anticipated was emotional distress by ECD educators while sharing their experiences. Although the risks were minimal, I made arrangements with the social workers of the local Department of Social Development (DSD) to offer counselling in case of emotional distress. Participants were only 10 from different areas within Vhembe East district. That made it easy to find assistance from social workers since there would only be one or two participants within their jurisdiction. Debriefing was to be done in cases where the participants could be distressed. Participants were also given the contact numbers

of social workers who were working with ECD centres. In cases where there are local health facilities, social workers from the DSD arranged for social workers from local health facilities to conduct those briefings. Fortunately, no participant was distressed and as such the arranged services by social workers did not materialize.

3.7. Conclusion

The research designed and methodology described how this research was conducted. It showed how the research paradigm defended the choice of the research design, and the focus of the study as well as the unit of analysis. This chapter detailed the step by step of this research: how sampling was done, how data was collected and analysed. Chapter Four will focus on presentation of the findings as well as discussions thereof.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 described the research design and methodology of the study and gave the background of the population, sampling as well as how data was collected and analysed. This chapter presents and discusses the findings as categorised according to the four objectives of this study. The first part of the presentation of the results will be demographic. The demographic results focus on the gender of the participants, their age, level of education, teaching experience as well as the settlement in which their ECD sites are situated.

The second part of the presentation will be on findings as they are found from the four objectives of this study. The findings are grouped according to themes and sub-themes.

- (i) To explore how ECD teachers are trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district,
- (ii) To explore challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district,
- (iii) To explore ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the rural Vhembe East district, and
- (iv) To establish strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

The data will focus on details of the participants. It will include their locality or settlement, age, gender, level of education and years of teaching experience. The data will be presented in a table form followed by the narrative explanation. Table 4.1. Below presents the demographic results table.

Table 4.1 Demographic results

Participant no	Gender	Age	Level of education	Teaching experience in ECD	Settlement
001	Female	56	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	18	Rural
002	Female	45	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	13	Deep rural
003	Female	57	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	21	Deep rural
004	Female	43	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L4	11	Deep rural
005	Female	48	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	14	Rural
006	Female	60	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L4	25	Deep rural
007	Female	58	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	17	Rural
008	Female	52	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	14	Semi-rural
009	Female	60	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L5	30	Semi-rural
010	Female	41	Grade 12 + ECD NQF L4	7	Semi-rural

The ten participants in this study were all black women. None of them was below the age of forty years. Four of them (40%) were between forty years and forty-nine years of age, four (40%) being between fifty and fifty-nine and lastly, two (20%) of them sixty years and above.

Concerning their level of education, four of them (40%) have grade twelve and ECD NQF level 4 certificate while six of them (60%) have grade 12 and ECD NQF level 5 diploma.

In terms of the number of years in ECD teaching service, one (10%) has an experience of less than 10 years, six (60%) have an experience between ten and nineteen years, two have an experience between twenty and twenty-nine years while lastly, only one (10%) has an experience from thirty years and above.

All the participants are rural based although at different rural levels.

4.3. RESULTS

Tables 4.2 – 4.5 present results within the themes and sub-themes as they emerged from the interviews as answers to the four semi-structured research questions:

Table 4.2. Summary of the results: Training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.

Training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Recruitment and registration process	Recruitment and registration of ECD teachers Recruitment of training providers
2. Training orientation and modules	Training orientation and fundamental module Core module Elective module
3. Teaching Practice	In the training class In the ECD site
4. Assessment	Diagnostic / baseline Continuous Summative
5. Challenges in training	Distance to the training venue Inappropriate training venue Time allocated for contact sessions Language issue ECD classroom experience by the facilitator Delay in graduation or handing over of certificates

Below follows the discussion on the themes as they were unfolded under the first objectives of this study:

4.3.1. Training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.

This section details the findings as outlined by research participants on the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe district. The findings were categorised under the following themes:

4.3.1.1. Recruitment and registration process

In this training, recruitment was done in two ways: recruitment of ECD teachers into the programme and recruitment of service providers to conduct the training of the recruited ECD teachers.

4.3.1.1.1. Recruitment and registration of ECD teachers.

The participants indicated that they were selected from different community ECD sites. The criteria for their selection were as follows:

Teachers should belong to a community ECD site, already rendering ECD services to children between ages 0-4 and half years. This excluded those ECD teachers who are working on private ECD sites. Because this is an EPWP initiative, the teacher should not have benefited from the EPWP programme before. They should be in possession of grade 12. Those ECD teachers living with disabilities were given priority. The database from the district office was used for the identification of such qualifying ECD teachers and the ECD forums assisted in confirming them. The database has a list of all practitioners with all the necessary information such as the names of the site they work on, their highest qualifications as well as the villages where their sites are located. It is therefore easy to locate sites which still have unqualified teachers and those that have level 4 and still need level 5. Those participants should have served in those ECD sites before the financial year of their recruitment. Participant 008 put it this way:

P008: We were recruited at district level by officials from the department of education. All the recruited practitioners were from community ECD sites which have existed for at least three years. The recruited practitioners should not have been part of the EPWP project before. The

officials sent out a recruiting message to the ECD sites together with the list of the criteria for the group they want for that financial year. Our ECD forum members worked together with the officials in identifying us from different ECD sites. When they were satisfied with our grade 12 certificates and other Curriculum Vitae details they then called us to a common venue, and we completed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) for the EPWP contract which was a 12-months contract. After signing the MOU, we started receiving stipend on monthly basis even before the training commences.

Participant 001 seemed to have had her recruitment into this programme as a sort of a surprise since she mentioned that she heard of the recruitment from her principal. The principal further requested her academic documents and other personal details intending to submit them to the district office. Apparently, she started this whole training process from that submission of documents to the principal who in turn submitted them to the district office. After that submission she was called to come and contract with the department of Education for an EPWP engagement. The recruitment led her to a stipend payment. After that she was called for the ECD training. This participant described her recruitment process in the following manner:

P001: My principal came back from a meeting and requested me to bring along my ID document, CV and grade 12 certificate. She said she was sending it to the Department of Education. After a month or two I was called to fill out an EPWP contract with the Department of Education. It was in this meeting where I met other ECD teachers who were also recruited. You know what? At the end of the following month I started earning a stipend. After that I was called the other day by a district official to come for a training session for a level 5 certificate. That is where we met the district officials, training company and the facilitator.

The participants further explained that in that meeting they were registered with the ETDP-SETA which verified if they were registering their qualification for the first time. Those that were previously registered with other service providers were replaced. This

was done to prevent teachers enrolling for training for the second time since that would later cause problems when the time for printing certificate comes. Those that were found to have attended these training courses before were advised to contact their previous training providers to be assisted on getting hold of their qualifications (from ETDP- SETA). Participant 005 put it this way:

P005: Some of the recruited teachers were not doing level 5 for the first time. When we met for the actual training, they were told that some of them already completed this qualification previously with other service providers. In our group there were only two of them. Apparently, they thought they were not competent with the previous service providers and thought they would redo the qualification anew. They were told to contact their previous training providers and organize for the printing of the certificates. Somehow, I felt envious of them because they were getting a good surprise, getting the qualification which, they thought they failed to get the previous time.

On the issue of double registration, other participants think that sometimes ECD teachers do it on purpose because this second registration comes with stipend. So they do not mind doing the training for the second time as long as they will be getting stipend. Some ECD teachers dropped off the other privately paid training providers because they are recruited by the Department of Education which is free of charge and the training is coupled with stipend. This fourth the question of whether in the first place it was the training which is anticipated by these teachers, or it is the stipend which matters and brings them to be part of the training. Maybe the motive of participating in this EPWP initiated training was motivated by the love of money instead of the need to learn.

4.3.1.1.2. Recruitment of training providers

Participants were not very clear about this process. They were not part of this recruitment as they only met their trainers who came together with the service providers and the facilitators. The provincial Department of Education was responsible

for the identification and appointment of the service providers who then contract the facilitators. After probing and wanting to know how the service providers and facilitators came on board, participant 004 responded by saying:

P004: I don't know. We only met them there in our first meeting which they said was for the induction. They introduced themselves to us but did not explain how they came about. We also did not ask for any more details.

The details on how training service providers were recruited could have been obtained from the provincial department officials. Unfortunately, this study did not include the provincial department officials and as such further information could not be accessed.

The process of recruiting existing ECD practitioners for teacher training is a good contribution to the ECD field since it is important for children to be taken care of by trained ECD teachers. ECD teaching should be seen as a specializing area which is to be taken care of by educated staff instead of treating it as casual and leaving it to the care of those that are only interested in taking care of the children even when they did not study towards the profession. It is also to the advantage of the ECD teachers to be trained for these qualifications since it also affects their competency and access to decent remuneration.

Harrison (2022) confirms that there is a call for professionalisation of the ECD sector. There are now various training institutions offering a variety of training courses for this sector. The training courses now focus more on play based approaches than more formalised learning approaches. ECD teachers gaining ECD qualifications now are in a better position to develop lessons incorporating more physical movement which is much needed in the holistic development of the child.

4.3.1.2. Training orientation and modules

This theme focuses on the orientation together with the modules announced during the orientation session. After the recruitment was concluded, the participants were engaged in the orientation session. Focus was on the following sub themes:

4.3.1.2.1. Training orientation and the fundamental module

During the induction the participants were orientated on the details of their coming training. Their training was composed of modules which are comprised of a number of Unit Standards grouped together. The participants indicated that they have 3 modules for both level 4 and 5 qualifications, namely: fundamental, core and elective. They indicated that they received the first module (fundamental) on the first day which was for induction. The participants had longed for ECD qualification training which was not possible due to lack of funds on their part. They sounded grateful for being part of this training. Participant 001 voiced it this way:

P001: On the orientation day which was the very first day of the training meeting, I was very glad that I was given the study material in the form of the first module. The first module was called fundamental and we would receive the other two as the training was going on. The other two would be the core and the elective. Getting the first module on the first day of training felt like it was a dream coming true. It was long that I had wanted to get some ECD teaching qualification, but I could not do so due to lack of funds. I thank this EPWP programme because now I am a trained ECD practitioner. This first module was like a warmup because it focused on Mathematical literacy and Communication Unit Standards. It reminded us of the classes in secondary school.

Although some of the participants were likening the first module with the grades they did at secondary schools, some complained that the Mathematics component was not that easy and they felt like they should have had some thorough teaching to get some deeper understanding thereof. There is a feeling that the facilitators as well were not fully competent when it came to Mathematics Unit Standards. Although they are not satisfied with their understanding of Mathematics, they are grateful for the fact that they ended up satisfying the competence level in Mathematics. Participant 007 put it this way:

P007: Some of us did not do Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy in grade 12. When the Unit Standard for Mathematics was taught, it was

difficult for us even though it was not deep Mathematics. Maybe it's because Mathematics will remain Mathematics and is not for everybody to walk through. It appeared as if even the facilitator was having it tough as well. She would avoid discussing some of the topics and we assumed that it might have been difficult for her too. But I am glad we ended up being competent in the Mathematical Literacy Unit Standard as well despite the fact that we did not do it thoroughly.

With the exception of the Mathematics issue, the first module seems to have been an easy one which was fit for the start of the programme. Following hereunder, is the core module.

4.3.1.2.2. Core module

The second module was explained to be the 'core' module which consists of Unit Standards which are already chosen for them to be in line with their qualification either level 4 or 5. The module is also compulsory for all participants. Participant 008 described it in this way:

P008: The second module consisted of several Unit Standards which are grouped together to make it a core module. When doing my level 5 there were almost eight of them (Unit Standards) if I remember well, but they were slightly more than half of all the Unit Standards combined. As such, this module becomes the biggest of the three modules.

Referring to the same module, participant 010 confirmed it to be very relevant to what the trainee teachers would be doing in classroom with the children. It addresses classroom management and appears to be core in the real sense. The good thing is that both ECD level 4 and 5 underwent training on this module and this would appear to mean that all of them should have been competent in the matters of classroom and curriculum handling. The participants wished they were exposed to this module before starting to work in ECD sites. The Unit Standards of this module were said to be very relevant to what takes place in the ECD classroom. This module was seen as valuable to almost all the participants.

P010: This second module was, according to me, very relevant to ECD classroom and interesting as well because it consisted of Unit Standards which dealt exactly with what we do in the ECD classroom. Those Unit Standards gave us the in-depth knowledge of the practicality of ECD. I really enjoyed the module and also thought that I wish I got this knowledge before starting teaching in the ECD class. It would have made things easier for me. The knowledge we got from this module was such that one would not struggle any more with the ECD classroom of any age cohort.

Module 2 (core) appears to have been more informative to those that were with less work experience. Almost all participants appreciated having been exposed to this module. They described it as being rich in information regarding planning and facilitation in the ECD classroom. Participant 007 commended this module by saying the following:

P007: That second module was rich of information needed by any ECD teacher. It contained all the information on planning, classroom facilitation, playroom arrangement, in fact let me say that management of the whole ECD programme management was included in the Unit Standards contained in this module.

It is clear from the discussions on this sub theme that this module was much relevant to what the participants were familiar with in their ECD sites. This would then pave the way for them to excel in doing their work since they used to practice without formal knowledge of the work and now they are formally introduced to the correct ways of doing it.

According to Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, (2018) the quality of teacher training has a role in the performance of the trained teacher. If the trained teachers were satisfied with the training as is indicated, and the training was of acceptable quality, there is a high chance of teachers performing well in their ECD classrooms. Below here follows the module referred to as 'elective'.

4.3.1.2.3. *Elective module*

The third module's material was distributed amongst the students after they completed the second one. It is referred to as 'elective'. In this module they are supposed to select unit Standards which they see fit for their environment. In the case of these groups of participants they did not choose individually since they were in a small number of classes and had to do same Unit Standards. As such their elective Unit Standards were the same and fit for their ECD learning environment. They were selected in such a way that they will suit their needs in the ECD classrooms.

The selected elective Unit Standards were mainly on the teaching methodology in ECD focusing on Languages, Mathematics and Life Skills. The teaching methodologies are said to have considered the way children learn in their play environment wherein the major learning materials are in the form of toys. One would think of this module as very relevant to the teaching and learning situation since it is said to be articulating the how part of teacher and learner interaction in the classroom. Participant 004:

P004: After we had finished our second module, we received the third module which was composed of selected Unit Standards grouped together and are called the electives. They were chosen for us because they were found to be fit for our needs in the ECD sites. In our case that was where we did Unit Standards focusing on Literacy or language, Life Skills, Mathematics. These Unit Standards focused on how to teach those learning areas in the ECD environment. Remember, ECD is different because we use lots of toys in whatever that we do with children.

If the trainee ECD teachers were taught methods of engaging children in learning Languages, Mathematics and Life Skills in a playful manner, the training courses covered an important part of the ECD teacher training. Harrison (2020: 2) is one of the authors who emphasizes the importance of play based learning as follows:

Relevant, age-appropriate learning through play is an important aspect of stimulating learning in the birth-to-four age group; consequently, it is

imperative that South Africa has a well-trained workforce of early childhood teachers who can meet the needs of children.

Some participants said they felt very good to be doing the Learning areas as they are named in the foundation phase. In ECD sites they speak of Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) instead of subjects or Learning Areas. For them to learn about subjects or Learning Areas was a way of elevation or upgrade. One put it as follows:

P002: It felt very good to be talking of Literacy, Mathematics and Life Skills. I felt like I was doing a real teaching course since we were now using the same concepts as the foundation teachers are doing in primary schools. I have some hope that when one day I enroll for a further qualification in teaching, this background will be of use to me. I am really thankful that I got some exposure here.

It appears as if the participants were very satisfied with the way their training was packaged. The modules were of interest and benefit to all of them. Their satisfaction with this training resembles that perception as noted by Lingam (2012) as cited by Ullah (2017). The finding was derived from the study which was on teachers' perceptions on the training programme offered by Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education. Research participant teachers reported to be very satisfied with the teacher training programme which they attended.

Research participants' responses appear to express satisfaction over the trainings they went through. If the training was relevant to them, ideally one would then expect them to display some expertise in their classroom situation after their training unless if we are also to accommodate what was raised by Bawani and Mphahlele (2021) that training alone does not guarantee good teaching and care but there are some factors that need to be considered. Even if that were the case, it would not mean that teacher training is less important. Contrary to that Ulla (2017) strengthened the fact that teacher training has positive effects on students. It affects their level of confidence in the task which faces them and that would also contribute to the improvement of their

courage to do their work. If one knows what there is to do, one faces the duties with courage and confidence.

To Toraman, Aydin and Ulubey (2016), quality education can only be achieved through the training of teachers who acquire skills and have good attitude towards their training. Being satisfied with their training is one such example of a good attitude towards their training, which according to this view, is a positive factor which contributes towards delivery of quality education.

4.3.1.3. Teaching practice

Teaching practice is regarded as a good structured programme which gives trainee teachers with an opportunity to experience real classroom setting. It also includes an opportunity to evaluate the prospective teachers' competencies (Aglazor, 2017). The practitioners explained their teaching practise as happening in two ways, which is practising in the training classroom in the presence of the trainer and the rest of the practitioners. The other practise took place in the ECD classroom in the presence of real learning children. This practise may take place in the presence of the mentor or the peer teacher as and when there is a need.

4.3.1.3.1. Teaching practice in the training classroom.

The participants reported that the training was structured in such a way that most of their work was practical. They spent one week in the training venue and three weeks in their community ECD sites, putting into practice that which was taught in the class. This was explained as follows by participant 002:

P002: Much of what we did was practical than the theory. We would spend just a week in class and do maybe one Unit Standard or two. After that we would go back to our ECD sites and put what we have learnt into practice. That was when we would experience change from how we were doing things before training and how we do it after training.

Besides doing the practical part of what they learnt during the three weeks in a month, the participants indicated that they would at times do their practical work in the training

classroom in the presence of the facilitator. They would after the facilitator's presentation, be instructed by the facilitator to put the theory in practice. According to participant 006, the practical part emulated in the training classroom was very interesting. The trainer got an opportunity to correct where it was needed. In her own words participant 006 explained as follows:

P006: One other interesting part in the class was when the facilitator would want us to demonstrate what she taught us or what we discussed in our groups and presented to the class. I remember us doing puzzle fitting in the class. The other day she requested me to demonstrate to the rest of the class how to feed a child. I did it using a doll in the place of the real child. The advantage of doing practical in the class is that the facilitator is there to correct us when need arises.

Practice teaching plays an important role in the initial teaching of the ECD teachers as well as teachers of other phases. Mentoring teachers play a vital role in assisting the trainee teachers (Bipath, 2022) on how to do their activities as and when the need arises. The inclusion of teaching practice in this training programme is in line with what many authors believe (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). Below follows the practice teaching which takes place inside the real ECD classroom.

4.3.1.3.1. Teaching practice in the ECD site

The participants also indicated that during the three weeks which they spent back in their ECD sites before coming back to classes, the facilitator would do site visits to observe the participant when they are in class practicing what they were taught during the training sessions. This was remarked by one of the participants:

P008: In terms of practice teaching observation, our facilitator came to the site to observe how we were doing as far as classroom matters were concerned. She would come to the site and spend the whole day with us, assisting even those other teachers that are not in training but needed some assistance.

Teaching practice is an important part of the training in any teacher education process. It is important that student teachers be exposed to the real classroom environment and also have teacher and learner experience. During the teaching practice, the student teacher discovers their strengths and weaknesses and also gets a chance to address the weaknesses with the assistance of the experienced teachers in schools (Aglazor, 2017). Ode, Iloakasia and Maduka (2020) emphasise the fact that teaching practice should be given adequate time and be well supervised so that it prepares teachers who are well prepared for teaching.

In the case of this ECD teacher education which ECD teachers accessed through the EPWP and the Department of Education, one can say that the time for practice teaching was ample. Although the period of the training is just for a year or two (in case of those that did L 5 diploma), the practical part dominated the whole scheduled time for training.

4.3.1.4. Assessment

The assessment was said to be done in three ways: diagnostic or baseline, continuous and summative.

4.3.1.4.1. Baseline assessment

The baseline assessment was conducted on the induction day. After the participants were introduced to the course, they were made to write a baseline assessment. The facilitator explained to the participant that the test would assist in identifying those participants who had broad experience in ECD, and they will be exempted from doing some of the Unit Standards. However, the participants noted that they were all taught the same way, so they ended up not seeing those who were exempted from any Unit Standard. Participant 007 put it this way:

P007: On the induction day we wrote a short test. The facilitator told us that the test would serve as baseline and diagnostic at the same time. The assessment would identify some gaps which would have to be closed during the course of the training. Another purpose was that it would assist those teachers who had broad experience so that they would be assessed

in those Unit Standards instead of being taught. Unfortunately, that did not happen in our training session. We all were taught the same way, those with broader experience and those that were having less number of years' experience.

4.3.1.4.2. Continuous assessment

Participants indicated that continuous assessment happened almost every day in the class or at home. Participants further indicated that there was too much work to do on their part as Training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district. The participants would at times do both classwork and homework on one day. The programme is said to have been very hectic with very little breathing space. Participants always had some assessment work to do, and the facilitator used to give them positive feedback on the tasks given. The facilitator would always give them the way forward to the next task upon completion of the other task.

P010: The training material was also composed of what I can refer to as a workbook. This is where we would fill in the answers and at times we would do that either as classwork or homework. Whenever the task would be more time taking, the facilitator would let us do the work at home. It seems as if she did not want us to spend more time doing individual work in the class. The programme was very packed of activities in such a manner that we would hardly have time to rest.

Still on the continuous assessment, participant 009 indicated that during the training they would be given assessment tasks upon completion of every Unit Standard. Every day they had some assessment tasks to do even within the Unit Standard themselves. The tasks would be in the form of an assignment, a test, classwork and or project. Every day was characterized by tasks. The programme is said to have been very busy. The participants were very active in their process of learning for these qualifications. The facilitator used to mark their work and give them feedback in both assessment cases (during the particular Unit Standard and after completion of the Unit Standard). Participant 009 put these matters as follows:

P009: Between each Unit Standard we would do some kind of assessment. It would either be an assignment, test, classwork, homework or project. As such we would always have work to do on a daily basis. Really it was a tough situation where one would work and sleep late and still wake up very early in the morning. That training was very busy and the schedule was very tight. After finishing the allocated tasks, we would submit our completed work to the facilitator who would then assess our work and correct where it was needed. She usually gave us feedback after assessing our work.

Assessment is said to be a central part of educational practice (Amua-Sekyi, 2017). In the case of the above citation, continuous assessment also included the use of formative assessment (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021), as the teacher would assist by correcting and giving feedback on what the participants have done in the tasks. The last type of assessment referred to by the participant is the summative assessment.

4.3.1.4.3. Summative assessment

As summative assessment the trainees were made to submit their portfolio of evidence which was in the form of a file. The file would then be submitted to the training provider for submission to the moderators who would then confirm whether they are competent or not. At this time the facilitator as the assessor is satisfied with their performance.

Assessment in different forms is an integral part of the education process. It affects how the teacher plans and teaches as well as how the learners learn (Amua-Sekyi, 2016). The ECD NQF level 4 and 5 seem to have not used other assessment techniques like writing of formal tests. The programme could have made use of a variety of assessment techniques to do evaluation and assessment. That could have assisted in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of student teachers (Yambi, 2020) with the aim of making interventions which would strengthen their learning in their teacher training.

4.3.1.5. Challenges in training

Whereas the research participants confirmed that they were satisfied with the way their training went, there were however some challenges picked up from their narrations: distance to the training venue, time allocated for contact sessions and language issue on the side of the trainers.

4.3.1.5.1. Distance to the training venue

The fact that trainee teachers were travelling to a central place coming from different villages was a challenge to some. Two of the participants reported having had challenges that stemmed from staying away from the training venue although they mentioned that from their villages this area is the nearest sub-urban place where they usually come for municipal consultations, minor banking matters and shopping. But having to arrive there early for classes and leaving at the end of the session was not the same as coming for other errands which are not done on specific times.

The distance issue left some participant having had to get temporary accommodation around the settlement where the training was taking place. This was worsened by the scarcity of transport from their place coming to the area where the training is. The participant showed the understanding that there was no better place for this training to take place since all participants were coming from different areas and this place is the only one which could cater for them all although there would be this type of difficulty to some of them. Participant 003 expressed her distance challenge as follows:

P003: I understand that the venue could not be equally conducive for everyone, but with me it was a serious challenge because there was no way I could have travelled daily from my place to the training venue due to the distance and lack of public transport in my village. I was as such left with an option of seeking accommodation from a friend I found in the training during the induction. The training started at eight o'clock in the morning and ended at four o'clock. Already it was late for me who had to change transport two times before getting the one going to my village. I have already indicated that I understand that the venue could not suit us all in the same way but having to leave home for a week every month was

a bit of strain since I had to leave my eight-month baby at home with my mother. So, you can see why it was a challenge on my side.

Still on the distance issue to the training venue, one participant said she was travelling more than eighty kilometres to come to the training venue every day. She was expected to be in the class on time just like other students. She stated that on the first day the officials emphasized that everyone should be on time every day. The travelling was not easy since she had to depart from home very early in the morning and be back very late in the evening. Regardless of the very long day encountered, the participants had to complete some activities given to them as homework. This is how she put it:

P004: I stay here in this village. I had to travel to Tshilamba every day so I had to wake up at four o'clock in the morning so that I could catch my transport at five o'clock. Our facilitator wanted us in class on time and did not tolerate late coming regardless of the fact that I stay more than 80 kilometres from Tshilamba. Even the officials who came in to monitor the training did emphasize that late coming and absenteeism was not allowed at all. I used to reach my home around seven in the evening. It was not easy at all since I still had to do my homework and still start early again the following day.

This distance challenge was not for all participants since there were those that said they were residing in the same vicinity as the training venue. Also, one participant indicated that she was welcomed by one classmate who was residing locally. The others were coming from places where they used one transport which was easy for them to reach the training venue on time and also easy to reach home on time after knocking off from the training.

The distance challenge is unfortunate in this circumstance and it is clear that it made their studying time at home very difficult to manage although they ended up completing their qualification competently. In their case one can say that their hard work paid off.

4.3.1.5.2. Inappropriate training venue

Participants reported the size of the training venue as one of the challenges they encountered. The training venue is said to have been small and although it was having windows enough for its size, they were not enough for the number of participants who were in the class. The smaller classrooms were not conducive for learning more especially during hot days. During the summer afternoons participants would be exhausted and end up sleeping in the class. One participant put it this way:

P002: Our venue was a classroom in the ECD site. That class is not a normal sized classroom like those in the primary and secondary schools although it is built imitating the same shape with the classrooms in schools. We were 24 in the classroom. Our area is very hot. So, without fans or air conditioners, it was too hot in the afternoons. During summertime it was difficult to learn in such difficult circumstances. Most of the times people would be evidently tired and slumbering.

Erasmus et al., as cited by Isabirye and Moloi (2016) indicated that the training providers should see to it that the training venue is conducive for learning. Their advice is that the venue should have enough ventilation or air-conditioning and enough lighting. The venue should also be well furnished and equipped with relevant media which will enhance the learning process. From the look of things, the venues used for training in the context of the EPWP training were not comparable with the standard expected by these authors.

When probing on who was responsible for the arrangement of the venues, the participants indicated that the department of education was the stakeholder responsible for the arrangement of the venue, but the department official has explained to them that their choice of venues were limited to the venues which were in the institutions of learning since they were not able to secure commercial venues.

4.3.1.5.3. Time allocated for contact sessions.

According to one of the participants, the time allocated for contact session appeared to be not enough. She thought that it was the reason which caused congestion of

activities. To her, the contact sessions should be allocated more time than it is now. The participant suggested that maybe the contact sessions should be two weeks in a month which could according to the participant, raise some more problems like more transport fees. Considering the small amount of stipend received by the participants when doing training, this might be a problem since it would be double the transport expenditure. Participant 009 said:

P009: The time allocated for attending classes is not enough. We do too much work in the classroom and too much work at home. It is like we are overburdened with work which needed more time but is being packed in a small space of time. Maybe the contact time should be two weeks in a month, but that too would result in other problems which would affect finances for transport. Going two weeks for contact sessions would mean more expenditure in transport which maybe would still be a problem given the amount of stipend we were getting.

The time issue seems to have gone beyond the contact sessions. To others, the whole qualification time was too short for them to finish their work smoothly. Some reported that during the packaging of portfolio of evidence, they ran short of time and ended up coming to classes on their own. The scheduled time for the training lapsed before they could finish some of the activities. So the facilitator had to arrange some extra time and negotiated with the venue owners to accommodate them free of charge. The facilitator had to make sure that the participants' files were ready for moderation before sending them for that moderation. One of the participants put it in this way:

P006: I am not sure if our group was just slow in progressing, but what happened is that we ended up extending the training by two weeks beyond the scheduled time allocated for the training. The facilitator had to assist us by extending contact sessions by further two weeks. It was then that we could finish packaging our portfolios and made them ready for submission. She had to be satisfied first that each of us did the right thing before submitting our files for moderation.

Each module had time allocated. When facilitators tried fitting their facilitation in the allocated time, the allocated time appeared to have been little compared to actual time consumed when we are in the class. They needed more contact time than the allocated one. Since it is not all participants who reported on this challenge, other factors may need to be looked into before concluding that time is indeed an issue here. Maybe the experience of the facilitator also was an issue.

Isabirye and Moloi (2016) obtained the same finding wherein the participants who took part in the professional development and teacher learning at an open distance learning university indicated that time to finish tasks and the whole programme was not enough. The advice given was that trainers should ensure that enough time is given for the tasks and the whole programme to be finished well.

4.3.1.5.4. Language issue

Other participants pointed to the fact that their facilitator was not able to make a conversation using their local language. Even though all the participants had grade 12, some indicated that they could not understand all which the facilitator was communicating. The facilitator could not speak Tshivenda, so she predominantly used English as medium of instruction. The participants wished the facilitator could have been able to communicate in their own language in order for her to clarify some concepts and processes.

P004: I have grade 12 as my highest standard passed from school. Due to the fact that it is long that I have been working in the ECD centre, I am no longer as fluent in English as I was during my school days. In the ECD centre we use much of Tshivenda language than English. I therefore would from time to time miss some of the things when the facilitator was explaining things in the class. As such I wished our facilitator could at least have been able to add Tshivenda in some cases when clarifying matters and concepts. Those that were good in English were better understanding and enjoyed doing conversations with the facilitator.

Participant 009 indicated that although their facilitator was good in explaining concepts and issues, the participant would however, miss some information because of the language barrier. The facilitator could not explain matters in the local language and that was a problem. Apparently, the participants were used to teachers' further explaining matter in local language like how it used to be during their secondary school days. Participant 009 put it as follows:

P009: Our facilitator was very good in deliberations, but I would at times fail to grab the meaning because she would use the English I could not understand. When still trying to understand what she meant she would be passing to the next sentence as she should. I understand that English is the language of instruction but due to my level of English I need somebody who at times can explain further in my language. Maybe it is because even in my matric our teacher would further explain things to us in our local language and maybe that made me to think it is the way things would be even in this training.

Although this language issue was raised, the participants still made it with their training and were found competent. At least it did not negatively affect their performance. The language of teaching and learning should be adhered to although all the eleven languages can be of use where necessary.

4.3.1.5.5. ECD classroom experience by the facilitator

ECD is a more practical area than theoretical. The facilitator should be able to assist her practitioners in doing those practical parts which are very important in the implementation of ECD activities. If the facilitator's competencies lack in this regard, her trainee teachers might end up being competent as per requirements of the qualifications but lack expertise in terms of practical demonstrations in the classroom. One of the facilitators is said to have been a highly qualified teacher academically and professionally but she was without the needed experience in the ECD classroom environment. She had good facilitation skills as a professional who once taught at tertiary levels but then, she could not share any ECD experience with the trainees. When indicating this aspect, participant 008 said:

P008: Our facilitator was a highly educated person with Masters Qualification in education. She even had experience for college lecturing. She had very good facilitating skills and could explain concepts until we mastered them. Unfortunately, she did not have pre-grade R classroom experience.

The participant from another training group indicated a similar challenge of a facilitator who lacked experience in the ECD classroom. The qualifications of the facilitator were different from those of the group cited above. The facilitator was qualified for something else not teaching related. The area of her qualifications was not disclosed. But since the qualification is not relevant to ECD, such a trainer was not capacitated could come with solutions which would assist the participants in areas which are difficult for them to do when in their ECD sites. According to the participant, the service provider did not recognise that the ECD qualification is for the relevantly qualified who can identify themselves with what takes place in the ECD site, not some random educated person. Her case was stated as follows:

P007: My understanding was that for the facilitator to reach a level of being a trainer, she ought to have been a teacher in ECD site first. I was surprised to find out that our facilitator has never been a teacher in the first place. Her qualifications are from a different field, not education related. She has qualifications though, but they are not for teaching. Somehow some service providers see our ECD training as easy to an extent that they think anyone educated anyhow can come and train us relevantly. Unfortunately, we wanted someone who would teach us from experience to unlock where we experience difficulties in the ECD class, someone we would share our challenges with and she would share her breakthrough experiences with us.

Participant 005 was trained by a facilitator who was a qualified primary teacher who was never employed before. As such her only teaching experience was when she was doing practice teaching as a student. This shows that this facilitator as well did not have experience relevant to the ECD classroom. The facilitator is said to have been very kind to her learners and could present her matter very well. Because she lacked

the classroom experience, she would involve participants who are well experienced when coming to context which are more practical in nature. The experienced participants got a chance to lead in some of the sessions, taking turns amongst themselves. This is how participant 005 narrated her version:

P005: Our facilitator was very good in presentations and was also very kind to us. She understood our environment and would always attend to our individual needs. She would also explain things until we understood clearly. She was as well very honest with us to an extent that she would involve us more in practical work since she said she has never worked in an ECD centre. That gave us a chance to take lead in turns whenever we would be doing practical demonstrations. It was very interesting since it gave us a chance of feeling like we are facilitators as well. That was great.

Although the above three practitioners indicated the lack of practical experiences from the side of their facilitators, other groups were fortunate to have been trained by facilitators who have been teachers in the ECD sites themselves. Participants 001 shared her experience of a trainer who held the relevant qualifications and the relevant experience of working in an ECD site. The facilitator requested all participants to bring different play materials from their ECD sites. The facilitator then demonstrated how they should set corners in the classroom. She also let them role play how to engage learners in those arranged corners. Participants appreciated the manner in which this was done and wished training time was longer enough to let them have more of this kind of lessons. One such fortunate participant put it this way:

P001: Our facilitator was a local practitioner who holds a level 5 diploma and a National Diploma in Educare. She was good in classroom teaching and also in ECD classroom arrangement. She would let us bring toys and set corners and then some of us would act as if they were children whereas two of us would act as teachers. I really enjoyed her way of teaching us more especially the practical side. I know it is easy for us as trainees to feel like we will be able to do it when back in our creches only to find out that we struggle despite the fact that we were taught. According to me, the best way is to demonstrate how things are to be done whenever

time allows. If the training time was longer, we would have had time to do more demonstrations and things would have been smooth.

The participants experienced different types of challenges because they were not trained at the same venue and there were different facilitators in different venues. During some of the years, one facilitator is said to have rotated from one venue to the other. She would be in one venue for a week and be on another venue the other week while the previous group would be in their ECD sites. However, some challenges appear to be common, for example, the time allocated for training is the same for all the groups. All of them trained for one year in the case of ECD NQF Level 4 or 5 (certificate) except for those that did level 5 diploma.

It is however important to note that teaching in the ECD is unique (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021), and as such needs to be done by trainers who went through this unique experience. Teachers who went through other phases like intermediate, senior and Further Education and Training do not have this unique experience enabling the implementation of ECD curriculum. Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt (2019), cite lack of practical demonstration as one of the factors which makes teacher training to be not guarantee that the teachers will provide good teaching and care to children.

It is not an isolated situation that we find trainers being not properly trained for what they train. In Myanmar, government provides for teacher training like what our government is doing in this case of ECD teacher training although it is done through EPWP. Ulla (2017) indicates that although Myanmar started providing teacher training since 2004, teacher training provided for by government and other training providers are not always effective due to the fact that training themselves lack relevant training. One would think that whatever is provided by government should be exemplary in terms of quality and standards since government is the custodian of these qualifications through different structures it delegates for such purposes.

4.3.1.5.6. Delay in graduation or handing over of certificates.

After the participants were assessed and were found to be competent, they went to receive their qualifications in a graduation ceremony which was organized by both the

service provider and the provincial department of education. It is in this ceremony where they receive their certificates and the statement of results. This process also had its own problems. Some of the participants indicated that on the graduation day they received the statement of results and the certificate which were on the letterheads of the training providers. After many years when they went for SACE registration, they discovered that the proper qualifications should be from ETDP- SETA and should be without the logo of the service provider which trained them. Unfortunately, so far the participant's qualification is not recognized by SACE and this appears to be frustrating the concerned participants since the issue is not resolved yet. The departmental officials who facilitated the whole recruitment and training process were consulted on this matter, but they have not brought solutions to it. Some of these problems are stated as follows:

P002: I was trained in my ECD NQF L 5 through the EPWP and the department of Education. I was so happy to have been selected for a government funded training course. The problem which I have so far is that on the graduation day, I received the statement of result and a certificate which is on the logo of the college which was contracted to do our training. Little did I know that this was not the proper certificate that I should have received. I spent many years feeling satisfied that I have passed and I have this ECD qualification. Unfortunately, this year I went to SACE to register and I was told that I have to bring a certificate and statement of result from ETDP-SETA. So far I have tried engaging the district officials to assist me to get the proper qualification documents but I am not winning. I even contacted the ETDP SETA but so far the matter is not yet resolved.

Some participants had different challenges from the above-mentioned. Others completed the training and waited for years to graduate and receive the qualifications. Some of them waited for more than three years to graduate. The unfortunate part was that they could not use their qualifications since they did not even have the statement of results. They waited for all those years with nothing to prove that they completed their ECD NQF level 4 or 5. At least they ended up graduating together with those that

trained years after them. They then got hold of their certificates and statements of results.

P004: I was trained during the years 2014 - 2015. We completed the training and were informed that we were competent. I don't know what happened and hindered our graduation for the whole three years. Other groups were trained after us and did not graduate as well. It was only in 2019 that we were called to the district office and made arrangement for graduations. We were too many of us at the graduation ceremony due to the fact that we graduated together with those that were trained two more years after ours. That ceremony was big and made it very joyous despite the fact that we had waited for a very long time, and we were no longer sure if we would still receive our qualifications.

This problem of certification has been noted by Harrison (2020) and was explained to be the result of inability by training providers to apply for certification. Another problem identified was the ineffectiveness of the ETDP-SETA on handling the certification process. This resulted in service providers training ECD teachers on NQF levels and failing to issue certificates. This brings negativity in the image of the training service providers and disadvantages the ECD teacher trainees from benefiting from the qualifications they studied for. Without the certificates, there is no enough evidence to showcase their competency.

Not all participants encountered challenges with graduation and handing over of the certificates. To some it was a smooth transaction wherein they got their certificates well on time just after they finished their studies. One such participant put it this way:

P009: Upon completion of the training, we waited for only five months for the files to be moderated and for the SETA to do its part in terms of generating certificates and statement of results. Thereafter we were told that our graduation would be held in Polokwane. We were happy to meet our counterparts from other districts on graduation day. It felt so joyful to receive the qualifications after such type of engagement.

Even though there had been some challenges around some aspects in the trainings, the good part according to the participants was that they ended up completing their trainings and are now in possession of their respective qualifications in the form of either ECD NQF level 4 and or 5 which gave them light on how ECD classes should look like and how they should operate in the mission of childhood development.

Teacher training is viewed by Bawani and Mphahlele (2021) as fundamental when coming to the teaching and learning of young children. Qualified teachers play a vital role in the implementation of ECD curriculum. It is a positive contribution by the government to see to it that the ECD age cohort is taken care of by qualified teachers who underwent these trainings through the EPWP. Below follow the challenges faced by ECD trained teachers in their implementation of the ECD curriculum.

Table 4.3. Summary of the results: Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum

Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Inadequate infrastructure	Improper sitting arrangement Lack of resources
2. Interference by stakeholders	Interference by parents on curriculum matters Interference with daily programmes by management Interference with daily programmes by cooks
3. Lack of discipline on the side of the young ones	Damaging toys Pocketing of toys
4. Lack of support by superiors	By training providers, departmental officials and principals.
5. Resistance to change	On implementation On use of resources On collaborative planning
6. Lack of commitment by practitioners	Laziness and lack of passion by student teachers. Lack of passion due to lack of remunerations Dishonesty by student teachers

4.3.2. Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in rural Vhembe East district:

There are challenges facing trained teachers when they are executing their duties in the sites. Amongst them are setting the ideal ECD classroom, inadequate infrastructure, lack of support by superiors, resistance to change, dishonesty by student teachers and others.

4.3.2.2. Inadequate infrastructure

4.3.2.2.1. Improper sitting arrangement

More than 50% of the participants cited lack of proper infrastructure as a major concern giving rise to other problems affecting the curriculum delivery such as overcrowding,

improper sitting arrangements etc. Participants cited small classrooms as the one contributing to their failure to set up the much-required learning areas which are known as corners. The corners or Learning areas are central in the delivery of the ECD curriculum. Practitioners indicated that they have a lack of sizeable classrooms which can cater for 'corners' as well as enough space for other teaching and learning activities. There are tables which children should use when doing their activities like drawing and colouring. The small sized classrooms do not have enough space for those tables. Participant 007 stated the challenge linked to the infrastructure as follows:

P007: There are learning areas which I am expected to lay out here in the classroom. This becomes one of the difficulties I experience since I have many children who are supposed to utilise tables for activities like drawing and colouring as well as cutting. The learning areas or corners leave the middle space being too small.

It has already been explained earlier that the ECD classroom should be spacious enough to accommodate the corners and enough space left over in the middle in order to accommodate the chairs and tables which learners use during their other learning times when they are not playing in corners. What the previous participant has indicated means that she might end up not having set the corners because of the small sized classroom or she might have the corners set in the classroom and be left without space to accommodate learners in the middle of the classroom. Both cases will end up frustrating the teacher and make it difficult to manage the ECD classroom successfully.

In support of the above concern of insufficient space for learning areas participant 004 indicated that although she was taught during her initial training the fact that she should set play corners in the classroom, she finds it difficult to lay such corners due to lack of enough space in her classroom. She has enough play material but then the space to accommodate the material is insufficient. This might also mean that the space for children to sit by the corners and play using those structured toys is also not there. The participant put it this way:

P004: When we come back from the training and we are to do corners as we were taught, we find that our classrooms are very small in such a manner that we cannot carry out the laying out of learning areas. The space is very limited. Our materials do not fit in those little spaces.

Lack of space in the classrooms also results in the wrong practice of having one classroom designed as a playroom for all the age cohorts wherein they are expected to go and visit the room in turns. Every classroom is expected to have its own areas laid down using toys which are age appropriate. The sharing of one playroom is also time consuming since the participant made mention of the fact that when one class finishes using the set playroom, the teacher has to clean the room and make it ready for the other class which might be coming in. Participant 006 stated as follows:

P006: Sometimes we end up having one class reserved for laying out of areas and children will go group after group. That alone is difficult as well since every group will have to tidy the place before the other group enters. At the end of the day you find that only two classes managed to access the playroom. If I have laid the areas in my own classroom, my learners would have rotated all the areas by the end of the day.

Participant 002 linked this challenge of infrastructure with the slow pace of developing learners in different areas. According to this participant, availability of bigger classrooms and better learning materials would assist in developing children faster and better than it is now. According to her, children should be exposed to many learning areas everyday than the few learning areas they are exposed to now due to the limited space in their classrooms. As such she sees the present classrooms in her ECD centre as unfit for the ECD programme and to her this problem affects the development of the children in a negative way. She put it this way:

P002: You know what? ECD centre does not require the present type of infrastructure we have here. It needs bigger classrooms and bigger outdoor playing spaces than we have. It is just that when we started, we did not know exactly how these things work. You see these classrooms of

ours? They are not fit for an ECD classroom. Children are active and need bigger spaces. I should be setting at least six learning areas at once according to how I was taught in my training. That way, my learners would be getting access to more development areas every day. But instead, I am having only two corners as you can see. As such my learners' pace of development is affected negatively because the more the corners or learning areas, the more their exposure to the structured play aiming at a different learning aspect. You know what, I have to stop here for the sake of your time.

Still on the infrastructure challenge, participant 003 is also thinking that better infrastructure could improve their curriculum implementation. The participant compares her ECD site with the ECD sites from the townships which do not lack and as such they are able to satisfy the curriculum needs. She reckons that children cannot draw or cut without tables to work from. She also indicated the fact that when it is sunny the children cannot do outdoor activities since there are no shades in the centre. This challenge negatively affects the physical development of children. The practitioners said it in this way:

P003: If you can check with other creches which are in townships, they have everything needed to satisfy this curriculum. With us, it is different. How can we excel in an environment where we lack even tables for learners to put on books when drawing, cutting and pasting? Tell me, is it possible for a small child to cut from magazines placed on their laps? What about colouring activities? Our learners need many things which are absent in the centre. Things like quality swings, shades protecting sand pits and many other things. When it is sunny, our learners do not go to outdoor activities and that as well is a problem in their development.

The issue of improper infrastructure in ECD is a factor even in some of the countries abroad. Alma, Ashraf, Stagey and Shabnam (2022) found almost same finding in the study conducted in Pakistan wherein the classrooms were found to be overcrowded and having limited learning or playing material. Aina and Bipath (2022), raises the

concern that although the trained ECD teachers know how to arrange and use the learning material for children, the infrastructural limitation hinders them from fulfilling the expected development needed for the growth of children. This finding was based on the study conducted in township ECD centres in Pretoria. This infrastructure position has a negative bearing in the quality of the ECD provided as explained by the participants.

Davin (2013) as cited by Hadebe (2015) advises that when classrooms are small, teachers should have a number of learning areas which can fit in that classroom and change them after a week or two to put other learning areas which were not in place in the previous week. This should be done to cover all learning areas although in a rotating base since all learning areas are responsible for specific development in the life of the children.

The ECD National Audit Report (Department of Social Development, 2014) referred to infrastructure as the main reason which hinders ECD centres to register successfully with the department of social development. For them to register successfully they would need to have proper buildings, a proper fence with a lockable gate as well as age-appropriate toilets. Failing to register with DSD successfully means failing to get the subsidy which pays a certain amount per child per day attended. Not having that subsidy funding hinders the ECD site from growing the infrastructure way since money paid by parents will be overburdened by various needs found in the ECD site. Failing to have the needed infrastructure ends up creating challenges for trained ECD teachers such as the one of failure to set up playing learning areas.

The matter above suggests that the ECD training which these participants were trained on appears to be meant for crèches or pre-schools that can afford to have big enough classrooms which can cater for display of such learning environment. Although these participants were trained, they cannot bring out the desired results if classrooms are as small as they cited in this study.

If practitioners have limitations such as this of inadequate infrastructure, their learning becomes negatively affected. Daoust (2007) considers play as the natural way of learning for children because to him, children are active in nature, inquisitive and playful. Hadebe, 2015 maintains that play is not just an enjoyable activity done by young ones, it is a way in which children learn. Of course, once we make mention of play, we therefore speak of enough space and play equipment. Play, which also need space, is considered as a principal approach in the learning of pre-scholars. Without enough space for play, children are denied chance of participating in their learning (Borg & Samuelsson, 2022). It is essential that children be actively involved in their own learning.

4.3.2.2.2. Lack of resources

This is the aspect which appeared several times. The ECD teachers are stating it as a major concern which is the source of their lack of learning material and lack of remunerations. ECD curriculum is unfolded through play material and other equipment which should be purchased by ECD sites themselves. At present, sites receive subsidy funds from the Department of Social Development for assistance in this regard. The funds are to be spent according to the prescription set out by the department. What is specified by the department is not always what the site needs. The department at times tells them to paint the building structures for example, and when that happens, they have to comply instead of prioritizing what is needed for curriculum delivery. This situation has a bearing on how the participants interact with the children in the ECD site. The following participants stated this challenge as it affects the ECD curriculum delivery as follows:

P001: Another challenge is from our seniors who give us funds used for buying equipment which we use for the development of these children. We do not afford to buy necessary playing material for children. Not long they will tell us to paint windows using the same money. If we do not comply they threaten to close our facility. They want us to buy as they say and that does not always address our need for equipment which will directly improve how we educationally interact with these children.

Participants reported that there are strict control measures in place for the money which is funded by the departments. It comes with segmented allocations which do not enable ECD centres to do as they see fit but to adhere to the prescribed allocations. This becomes the reason why the practitioners in the ECD site cannot buy enough toys and other playing material. Not having quality equipment or enough equipment lead participants into not doing things correctly. The participant wonders why the ECD sites are not funded like schools whereas they are doing the same type of work. P 004 stated as follows:

P004: The money that we are given by the Department of Social Development is allocated some percentages. When we go for toy purchasing, we find that the percentage allocated for toys is too little. When we buy swings for the outdoor areas, we find the money being little too. So, it is difficult to do the right things in the site without having the right equipment. The subsidy is too little for the needs we have in this crèche. We need more funds to make things right. In fact, why are creches not funded the same way as schools? We are doing the same job as them and we should be getting similar support.

Lack of resources is said to be a challenge which affects the competency of the trained teacher because teachers in ECD classes need to use variety of resources in the classroom. Children always need to interact with the toys and other relevant material for their learning to take place. Trained teachers therefore need to have ample material for them to engage children meaningfully in the ECD classroom. The development of children in the ECD site is largely reliant on the availability of playing material and other resources in the ECD site. As such, lack of resources negatively affect the development of learners in the ECD sites. Participant 003 cited it as a major challenge in her site. She put it in the following manner:

P003: When you look into the funds, you realise that it is too little. Although it is not enough, we end up purchasing the little that we can. The learning material that we buy does not satisfy the needs of the children. Children are not satisfied by few items. This becomes my major challenge: lack of resources.

Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), are of the conviction that when resources are in place in the ECE they assist the teacher to successfully implement the curriculum. Resources are critical in the successful implementation of any ECE programme either in ECE centres or pre-schools. Regardless of their vital importance in the ECE, Aina and Bipath (2022), found that resources are usually not found in the centres more especially in public centres. Ntumi (2016) as well noted the fact that pre-school teachers lack the much-needed teaching and learning material which is core in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Learning material is vital in the learning of the young ones since children learn through play which need different play material suitable for different development areas and age cohort. Each age cohort needs enough material for the holistic development.

The fact that the government funds do not afford them enough capital for the running of the ECD sites, the ECD teachers are mostly paid by the money which is contributed by parents on monthly basis. Due to this limitation, sites are said to be under-staffed to an extent that teachers are compelled to perform other duties outside their work scope at the expense of their contact with the children. They at times are compelled to clean classes on their own before they start interacting with children in the morning which makes them start engaging with children later than they should. By the time they start engaging children they are tired as well. The lack of staff is also associated with the inability by the participants to group children according to their age cohort which is an important aspect in ECD since children in different ages need different play material and different interaction with practitioners. Another participant put it this way:

P002: We as teachers as you can see, we clean on our own. When I arrive here, I start by sweeping. So sometimes I start my own work tired already. If we could get some other people to do these other kinds of work, we would start early in our own classes... we would start when still fresh. Again, this lack of manpower affects our manner of grouping children according to their different classes which are based on age cohorts. We ended up combining children who were supposed to be on different classrooms. This combination becomes a challenge on its own since

those children have different developmental needs and should be attended differently.

Atmore (2012) and Erasmus (2015) attest to the fact that in South Africa, many of the accessed centres, lack required materials and trained practitioners. Looking from the responses of these interviews, it confirms what the two authors stated. If there are not enough funds, ECD sites do not hire enough teachers and as such curriculum delivery suffers. This is a challenge facing many ECD sites.

It is just unfortunate to note that in South Africa the ECD funding is still not a full responsibility of a single department. It is also interesting to see that there are countries taking full responsibility for all finances needed for the smooth running of Early Childhood Development. For example, in France, pre-elementary education (term used for ECD in France) is the responsibility of the state. Parents do not pay anything for pre-school since it is completely free. The central government takes care of the sites through municipalities. Municipalities own and manage pre-schools. They take financial responsibility as well as construction of sites. The ministry of Education hires staff and administers teaching posts. The ministry finances all pedagogic materials. The departmental inspector has the responsibility to inspect the teaching quality of pre-schools (Grun, 2008).

Zimbabwe as well is recorded as having lack of resources as one of the problems in its rural ECD centres. They have lack of infrastructure coupled with shortage of staff and finances (Madondo, 2020). One wonders if there is an African state which is making it in terms of resource provision in the ECD sector.

Erasmus (2015) noted that in South Africa a new funding and resourcing strategy is needed which will make it possible to reach the desired goals and the state's obligations to provide ECD services which includes those children from rural and other poor communities who cannot make it on their own to access the ECD services but can only access that through government provision. He also recommended that as much as comprehensive training of ECD practitioners is needed, remuneration and conditions of service should be taken into consideration.

Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) (2019) made a recommendation on its report on the state of education to say that government must make extensive investment in both infrastructure and learning and teaching support material (LTSM). LTSM in ECD would refer amongst others, picture books and toys. The report further recommended that capacity building at all three levels (national, provincial and districts) should take place. It is also sad to note that while there are infrastructure shortages in the ECD sector, funds are reported to be underutilized. The report made mention of the fact that there is underspending of the ECD conditional grant. Underspending of any funding related to ECD is not appreciated given the fact that there's still huge gaps of infrastructure nature which have a bearing in the educational state of those ECD centres which ends up frustrating the trained ECD teachers who are supposed to successfully deliver the ECD curriculum as anticipated by the initial trainings they acquired.

4.3.2.2.3. Early Childhood Development classroom setting

Although a number of participants raised issues related to infrastructure which included lack of spacious classrooms and resources, there are some few participants who did not complain about their class sizes nor lack of resources. I noticed that they had classes which were spacious and were laid out. I then requested to take pictures of the laid out corners. I wanted to know how they managed to have bigger classrooms and all the resources they displayed. In both cases they had budgeted on their own, while sacrificing their wages during the construction time. From the observation of their classrooms and the summarised discussions, this section will attempt to give a description of the ideal ECD classroom.

The classroom for ECD is supposed to be spacious enough for learners to be able to sit well with their little chairs and tables. The classroom should have space free of objects whose surface is usually a mat. This space is reserved for discussions and storytelling. In the morning learners sit around this matted surface for a session called 'morning ring'. It is during this time that they exchange greetings and discuss weather and health issues. This space is also used during story time. Children gather around it and listen to stories as shared by the teacher or by one of the children if, and when, the child has been designated to do so by the teacher.

In the very same classroom, there should be enough space for setting learning areas or corners as they are commonly known. The learning area or corner refers to a space wherein learning material (including toys) is carefully arranged to suit the nature of that Learning area. Although classroom interaction was not observed because of COVID-19 restrictions, setting of classrooms or playrooms in the absence of children could be observed in some ECD sites. Pictures of such corners or learning areas were taken to assist in showing how such arrangement of an ECD classroom should look like. Pictures were taken from different ECD sites. Only four of the ECD sites had the arranged learning areas. The ECD site managers gave permission for pictures to be taken.

The nature of the learning area is determined by the area of development it is intended for. For example, there is Art area wherein there are scissors, paint, paint brushes, modelling dough and other related material which aims at developing the small muscles in conjunction with development of art skills. Below is the example of the art area:



Picture 1: An example of an art area in a rural ECD site.

Other Learning areas are as follows:

Cognitive or creative area

This area focuses on problem solving skills which is capacitated by learning materials such as puzzles and other related toys which promotes activities like sorting and fitting.



Picture 2: An example of a cognitive or Mathematics area

Block area

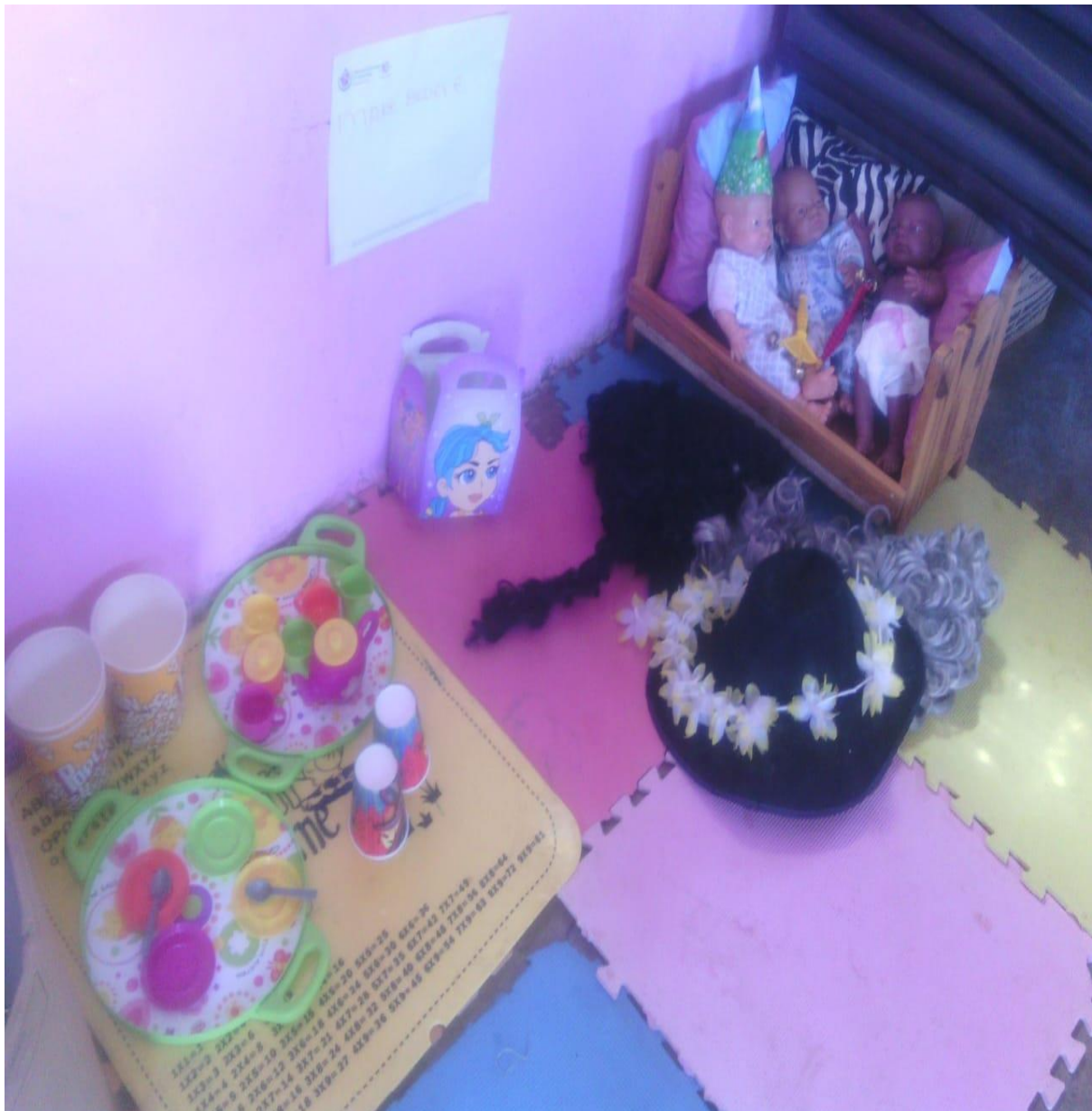
This is an area where children build different structures such as houses, buildings, and other structures. Blocks may be made of wood, plastic, or any other hard material. It aims at developing the technological side of learning.



Picture 2: An example of a block area

Fantasy area

This is the corner where children do their make belief activities. They may pretend to be in a kitchen preparing meals or in a nursery taking care of children. What they do here will depend in the toys arranged in the fantasy area. They can have more than one activity as long as the activities are in line with the theme of the time



Picture 3: An example of a fantasy area

Book area

This corner is sometimes referred to as an educational area. This is where children access books to page through and read what is taking place in the pictures. Their books are dominated by pictures. Where availability of resources is not a problem, picture books are carefully selected according to themes or sub themes for that week or number of days. For example, during the transport theme, there will be transport pictures to cut and transport drawings to colour on.



Picture 4: An example of a book area

Discovery area

This is the area which is furnished by items or objects which resemble the theme of the prescribed time, whether a week or some number of days. It can have things like seed, rice, fruit etc. Children should be able to touch and feel the texture of items which are displayed in the discovery table.



Picture 5: An example of a discovery area

This is the area wherein different musical instruments are displayed for children to explore. Since the instruments are at toy level, they usually produce minimum level of sound and as such children can play them in the same class where other children are focusing on other activities without much disturbance. This corner or learning area is categorised as a noise area because children will play the instruments, sing, and dance at the same time. It is as such a very busy area.



The arranged learning areas are now and then changed to suit the new themes being followed in the classrooms. Children are supposed to be free and comfortable to move and interact with the arranged learning material (Obaki, 2017). The Learning areas are usually arranged on a table as seen from the pictures above. They may as well be done on other suitable surfaces at the corners of the classroom or against the walls. The space for the chairs and tables comes in the middle of the class and then the mat space is usually in the front of the classroom where there are no corners set.

The trained ECD teacher is expected to be able to set these corners in the ECD classroom. In those corners children go and play, changing from one corner to the other under the guidance of the teacher. The fact that the classroom is arranged with toys with the aim of 'structured play' (Mohan, Celshiya, Karuppali, Bhat, & Anil, 2022), to take place is what makes it to be referred to as playroom at times. The trained ECD teacher should come with the skill to arrange the classroom the way it was explained to be in the above paragraphs. The training which the ECD teachers undergo should be able to address the classroom settings since they are important in the curriculum implementation by the ECD trained teachers more especially those that were trained as part of the EPWP initiative.

4.3.2.3. Interference by stakeholders

4.3.2.3.1. Parents interfering with curriculum matters

ECD teachers indicated that there were lot of complaints and interference from parents regarding educational activities in the classrooms. Teachers know very well what activities they need to carry out based on their initial teacher training and the National Curriculum Framework expectation. Some parents, however, want their children to learn to read and write which is supposed to take place in the primary schools. Other parents are said to be comparing the participants' ECD centres with other ECD centres which teach children how to count within a short space of time after they have accessed the ECD centre. Parents are said to have a very different view from what creches are meant for. They think that if children can demonstrate the ability to read and write earlier in their lives it shows that the children are intelligent. Parents do not understand that ECD centres are meant for pre-reading and pre-writing skills. Parents'

expectations give trained practitioners to divert from what they were trained to do, and they end up satisfying parents by teaching children how to read and write which is not part of their curriculum. These concerns were evident from the following participants:

P001: They take it that since their children are in this crèche they should be able to read and write. Many parents are saying this crèche is not teaching and they are paying for nothing as children are only playing while in somebody's crèche children are able to count from 1 to 10 within a month. They are able to do A, B, C until the end whereas others are able to write their names when still at crèche.

P008: Parents do not understand the ECD curriculum at all. They have totally different expectations from what we offer in ECD centres. To them, children who write their names early in life are those that are intelligent. They want to enforce reading and writing skills instead of pre-reading and pre- writing as we do in the ECD curriculum. Even when we explain the curriculum expectations as outlined on ECD documents, they are not ready to listen. This gives us pressure and we end up diverting knowingly to satisfy their expectations instead of correctly implementing what we were trained on.

Another challenge that was raised had to do with parents comparing infrastructure in different ECD sites. When doing that they forget that these ECD sites are not the same and are not receiving funding from the same source. Participants thought that since they are community based, parents would think on how to improve the facilities in the present ECD sites rather than discouraging them by comparing them with private ECD sites which are more affluent to be compared to them. Participant 001 indicated the following:

P001: Sometimes we hear parents saying that they will remove their children and take them to private pre-schools where there are better facilities than ours. We expected parents to support and contribute on what to do in order to maximize the chance to improve our curriculum

delivery instead of discouraging us of our inability to teach matters beyond the ECD age cohort.

The other challenge is that parents want their children to be able to speak English at this age cohort. To parents it is like the quality of education or development offered at ECD centres is associated with the early eloquence of children with English as a language. Whereas the education department is of the opinion that young children learn best in their own language, parents want these children to be competent in English. Learning in English is apparently superior as far as parents are concerned. one participant put it as follows:

P002: Parents say that they want their children to speak in English. Others say they want their children to be able to write. Apparently, they want to see their children being like those that come back with their parents from Gauteng during the holidays and are said to be not being able to speak their own languages. To them, speaking English is being educated.

Instead of parents supporting the ECD sites meaningfully, they are in most cases said to be not meaningfully available in the education of their young children. They do not in most cases accompany their children to school. In rural set ups children are brought to the ECD sites by their elder siblings. They accompany them to the sites as they are also going to school and collect them when they come back from schools (Nyarambi & Ntuli, 2020). Maybe if they were more involved, they would understand how the ECD education is to unfold instead of them pressurizing ECD teachers to do as they think it should be done. Instead, they are said to be unavailable but still take wrong decisions because of lacking knowledge on ECD matters and activities. Parents should be understanding the curriculum to an extent that they can educationally assist their children when they are at home.

4.3.2.3.2. Interference with daily programmes by management

The daily programme gives directions as to what and when to do particular learning activities. The planned learning activities are derived from the National Curriculum Framework. When the daily programme is drawn following the NCF way, it ensures

correct implementation of the curriculum. Trained ECD teachers should implement the daily programme accordingly since that would mean correct implementation of the ECD curriculum. Tampering with the plan should therefore be avoided or be minimal. The daily programme is likened to the timetable in the school environment, and it is drawn to see to it that the curriculum is planned for coverage.

There are two ways which are referred to as interfering with the programme. Firstly, it is the interference by the principals. It is said that upon coming back from the level four and five training courses, some principals do not welcome the new ways which are guided by the daily programmes which are compliant to the NCF which is a new curriculum. The principals insist on doing things the same way as before the NCF. This appears to be frustrating on the side of the newly trained teachers because they end up doing what the principals insist on whereas they know the right way of implementing the curriculum. To indicate this challenge, participant 006 stated as follows:

P006: After training, when I show my principal that this is how we were taught to do things in our training, she denies and tells me that her way is how things were done in their ECD site. She continued to say that they are not going to change how things are to be done in the class just because I went for the training. This becomes a challenge because as one is employed by the management whom the principal is part of, one ends up doing as told although one is aware of how things are supposed to be.

If one was to ask a question, it would be to want to know the reason why practitioners must attend training in the first place if they are not going to change how things has always been done. One participant went on to recommend that principals need to be workshopped in this regard. To let them understand that what other teachers are trained to do should be implemented even if those teachers are juniors in the staff. If that means that there should be changes, then that should be. They should be made to know they are not being disempowered by the teachers who are coming with these new things.

4.3.2.3.3. Interference with daily programmes by cooks.

The second daily programme interference is when it is mealtimes, and one finds out that the kitchen staff is not ready with meals yet. It makes the teachers wait for whenever they finish so that they send children for meals. This breaks the flow of the daily programme and once this happens, teachers end up frustrated and not being able to mend what is lost for the day. Some activities which were prepared for that day remain undone because of this interference. The missed activities were meant to contribute to the development of the children. As such their development is compromised if such kitchen delays become habitual. Participant 007 put it in this way:

P007: When I have checked the programme and realise that it is mealtime, we break and go for the meal. When we arrive by the dining hall, we find that the cooks are not yet finished. We are bound to wait for them to finish preparing. When we finish eating the time is no longer aligning with the timetable. In order for me to cover the day's work, I end up skipping some activities which should have been done on that day. That robs the children from having proper learning development activities.

Because sites have these difficulties in terms of following the daily programme, some ECD sites end up having two daily programmes: one which complies with the expectations of the departments and the curriculum, and the other one which they are using practically. The first one is usually displayed in the walls for officials to see when they visit the sites. This sounds like cheating and appears as if the practitioners do not know the importance of following the daily programmes themselves.

It is important that young children be exposed to consistent daily routines which assist them to predict what activities come after the other as well as improving their understanding and improving their behaviour. When events follow a certain order daily, children become used to them and get a better understanding of the environment which results in them feeling secure. However, the schedule should have some extent of flexibility in it to avoid being very rigid in a manner that children may not cope with when it cannot be followed due to unforeseen circumstances (Seiberlich, 2016).

4.3.2.4. Lack of discipline on the side of the young ones.

4.3.2.4.1. Damaging toys

Only one participant pointed to lack of children's discipline as a reason which hinders them to set learning areas as was taught during their training. The participants mentioned that when they came back from the trainings, they tried arranging children in the different corners as they are supposed to using the variety of learning materials. Unfortunately, the children started throwing the toys around instead of playing with them. Other children go to an extent of breaking them. Some children use the toys as hitting objects which at times results in injuries.

P001: It is true that they taught us and as they taught us, we understood well. On our coming back we try it, but the first thing is that when we have grouped children in corners, they take toys and throw them around, while some are breaking them because they do not understand what is taking place. Some hit one another using toys which results in them injuring one another. As such my understanding comes to be that it is better if these children sit all in one place.

Throwing around of toys by children is usually experienced when learners are not monitored during their playing times. During their initial teacher training, teachers are supposed to be taught on how to assist learners during their playing activities. Children in the ECD centres learn through play, and as such their teachers should be able to handle children during playing times. Teachers are expected to be guides and mentors although children are expected to be free when learning (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). Teachers are therefore expected to know how to enable children to use the learning material in a responsible manner. The knowledgeable other should be able to demonstrate competency in this regard.

4.3.2.4.2. Pocketing toys

Participant 001 strengthened her point further by stating that she does not follow the prescribed playing arrangement in corners or learning areas because at their age, the children are not yet disciplined enough to understand how they are expected to do.

Another of her concerns was that children do take the toys and put in their bags when they leave at the end of the day. This results in shortages when they count the play/ learning material. Some of the missing items are part of a set. This makes it difficult to use the rest of the parts left behind since they can only be meaningful when all pieces are there. The participant put it in the following manner.

P001: Some of these children do pocket the toys and leave with them. Time and again when we take stock there are always some items missing. In some cases, it makes the whole set to be difficult to use when there are missing items. Let us take puzzles for example. It is difficult to complete the whole picture meaningfully when some pieces are not in place. It then means the whole set is no longer user friendly and we then put it aside like it is damaged goods. Such cases are frustrating because we cannot search them every now and then like we are dealing with little thieves since they are still innocent and not knowing yet the frustration brought by such actions.

Cases such as these might not be only happening at this ECD site only. It is possible that it might be the case in other ECD sites as well. Some sites might have solutions to it since they never mentioned it except for Participant 001. There should be a way whereby children are made to leave all toys on site. However, discipline is an educational concept experienced in all educational phases. Discipline is essential to learning and can sometimes be a challenge to teachers. In the learning classroom there are expected ways of behaviour regarded as standard (Prins, Joubert, Ferreira-Prevost & Moen, 2019).

Although cultural diversity may result in different expectations of behaviour as discipline, I think there should be agreement that basic discipline actions like that of handling toys properly and bringing them back after use should be implemented in the ECD classroom. It therefore remains the responsibility of the site to instil such a minimum level of discipline. ECD learners have to use toys in their learning and as such the ECD site with discipline challenge such as the one mentioned above might have to find ways of managing discipline since discipline in education environment involves teaching appropriate behaviour. Discipline in ECD sites should take into

cognisance parental discipline practices (Fatima, Zhao, Yue, Li, & Shi, 2022) of the local communities. It is also important for ECD teachers to bear in mind that they can adopt positive discipline to curb behavioural problems in the classroom (Belle & Munirah, 2021)

4.3.2.5. Lack of support by superiors

Participant teachers indicated lack of support by departmental officials, trainers, and the site management as one other factors which contribute negatively in their curriculum implementation.

4.3.2.5.1. Lack of support by trainers

The participants made mention of the fact that after training, they expected their trainers to support them for at least a year or two. For those that were visited and assisted by their trainers during their practice teaching, they spoke very well of their experience. They indicated that the trainer spent the whole working day in the centre and observed them working with the children and inspected all the working documents and assisted in correcting where it was necessary. She later gave them feedback on their preparations as well as their interaction with children. Where necessary, the trainer would demonstrate how the participants were supposed to interact with the children in the classroom. To them an experience such as this one is still needed even after the training. They think that it would be better if trainers were assigned with the responsibility of continuing supporting them for a year or two after their initial training.

P010: During our training, the trainer would come and visit us during our practical time and assist us the whole day. She would look at all the working documents which we were using and assist in correcting wherever we were not getting it right. She would let us correct those mistakes. She also observed the manner in which we interacted with children in our playrooms. She would encourage us where we were doing right and would demonstrate to us how to do it right wherever we were not doing it right. That session with the trainer in the ECD site was to me, very beneficial and is still needed now when we are in a classroom situation. It

is important that someone carries on doing that duty of trainer in our ECD environment for at least a year or even two years.

Still on the trainer's supporting responsibility after the training, the other participant indicated that her problem is that she sometimes needs assistance in developing her lesson plans. Sometimes she struggles to put her lesson plans in practice and as such she would appreciate it if there had been knowledgeable people to assist her in that regard. The participant assumes that maybe she still has that gap because of the period of their training which was very short. Her qualification training was just for one year. According to her, the training work was done in a hurried manner since she is stating that too much work was done in that short space of time. This might mean that the participants might not have mastered the context due to the speed at which they were trained although they ended up being competent. Now that they are to make it alone in the ECD centre, they realise that it is not easy. During training, the participant was the only one doing the training from her ECD site. When the trainer visited the site, the trainer assisted all the teachers in the site regardless of the fact that she came to support her student. The participant put it this way:

P003: The problem which I have is that at times I don't know how to go on with my preparations and my presentations to the children. I so much wish I still had the support of my trainer. I think the problem is that our training was just a year and so many things were taught over a small period. Now I am left on my own to continue working as a trained ECD teacher. It is not easy for me to do it alone. I so much wish that my trainer was still to visit and guide me like she used to do when I was still on training. Since I was the only one in training from this ECD site, during her visit the trainer would assist also, my colleagues who were trained long time ago and those colleagues that are not trained yet. I really wish she was still available to take me by the hand through ought this process.

The issue of support by trainers is part of mentoring and coaching which can be done by trainers, mentors and other officials. What was said by P003 above, referring to the need for assistance with the lesson preparation can be related to a finding in Bawani and Mphahlele's study

(Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). In their findings, an ECD teacher was happy to have learnt on how to prepare a lesson from an in-service training. In the absence of the trainers, other teachers, ECD principals and departmental officials are seen as stakeholders who can assist.

4.3.2.5.2. Lack of support by departmental officials.

The departmental officials who were part of the participants' recruitment and training were also expected by the participants to continue being part of the support which would be provided to the newly trained teachers when they go back to their ECD centres after completing the training. According to the participants, the departmental officials were also part of monitors who were monitoring their training. As such they believe that those officials have the capacity to assist them in their implementation of the ECD curriculum in the ECD centre since they know what is expected of them (participants) in their sites.

P006: I thought the departmental officials who monitored the trainings would continue monitoring and assisting us when we came back to our sites. During their visits in the training sites, they would encourage us to learn seriously so that we would pass and be meaningful in the development of the children found in ECD sites. They even assured us that they would visit us in our sites to see if we would be implementing what we were taught. Now that they are no longer visiting us I think that they were just assuring us in order for us to focus in our studies, not saying it for a fact.

The other participant expressed a different response from the one above. In her case, the departmental officials did visit her ECD site and assisted all the practitioners who were on site. The officials did not only focus on her as their trainee. Their visit appears to have been shorter than the participant would have opted for since she indicated that she would have wanted to be individually assisted on some issues. The officials observed the ECD teachers in the site and gave all of them feedback on their findings. They also advised them on the relevant documents which they were expected to develop. This is how she put it:

P001: The departmental officials once visited our site. They wanted to see how I was doing my work after training. However, they were not there for me only. They monitored all the other teachers and classes. At the end of their visit they gave us the overall findings of their visit and showed us where we needed to improve and what documents we needed to develop. Although their visit was beneficial to us, we could not get a chance for individual attention on the specific areas of concerns individually. Although it sounds greedy, I wished they were there for me to assist me on the problems that I am facing individually since I was the newly trained on the site.

Another participant also had a visit by the officials who promised that they would come back and do the follow-up visit which they have not yet done so far after more than a year. During their visit the officials found out that there were some areas wherein the participants were to effect some changes or improvement. They advised accordingly and indicated that they would come back again to see how far the participants would have improved so that they would assist more if necessary. During the interview with the participant, it had been a year since the officials had visited the site. This is how P 005 stated:

P005: When the departmental officials came to our site, they picked up so many important things that needed to be improved or to be changed. They highlighted on how we were supposed to be doing them right. They ended up telling us that they would come back again and make a follow-up visit in order for them to see whether we did right on that which we were told to improve on. Unfortunately, it has been more than a year now without them fulfilling their coming back promise. They also indicated that they were short staffed in their offices, but I think they should be finding some other ways of assisting us regardless of their lack of manpower.

4.3.2.5.3. Lack of support by ECD site principals/managers

In cases where participants were not principals of the ECD sites, the participants indicated that they also expected their managers to do the supporting roles in terms

of assisting the trained teachers on how to go about preparing and engaging with children in the ECD classroom. Unfortunately to some participants, their site managers were not trained yet, some who were trained appeared to be on the learning curves themselves. Participant 007 was one of those that encountered such kind of a problem. The principal of her ECD site is an elderly person who does not have a proper qualification. The elderly principal got her qualification through the recognition of prior learning which was based on her working experience. That made it difficult for the participant to get some assistance on the implementation of the new things which she was taught during her training. As such there is a need for somebody from outside her ECD site to assist in this regard.

P007: I think that we should have been assigned some mentors to support us after we received our trainings. Instead, we are left on our own to find our way on how to put into practice that which we were taught to do by our trainers. We are expected to be assisted by our principals in the ECD site. I was unfortunate because my principal is an elderly person who cannot assist me since her qualification was based mainly in the Recognition of Prior Learning which is based on her working experience. As such she cannot assist me with the planning and other stuff which needs a literate person. So I am instead the one who assist her on many things which require competency as far as literacy is concerned. So unless there be some external support, I am on my own. That is not simple since I really need to be mentored on these things.

From what participant 007 said, there is an element of Recognition of Prior Learning which take into cognizance the fact that the ECD teachers have been working for a considerable time before they approach their initial trainings or qualifications. This RPL process exempt those experienced teachers from some of the Unit standards offered in the qualification they have registered on. According to the policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in higher education for Early Childhood Development educators (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2017) when RPL takes place, learning outcomes should not be compromised in the process. The RPL should involve professional individual assessment of that prior

learning experience. The assessment should satisfy the stipulations of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008.

One participant who was the principal of the site herself indicated that she had no one to assist her from her ECD site because she was the only trained by that time. When she returned from the training, she sought for someone to mentor her from other community ECD sites who had the capacity to do so but she could not find any. That left her without any mentor, and she has to struggle learning by herself which becomes a challenge in the implementation of the curriculum:

P010: Towards the end of our training, we were addressed by the officials, and we were made to understand that as we were concluding our training, our managers on ECD sites would take over assisting us wherever they could or and wherever we needed their support. I for one knew from the onset that I would not receive that assistance from anyone since I am the principal of the site and the first one to be trained. I then thought I would try getting assistance from principals of other sites which I tried unsuccessfully.

The participant below had a different experience because her site principal assisted all the trained teachers in her ECD site but there are new things which the principal was not familiar with and as such she could not assist this newly trained teacher on those new matters.

P006: I confirm that I am having challenges when executing my tasks in the ECD site as a trained ECD teacher who was trained for a very short period of one year and also acquiring a very minimal qualification which is an ECD NQF level 4. In order for me to get things right I still need much guidance from experienced professionals. In my site, my manager has a higher qualification which is ECD NQF level 5. She assists the whole teaching staff whenever she can, but there are new things which I was trained on which she says she was not exposed to. As such I end up leaving those aspects out of my scope of work because I do not understand them, and no one will assist me on them.

The issue of support appears to be a serious challenge on the side of the trained ECD teachers who were trained on ECD NQF level 4 and 5. The participants shared their frustrations as far as the professional support is needed. On the other hand, Fonsén, Szecsi, Kupila and Liinamaa (2023) are of the opinion that teachers are supposed to be leaders in their own classrooms. They should be utilizing their curriculum knowledge and relevantly planning for the activities which are addressing the observations they got from the children. When ECD teachers still feel short of competency and are also short of leadership in the classroom, there is a gap which needs to be attended.

4.3.2.6. Resistance to change

4.3.2.6.1. Resistance to change on implementation

When participants are back from the training and are to implement things differently from the status quo, they sometimes experience resistance from the side of their management. Some wrong cultures seem to be adhesive in the processes of the ECD sites such that it is difficult to move from. The resistance to change implementation is seen from the side of the senior staff members in the ECD sites. They do not allow the newly trained ECD teachers to implement changes to suit what or how they were trained to do. The participants appear to be discouraged by this resistance to an extent that they don't understand the reason for their training if they are not allowed to effect changes where need be. The participants want to implement curriculum changes in a smoother way, which is not easy in this environment. The practitioners feel as if they were trained just to fulfil the expectations of the departments since the departments insisted on ECD sites having trained personnel. The trained practitioners end up not properly implementing what they were trained to do.

P008: Sometimes we differ with our seniors and not fully agree on the implementation of changes in curriculum in such a way that our training appear to be worthless because we are not allowed to follow the curriculum in a smooth way. In other words, our training ends up being like a mere process followed just to satisfy the departmental requirements.

When we come back, we are disturbed in terms of proper implementation of what we are trained for.

4.3.2.6.2. Resistance to change on the use of resources.

At times the resistance to change is said to affect even the use of material and other equipment in the site. The senior staff members in the ECD sites are said to be controlling even how the learning material should be used in the site. The learning material in use are at times different from those that are stored and reserved. To the participants it would, however, make sense if they could be allowed to have all types of available toys in use and then store the excess ones for future use rather than having them stored reservedly.

The participant wanted to try using the play material for the new games which was learnt from the training sessions. She as well intended exposing the rest of the ECD teachers in her site to such activities. Unfortunately, she was not allowed to touch the unused toys which are stored in boxes in the ECD site. The participant stated that such refusal to use relevant materials by the senior staff members becomes one of the reasons why trained ECD participants end up teaching children rhymes instead of playing activities which would attend to the holistic development of the child. This aspect is disappointing on the side of the trained ECD practitioners. If allowed to utilize the toys, curriculum implementation would be different in their case. The participant put it this way:

P009: I came back from the training with excitement and energy to implement change in my site. I came back and suggested to my seniors that we start using the new toys which are still stored in the boxes in order for me to even demonstrate to my colleagues how to do new games and activities using those puzzles and toys that are still in boxes. I was very disappointed when I was told to forget about the toys in the boxes and plan around using the toys that we are already using. What worried me more was the fact that there were toys in the boxes which were not represented in the ones that were already on use. So, it still meant that I would still be not able to do those new activities that needed the types of

toys which were not yet opened in boxes. This results in us as teachers doing rhymes with children each time we are frustrated by not getting right material we need for an activity. Content which needs specific material ends up being neglected.

Keeping new toys in boxes and not allowing ECD teachers to utilize them is questionable. One would wonder if the reason for storage is for the ECD site to showcase that they have enough toys to the officials who come in to assess the ECD site's capacity to develop children or they simply want toys in use to first dilapidate so that they will be able to use the reserved toys. This leaves one without an accurate picture of how the trained ECD teacher would have performed in the implementation of the curriculum should they were having access to all the teaching materials available for use.

4.3.2.6.3. Resistance to change on collaborative planning.

Another practitioner met resistance in terms of collaborative planning wherein she was taught during the training that after training the ECD teachers are supposed to plan together with other teachers in the site. When back into the sites, they find resistance from other ECD teachers in the site. Lack of coordination in planning results on the ECD sites functioning without documents such as annual plans, quarterly, monthly, and weekly plans. This results in ECD teachers always doing different themes to an extent that some teachers are found doing themes suitable for winter during summer times. This leaves the ECD site without proper coordination which assist in children being exposed to similar content at a time. It is important that children should find the whole ECD site environment echoing the same sentiment with what they are also doing in their individual classes. It serves as an emphasis of what they are doing in their respective classes.

P007: In this ECD site there is no coordinated planning of activities. I learnt from the training that we are to plan together as all teachers in the site. We are to plan and develop our year plan, quarterly plan, and monthly plans and thereafter each teacher would do own weekly and or daily plans. I came back and tried implementing that change but it was only met

with serious resistance, and it was clearly indicated that each person was responsible for own classes and its planning thereof. This results on each teacher focusing on a different theme at a time whereas we were supposed to be doing same themes at once. Some teachers end up doing the winter themes during summertime because of this resistance to plan things together.

If indeed, training is perceived as important, changes that stem from the training are supposed to be implemented. If change is not allowed by seniors to be implemented, the question is why were the teachers trained in the first place? One would expect seniors to appreciate any change which would contribute to the betterment of the site and its responsibilities.

4.3.2.7. Lack of commitment by practitioners

4.3.3.7.1. Laziness and lack of passion

Three of the participants raised laziness amongst practitioners as one of the challenges in delivering quality on curriculum or educational activities. This is seen in cases where the teachers are saying they have enough learning material and infrastructure but still find curriculum matters lagging. This is usually evident in cases where there are no lesson plans prepared by the trained ECD teachers, no evidence of activities done with the children leading to lack of assessment records and consequently no valid reports by the end of the quarter. One participant indicated that she prepares her own lesson plans alone. At some time, she found out that other trained teachers stole her work for copying. She noticed that when the teachers in her ECD site met for discussions and she found out that other teachers have the lesson plans which are the same with hers although she wrote hers alone which makes it impossible for them to have similar lesson plans. Because the other teachers did not plan that lesson on their own, there is a possibility that they might not be able to implement it fully when they are with children since it is not their original plan. Participant 007 raised her concern as follows:

P007: Sometimes when I have prepared my lesson plan, which I prepared alone because I am preparing it for my own class, you find other teachers

who are trained as well, although through different training institutions, stealing other teachers' files. When working together, you find those teachers having the same lesson plans as yours. This means that when teaching in their class, they will not do a thorough job, they will just do highlights because they are not the authors of what is prepared in the lesson plan. I prepared it with knowledge of my learners.

Teachers are considered as professionals who are on a calling. They are considered as having passion for the work which they are doing on a daily basis. They are expected to be effective and resilient (Bipath, 2022). However, in the case of the above participant, the perception is opposite. One of the factors which causes the lack of passion is indicated below:

4.3.3.7.2. Lack of passion due to lack of remunerations

The other reason which is contributing to laziness or working without dedication is lack of remuneration. This was articulated by many of these participants. To them, remuneration enhances performance. Participants think that they could do better if they were remunerated for the work they are doing. To them payment could cheer them up. Participant 006 put it this way:

P006: Not getting paid for our work results in poor performance because we are working for nothing here. So at times you find that even if I am qualified and experienced, I don't use my expertise in an expected manner knowing that after working well I will not get anything to cheer me up.

Besides the reasons mentioned above, one participant raised a concern about teachers lacking passion of what they are doing. According to her if a teacher does not have passion for working with children, things will never go right. She states that at times teachers find themselves in the ECD sites by 'accident' having been selected by the royal authorities to come and work in a community ECD site. So, these types of teachers end up going for training not being dedicated to its course.

P003: If I am chosen by the chief's kraal for this job, I come here without passion for children. I mean it is not my vision. Such a person will need to be pushed in order for her to work. The way people are recruited into teaching work in the ECD centres is as well contributing to this lack of passion which results in failing learners from developing the way their ECD curriculum anticipated.

From the above finding, it shows that passion is taken as a driving force behind hard work by trained ECD teachers. If ECD teachers are trained and are driven with passion, this finding suggests that those teachers could work hard, which would benefit the ECD site and as such it would eliminate some curriculum implementing challenges in the ECD site.

4.3.2.7.3. Dishonesty by student teachers

One participant made mention of the fact that while in the trainings, some student teachers are not honest. When they are given tasks to complete at home, they come back and copy from those that were trained successfully during the previous years. Sometimes they write for each other even when they are in the same class. This is seen as a malpractice which results in some of them passing their qualifications by flying colours whereas they were incompetent. If one got a qualification by copying from others, that person is considered as someone who did not learn because he or she did not do the work on their own. The interview participants think that it would be better if the teachers in training were coming to the ECD site and engage other trained teachers in their site to jointly go through their assigned tasks and advise where they should. If the teachers themselves did not go through the teaching process faithfully, the assumption is that they as well cannot take the child successfully throughout the education processes. The research participant who is a site principal as well, put it in this way:

P003: I have three teachers who are in training. The truth is when back here at home they write for one another. Do you think that that person learnt? No she did not learn. But if they come back and sit down with us and we jointly discuss their assignments, with the involvement of their

trainers, we could jointly assist them instead of them cheating. What then do you expect from that type of a teacher? Can that teacher really take a child through educational processes successfully?

Actions such as described above defeat the aim of education in general and become a disadvantage on the children who are learners in their care. Such kind of teachers end up working as trained teachers without being the real product of the training they acquired. The following discussion will be on ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners

Table 4.4. Summary of the results: Ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in rural Vhembe East district.

Ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in rural Vhembe East district.	
Themes	Sub-themes
1.Training enhancement	Training teachers on NCF document. Development of supportive documents for teachers. Provision of Learning and Teaching Support Material.
2. Curriculum Support	Community awareness campaign on ECD services Classroom Assistants Enforcement of one curriculum in ECD centres Local cluster meetings by trained ECD teachers Parental involvement on curriculum matters Effective teacher remuneration structure

4.3.3. Ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in rural Vhembe East district.

4.3.3.1. Training enhancement

The participants made mention of the fact that they would prefer more training on the NCF document. Further than that they wanted the department to develop more supporting documents which further unpacks the NCF document. They also mentioned the need for Learning and Teaching Support Material. The three subthemes are unpacked as follows:

4.3.3.1.1. Training teachers on NCF document.

The participants reported that NCF is the central document in the preparation of lessons and implementation of the ECD curriculum. For them to implement curriculum successfully they need to have a clear understanding of the NCF document. To them, this document is like almost new to them even though they started knowing of it around for some years now. Although the participants are trained in the NQF Levels 4 and or 5, they still need more training on the NCF document. Their training did not manage

to focus much on the NCF itself. It is also important for the trained teachers to be able to assist the untrained teachers and the volunteers. This is difficult for those participants who did not learn much in NCF. They cannot help their untrained staff members since they themselves do not understand the NCF. Participant 005:

P005: The NCF document is like a bible in the ECD curriculum. We have to follow it when we do our preparations. So if I do not understand this document, I am lost in this environment. Telling you the truth, I understand this document maybe a quarter in percentage. To be honest with you, I cannot even assist the volunteers in interpreting this book. I also know that I am not the only one here. Some might not say it but I am telling you the truth. Maybe it is because what they taught us during the ECD level 4 and level 5 had very little on this book. Maybe it needs to be included in our initial trainings.

Another participant also showed lack of knowledge of the NCF document by not being able to pronounce its name. The way she said it left me wanting to know how they call it in the ECD site. I asked the participant how other teachers refer to it when talking amongst themselves. She indicated that they call it 'bugu ya dzi ELDAs' (the book of ELDAs) referring to the Early Learning and Developmental Areas found in the NCF document. It is of concern that ECD teachers are still not familiar with this important document (NCF) whereas it is serving as the current national curriculum document they should abide by. The participants indicated that there are few trained teachers who were also trained on NCF. The group attended the training for three consecutive days. Other teachers were only trained for one day. The participant thought that she was understanding what was taught on NCF that day until she came back and started preparing on her own. Another participant put it this way:

P004: The truth is that I do not understand this book. I need someone to teach me. Only few teachers were called to a hotel for three days and were taught about the book. Since then some of us were just called for a one-day workshop where we were taught for some few hours. When I was in that session, I felt like I understood what we were doing there. It was

only when I had to do lessons on my own that I realized I am not able to do like I thought I could. Yoh! It is tough I am telling you.

Whereas the above participant (P004) was exposed to NCF but still experience some difficulties, participant 002 was only trained for level 4 but has never been to a NCF workshop. Even during the level 4 training, the participant was never exposed to NCF. This ECD teacher cohort has NCF training need which should assist them to continue unfolding the curriculum for its successful implementation.

P002: I am one participant who was trained on ECD NQF level 4. I did not come across any NCF in my training. What we did in our portfolios of evidence files were not related with this NCF. I am new to this NCF. At present I cannot integrate what I learnt in my training with what is in the curriculum document. So in order for me to implement what is in that curriculum document, some serious training is needed.

It is of importance for ECD teachers to fully understand the NCF clearly since it is supposed to be their source of inspiration (Karisa, Samuels, Watermeyer, McKenzie & Vergunst, 2022). Without their understanding of this document which sound to be a prescribed document, it looks like what is intended by the curriculum framework will not reach the target (ECD children in the ECD sites).

4.3.3.1.2. Development of supportive documents for ECD teachers

One other aspect mentioned for the betterment of the curriculum implementation is the development of the supporting documents which would further unpack the National Curriculum Framework document for easy use when they prepare their activities. The participants referred to the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document which is very comprehensive and clear in its activities and schedules but still it has some further guidelines documents. To them, other materials like teachers' guide could assist into unpacking the NCF document for easier implementation. This is how participant 010 said:

P010: I think that this NCF document still needs further explaining and guidelines documents. It could be better if they could do like it is in CAPS

where they further scheduled activities in quarters for each grade. It is not easy to come up with activities on our own without other books to assist us. We also need more unpacking of this document. Maybe there should be a teacher's guide or something.

Participants sees NCF as a document full of new information which ECD teachers need to know and understand. For them to understand this new information, which is dominated by its own language, there should be further explanations in order to understand the intended contents. Participant 002 shared the same sentiments with participant 001 on this matter of further explanation of the NCF document. However, she further indicated that there is a need for the methodology type of training which expatiate on how ECD teachers should implement this NCF the same way. ECD teachers need clarity on what and how to do in the playrooms with the children. The participants further assume that there is also a need of the upgraded learning materials in the ECD sites to fulfil the expectations of the NCF.

P002: The NCF document is rich of new information which we really need as ECD teachers. The challenge is that it also has the rich language which further requires some explanations and some expansions which will make us to fully understand its contents. I see it as a curriculum which need us to have new types of material which are more advanced and also some new methods of doing things. All these calls for good material guiding the teacher on how to do it step by step if possible. We need to be clearer in what and how to do our work.

In a study conducted on the implementation of the ECD curriculum in Zimbabwe, to address challenges in the implementation of the curriculum, Madondo (2020) recommended that curriculum makers should prioritize concerns of teachers, parents and learners in ECD settings before planning and implementing a new curriculum. Zimbabwe ECD teachers were as well implementing a new ECD framework which Madondo's study focused on examining teachers' perception on its implementation.

In Botswana the Pre-primary Curriculum Framework includes teacher's guide which details how teachers are to implement the curriculum. Supporting documents to the

curriculum framework appear to be vital (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). This finding is therefore not new and it is in line with what is taking place in other African countries not far from South Africa.

4.3.3.1.3. Provision of Learning and Teaching Support Material

Besides the teacher supporting documents on NCF, participants emphasized the need for learning and teaching support material (LTSM) in the ECD sites. If learning is to be regarded as educational in the ECD environment, there must be books, toys and other playing material. According to the participants, that is not what is taking place in their ECD sites. Children are in most cases without books of their own except for the loose blank papers which they are given to write or draw on and later the papers are put together in a file. These files end up serving as books containing all daily tasks instead of files having sampled tasks to showcase the development of the children.

P005: In the training we were introduced to many types of tasks which we can do with our children in the classroom. Unfortunately, all of the activities and tasks need learning material in order for them to take place effectively. Imagine an environment of learning wherein the children do not own a single exercise book in their name. They always do their drawings in some loose papers which we put together in their files as portfolios of evidence. In those files we were supposed to put only samples of the children's work according to how we were trained. However, we now use those files to put together all that which children do in their pre-writing and other tasks.

Some participants compared their ECD sites with the urban ones. The children in the urban ECD sites are said to be having their own variety types of books suitable for different skills. Before the end of the year those books are already full of activities completed by the children themselves. In her site, participant 004 indicated that their children are proceeding to grade R in schools but have never used a book. The participant wishes that the department of Education could assist by supplying books in ECD sites. She feels that it would be right for the department to supply books for the development of children who are going to be part of the education system

hereafter. To them school readiness is what is being addressed in ECD sites and as such the department of Education should assist in developing that school readiness programme. To the participants, children should be exposed to book paging at this pre-school cohort and as such there should be books in ECD sites.

P004: I do not mean to be comparative, but I once visited an urban pre-school and found children having their own workbooks, drawing books and picture books. Already the books were almost full of the activities carried out by children around August. Imagine our children who are going to grade R next year having no books at all here in the site. I know that we started these crèches on our own as communities, but it would be good if departments could at least see to it that these children get books. After all we are preparing these children for smooth entrance in the departmental schools. The department of education should at least be considering that we are part of them, doing the school readiness which is also an important part of the children's education. These children should be experiencing to page through a book other than a picture book from the pre-school level.

Even before the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework, Phajane (2014) recorded that ECD teachers has long been faced with challenges of not clearly knowing what exactly to teach, when and how to teach in order to maximize the learning process. On the other hand, it is important for the ECD teachers to assure parents and the public that as professionals, they know what children need to know, when they must know and how to let them know.

With the assistance of the enhanced teacher training on NCF, development of NCF supporting documents and provision of LTSM, the participants think that the implementation of ECD curriculum could be improved. Below follows another theme which focuses on curriculum support.

4.3.3.2. Curriculum Support

4.3.3.2.1. Community awareness campaign on ECD curriculum

This item was mentioned by many participants. The participants are of the view that there is a need for meetings with communities to empower them in the matters of ECD. Parents are to know and understand the role of ECD curriculum and differentiate it from that of the primary schools. Some of the things expected by communities from ECD services are damaging to children themselves. This participant further advised that, if possible, departmental officials should be part of such meetings in order to strengthen or emphasize the seriousness of the matter. The participant stated as follows on the matter:

P002: My view is that parents may understand if we call them for a meeting. We explain to them how ECD sites operate, not the way parents think it should operate. They need to understand the extent to which we will develop their children and understand that further than that is the responsibility of the primary school. When doing those meetings, it would be better to include departmental officials. Their presence is important since they as well can emphasise how serious this matter is.

Participant 001 was also of the idea that the community should be empowered on the issue of not teaching children on literacy not fit for their age. Teaching the children how to write before their appropriate age is not right although teachers are doing it to impress the parents who are expecting children to read and write beforehand. Parents are expecting this because of their ignorance on the matter of the ECD. It is therefore important to let them know, understanding and accept the ECD curriculum as is instead of pressurising teachers to do the wrong curriculum implementation.

P001: The community should be taught on these matters because yes, if I am teaching a two- to three-year-old how to read and write before their brain is ready, it is wrong. But we are compelled to do it because parents are not aware of the fact that at this level, they are not to be taught that way and they as such keep on pressurizing us.

From the above citation one learns the importance of community awareness in the ECD services. Parents and community members are to know and differentiate the services of the ECD site from that of primary schools. It is surprising that parents and the community do not dictate their expectations in schools but they do so in ECD sites. The ECD should be trusted and be respected on what they do in the ECD sites by the community.

4.3.3.2.2. Classroom Assistants

Two participants suggested that there should be a classroom assistant in the ECD class. If that is not possible, two teachers should assist each other in the same classroom. To her, when learners are playing in different organised corners, a teacher cannot work alone. Children are said to be very active with toys to an extent that teacher should also be in active control or guidance in the playing process. There is a need for the second teacher to assist learners in other corners. The other reason which makes it advisable to have more than one teacher in a class is that learners should always be with a teacher even when the other teacher is out for a while. As such children will always be meaningfully engaged in their work and be monitored throughout their learning process.

P005: In those corners I am to put this toy that side and those toys that way. That is why I am saying I cannot do this alone. We put things there and dolls there as well as tables and chairs there...that side the child wants to use all toys alone and that needs to be controlled.

4.3.3.2.3. Enforcement of one curriculum in ECD centres

Some participants felt that if government could enforce the implementation of one curriculum in the ECD sites, some problems would be resolved. These are problems such as succumbing to the expectations of parent more especially those related to the issues of language and literacy at large. It would also solve the issue of migration from community sites to the private ones in pursuit of English as a language of learning and teaching. This would result in strong compliance to curriculum by all ECD teachers. There is an understanding that if all ECD centres were implementing curriculum the

same way, none of the sites would have to succumb to any pressure from the parents. An example of the use of English as the language of teaching and learning (LOLT) in the ECD site was pointed to. The participants indicated that if there are other ECD sites who are using English as their LOLT, other sites are compelled to use English as well in order to appease the parents. So as long as there is no enforcement in the use of same curriculum implementation, ECD sites will continue to divert from what and how they are supposed to do things. The other participant put it simple and said:

P002: If all crèches were doing the same, we would not be diverting. But because other ECD centres are at times doing things their own way and get away with it, we are also tempted to follow suit since we as well want to attract learners through their parents. As long as others are still using English as a language of learning for example, we will do it also because if we don't, parents will not bring their children to our ECD site.

According to participant number one, implementing the curriculum the same way would limit the mushrooming of the ECD site which is motivated by competition amongst crèches. Not doing things the same way leaves ECD sites as competing. Unfortunately, the sites are not competing on the correct implementation of the curriculum like competing on which child plays educationally best, but it is competition on which child speak English best or who reads and write best. Parents are proud on those three performances (English speaking, reading, and writing). In her own words, participant 001 said:

P001: It means that we are now in competition and the competition is not about the child who plays best as we are expected to do with them, but it is about those children who are able to write their names since that is what parents are proud of.

This participant further advised that there be a community committee which is monitored and assisted by the department. This committee should monitor all crèches in that community to see to it that they do similar things and assist one another where need be. That uniformity should be adhered to even in terms of prices for fees paid by parents. The committee should as well be responsible for ECD community meetings

wherein ECD teachers will meet to assist one another. Such meetings should be for all ECD sites belonging to the local communities. This would also be addressing what Phajane (2014) observed that “in most cases, teachers are constrained to their classrooms or schools which prevent them from participating in networking opportunities with other teachers. These constraints, often termed as isolation, translate into a lack of access to supportive professional learning” (Phajane, 2014: 241).

Concerning the enforcement of one curriculum, it is interesting to note that some countries do not enforce one compulsory curriculum by all pre-schools but however they monitor to ensure quality of what takes place in the pre-schools. One such country is Netherlands which is recorded to be not having prescribed curricular. Each ECEC can develop its own curriculum if it is based on children’s needs and objectives of the site. Developmental goals are there to guide the process (Adamson & Litjens, 2016). This Netherlands example, however, is not to show that there is no need of a compulsory curriculum for ECDs. The ability to develop own curriculum on sites can also be related to the higher standards and competencies which ECEC teachers are afforded during their initial training as well as on the job support, they are receiving. Some countries are faced with lack of financial resources which results in their inability to develop their own local curricula. Those countries, however, end up developing curricula which are closely connected with cultural context of their immediate environment with the assistance of NGOs (Sun, Rao & Pearson, 2015).

As part of key challenges in strengthening early childhood care and education, many countries are found to be not having an evidence-based curriculum. One of the reasons leading to such conditions being lack of financial capacity for undergoing evaluations and collecting informative data which is valid. The existence of the different curriculum models’ advantages is not known so far. Not much is known about their quality, cost as well as implementation (Aboud & Proulx 2019).

4.3.3.2.4. Local cluster meetings by trained ECD teachers

Participants recognise the fact that even amongst the trained ECD teachers, there are some trained teachers who appear to understand curriculum matters better than

others. They believe that if a sharing platform can be developed for them in a form of regular meetings, all of them could assist one another through sharing better practices on the curriculum implementation. The more experienced ECD trained teachers would share their experiences to the benefit of the newly trained teachers who still struggles to implement some of the curriculum components like the development of the lesson plans. In her own words participant, no 006 said:

P006: Although we are all trained in the ECD levels qualifications, our speed in understanding and implementation is not the same. I agree that some of us, although trained on ECD level qualifications, are not as clear on these matters as our counterparts who were long trained and have long experiences on the ECD matters more especially inside the classroom. I am of the opinion that we have monthly meetings for example, wherein all ECD teachers from the nearby villages gather together for the purpose of curriculum development. Those of us who are still wanting will benefit from the experiences of those that were trained long ago and also have more teaching experiences. They could demonstrate to us how to do lesson plans and other related matters.

Sharing the same sentiments with the previous participant, participant 002 also indicated the need to meet with other trained teachers. She indicated that most of what needed to be addressed were the same. According to her, there should be regular meetings which addresses common challenges for example, how other ECD centres are maximising the use of space in the small classrooms. At the end of it all the participants want to see children accessing the playing learning areas or corners meaningfully so regardless of the physical challenges facing the ECD sites. Having regular meetings could assist in sharing ideas which would enable the practitioners to overcome their challenges.

P002: If we can meet as trained ECD teachers of nearby areas at least once in a month, or bimonthly, we can be able to share ideas on how to improve our curriculum implementation in our ECD sites. Most of us have similar issues like for an example, lack of enough space. In such meetings, we might find out how others are improvising for the children to

end up having access to all corners by the end of the week. We may learn new techniques from one another. For example, some may say we use spaces outside the classrooms under the trees for some corners like music area and fantasy. This might work very well in cases where there are classroom assistants who would go outside with the other group or remain in the class with the remaining group. These children might rotate the corners inside and outside the classrooms. Sharing ideas such as this could bring about good access to corners by learners who do not have enough spaces in their classrooms or playrooms and as such enhancing the curriculum implementation.

Black (2019), in his studies conducted in the United States in one of the private ECD centres, advocated for teacher interactions as a practice which promote teacher competencies. When teachers interact, they learn from one another and that is empowerment on its own.

Cluster meetings as suggested by participant 006 above, could be a meaningful platform if ECD teachers could manage them well. It could count as part of professional development although it is on a less formal form. If indeed they could manage it by having some formal programme to go by instead of meeting without a formal programme. It would be better if they could as well search for a programme from similar meetings which take place amongst teachers from primary schools and use them as their starting point.

4.3.3.2.5. Parental involvement on curriculum matters

As a measure of resolving the issue of lack of resources, one participant indicated that they requested parents to provide for other needed materials in the ECD site. Therefore, parents are supplying the site with learning materials. They buy workbooks and other stationery for their children. The involvement of parents in the provisioning of learning materials reduces the financial burden of the ECD committee which would be left with the responsibilities of purchasing the missing items. She put it in this way:

P009: Parents are involved in the provision of learning material. They assist by purchasing learners' books as in books used for drawings and other pre-writing exercises. They also buy crayons and scissors. By doing it this way, they are solving our lack of learning resources. What is left for us is to purchase the toys, not books and crayons.

When asked whether they are involving parents in the issue of lack of resources, participant 004 said that they have never requested more than a packet of toilet papers and minute books used for writing. Apparently, parents are responding positively to requests which are made by the ECD sites.

P004: We have not spoken with parents yet. What we tried was to say that every child must bring a packet of toilet papers. Another thing was for them to come with their own minute books to ease on the stationery which we buy.

Parents are also expected by ECD practitioners, to physically support their children in the ECD site by being available when needed by site managers or principals. Participants indicated that when requested to come to the ECD centres, parents often agree to come but end up not showing up. ECD centres need to physically communicate with parents at times. The inability of parents to show up leads to participants believing that parents are not interested in the education of their children. As such Participant 003 concluded that parents do not value the work of the ECD sites, but they only want a place to bring their children for their own relief since children are a handful when at home where parents are to be busy with other important activities. As such they are not valuing the ECD site as an educational institution, but they see it as a safe place where learners are kept during the day for parents to do other businesses. Participant 003 described the response of parents in the following way:

P003: Even when we call them to come, they just say that they will come, finish! They don't come. This becomes frustrating to us since we expected parents to be positively involved in the education of their children. At times we think that these parents are not interested on the education side of their children, but they just want to get rid of the noise and any

inconveniences that comes with having kids at home. Forgive me for saying this but it is as if they are just dumping children to the ECD site just for them as parents to be left alone at home. They want to remain undisturbed at home to take care of their errands freely.

Phajane (2014), emphasized the need for the involvement of the parents and families in the education of their children. Their involvement is to her equal with that of the teachers as well as learners themselves. According to her their presence is needed now more than ever. The presence of the families and community in their children's education has positive effect in the academic progress of those children. In the study which focused on the challenges which teachers experience when implementing the curriculum, Ntumi (2016), found out that teachers needed parents to be involved in the learning of their children. Without the parents' involvement, teachers found their work difficult to carry alone.

Jones, Hampshire and McDonnel (2020), also emphasize the fact that involving the parents of the learners in the education of their children should start as early as in the Early Childhood Development. Their engagement is believed to lead to improvement in social and academic outcomes for the children. Parents are seen as important in the education of the young ones as they are important in their lives in all aspects. They are needed to support even the curriculum implementation. They should know and assist in what is needed for the implementation, as well as what is to be done. Children need more involvement of parents when they are young than when they are older.

On the other hand, Aboud and Proulx (2019), identify a gap wherein they see ECCE as underutilizing parents and communities who are regarded by the two authors as strategic partners in the improvement of quality ECCE services. So, if parents are as important as they are shown to be by different authors, their availability in the ECD sites when invited is undeniably important. This shows that their presence is needed in the strengthening of the Early Childhood services. However, it should be noted that in some cases, parents of those children are working which poses difficulties when they are needed to physically participate in the education of their young ones.

Parents who are interested in the education of their children should be fully involved and available in the education of their children and be willing even to assist in the governing matters of the learning site. They should go to an extent of being members of the Site Management Committees (SMC). This would show that they can go beyond minding about their children only.

4.3.4.8. Effective teacher remuneration structure

The participants see proper remuneration of ECD teachers as part of the possible solution to the proper ECD curriculum implementation problems which they are facing now. The participants are of the opinion that government should be paying ECD teachers. They want to be paid salaries every month instead of getting funds quarterly as it is happening presently. At present they state that they are paid stipend once every quarter. To the participants the presence of money contributes to the success of the work environment. If workers who are ECD teachers in this case, are paid every month then the work in the ECD site would be better. According to the participants, trained teachers should be paid according to their qualifications. If they are paid for the work, they do in the ECD sites they think they would be more effective:

P007: What I see from all other work environment is that what makes them successful is money. They pay workers every month to keep them working successfully. If they can change and pay us on a monthly basis instead of quarterly, it would be better. On top of that, they should say those ECD teachers or practitioners with ECD NQF level 4 and or level 5 be paid according to their qualifications so that they would work with dedication.

Participant 003 made a comparison of the way she worked during the time of her training. The stipend paid to her appeared to have been motivating her to work meaningfully as compared to this time wherein she is no longer receiving monthly remuneration. It was good to receive the payment on a specific date every month. That made her to work happily because she felt that she was working for a good course. Getting paid stipend during their training time made the practitioner feel like she was a real teacher although the stipend is a low amount. This motivated her to work hard as a teacher who received payment. After training the participants felt discouraged by

going back to work without monthly payment. That nonpayment was demotivating to the participants in a way that it made them lose energy to work meaningfully. The demotivation discourages them from doing their preparations in advance. To these types of participants, it suffices to keep the children safe and clean in the ECD classroom instead of developing them as it should be. P003 put it this way:

P003: I was very glad when participating in that EPWP training. One part which was interesting to me was the fact that I experienced monthly wages for the first time in my life. It was very good for me to know that on a specific date I get money deposited into my account. When I wake up in the morning of the pay day, I would find a message in my phone which is a notice of payment in my bank account. During that time, I felt like a real teacher because I was earning some money even though it was not much. As such I worked happily putting all my effort in the classroom with my children. After the end of the EPWP contract I started feeling less motivated and had a sense of disappointment to find myself wanting again. To be truthful, I don't have the same energy anymore. I hardly see it necessary to spend my evenings at home preparing for the work which is not paying me. Since when do teachers work for nothing? As long as I keep the children happy, clean and enjoying rhymes I feel it as okay.

If trained ECD teachers are this dissatisfied and discouraged regarding remunerations, then the learning environment is not going to be as conducive as it should be. Teachers are regarded by Lungi and (Matafalwi, 2020) as key people in the implementation of any curriculum strategies. As important stakeholders in the ECD curriculum, the well-being of the ECD teachers is important for the wellbeing of the children they teach or develop. Happy and satisfied teachers are needed to have happy healthy and eager learners. So far it looks like there is low job satisfaction amongst ECD teachers.

To Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2018) it is not possible to deliver the quality ECD programs for children without taking good care of ECD teachers who are supposed to be instrumental in the process. On the other hand, teachers are expected to improve their qualifications regardless of the fact that they are not properly compensated for

their educational effort. As professionals they were supposed to be flourishing instead of holding on and surviving under difficult conditions. In support of this view, Sin Wong (2022) regards raising ECD teacher qualification and remuneration as a means of achieving quality ECE.

ECD is one of the Apex priorities in South Africa listed as project number 11 in 2008 by President Thabo Mbeki (Davids, Samuels, September, Moeng, Ritcher, Mabogoane, Goldman & Buthelezi, 2015). One would not imagine it to be left in the hands of volunteers. 'Volunteers' here is referring to the ECD teachers who are rendering services without getting remunerations at the end of the month. As one of the listed priorities, one would think that government should have ensured that the important personnel which is responsible for the curriculum delivery amongst many responsibilities, are taken care of financially.

The knowledgeable other who is expected to be a properly trained person (Kendra, 2021) successfully assisting the child through the zone of proximal development cannot be imagined to be working in a formal environment without being remunerated. As a respectable professional, it is expected that their hard work be recognized by the employer and or the government which values the ECD sector. It is important to eliminate the frustrations and helplessness faced by teachers of the ECD category. It is not possible for the public to give respect to a professional who is characterised by lack and poverty. The following discussion will be on strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers.

Table 4.5. Summary of the results: Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.

Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Training of ECD teachers	Coverage of teacher training Teacher training before employment. In-service training Residential workshops
2. Professional support / development	Coaching and mentoring Management workshops
3. Management workshops	Workshops NCF trainings for L4 and 5 graduates

4.3.4. Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district.

4.3.4.1. Training of ECD teachers

Participants raised some concerns related to the present situation wherein there are still ECD teachers who are not yet trained whom they have to share classes with. Their raised concerns were grouped according to the following sub-themes:

4.3.4.1.1. Coverage of teacher training

One other challenge noted by trained teachers was that there are still ECD teachers who are not yet trained for either NQF level 4 or 5. According to them the department of education should see to it that all teachers who are already in service in the pre-schools should receive some qualifications in ECD. So far those teachers that are not trained yet, apparently take it as if they are not expected to do the right things since it is known that they are not trained whereas they are responsible for their own classrooms.

The trained participants are to work hand in hand with other ECD teachers in the site. It is not easy for the trained teachers to do the correct things alone in the site while those that are not trained are doing it anyhow. The participants' view is that the rest of the practitioners be trained in qualifications as well so that all teachers be on the same level. The untrained teachers appear to be not focused on developing the children but are satisfied by spending time with the children as in rearing them. The untrained teachers do not understand that there are ways to be followed when developing children holistically. At times the untrained teachers end up sleeping in class when it is time for children to nap. They do not continue preparing for the next activities during the nap time.

Teachers pass children from one class to the other every year. It is therefore important that the present class teacher develop the child in totality so that the next class teacher can continue that class' work instead of catching up on the previous year's work. It is also important that the teacher who is receiving children from the lower class be competent enough to do the current class' work so that the children are not stalled after the good work done from the previous class. That makes it important for all teachers to be trained in the ECD centre. Participant 007 put it in this way:

P007: It would be better if the Department of Education would ensure that all teaching staff in the ECD sites are trained. There are those that are not trained yet so if they could get training, we could assist children in a better and similar way. A trained teacher and the untrained one are not the same. Those that are not trained are satisfied with taking care of children as in rearing them instead of developing them. When we talk about developing the child, they do not understand since they are not trained. If all of us are trained it will be smooth since we shall all be of the same understanding that we are developing children here, not just rearing them which might lead to us sleeping when it is time for children to sleep.

Another training coverage raised was that of enhancement workshops. The participants related this matter to the department of education. They are of the view that the department should cover all the sites when planning for ECD teachers' workshops. The department is said to be selecting some sites for workshops and leaving other sites

behind. As such other sites are left in the dark in terms of the new information intended for that workshop. The suggestion made by the participant is that there be at least two teachers per site when workshops are conducted. This means that all sites will be trained, and more than one teacher per site is trained on whatever the workshop is intended to cover. Participant 004 raised it this way:

P004: Challenges which we encounter which result in our work lagging behind is related to the Department of Education. When there is a workshop for an example, when it is here in Mutale, one would expect that instead of some ECD centres being selected, all sites should be included. At least two people per site be involved in the workshop so that we can get equal information instead of other ECD centres being left behind because they were not trained.

It is so far, an accepted perception that professionalization of the ECD teachers is an important factor in the process of ensuring quality services in the ECD. This quality is of course a determining factor in the success of curriculum delivery by teachers. So far there is still shortage of trained ECD teachers in many countries. The sad part is that in most of those countries ECD teachers are considered of low status. The issue of them being perceived as low in status might be due to the fact that they are usually lowly paid, and they are less mentored by the powers that be. Their career path is also not clear even to themselves (Aboud & Proulx 2019). To her disappointment, Mead (2017) the ECD work is usually carried out by those with minimal training and obtaining very low wages.

It is important to have trained ECD teachers as a backbone of the teaching force. If communities do not view this work in a positive light, the ECD fraternity might still encounter entry into workforce by teachers who 'accidentally' find themselves teaching in pre-schools like what has been reported by one participant. Apparently, there is a need of a strategy which can attract people to train for the ECD qualifications out of their liking. This could improve the *quality of ECD services*.

4.3.4.1.2. Teacher trainings before employment

One participant pointed out the fact that ECD teachers are facing curriculum implementation challenges because they start by working in ECD centres before training for ECD qualifications. When they later go for qualifications through the EPWP opportunity, they are already exposed to wrong ways of doing things in the ECD site. As such it becomes difficult for them to change their old ways of doing things after being exposed to the right ways of doing things during their trainings. So, to her ECD teachers should be going for training first, the same way teachers do in formal primary and secondary schools. That would mean not being hired or allowed to practice in the site before having acquired the qualifications.

P008: We go for training coming from the ECD sites already. We are employed without qualifications. When I look at this matter, I think it contributes to this challenging situation because we are already accustomed to our ways. This makes it difficult to come out of the previous manners although now we are trained.

The participant further advised that it is better for ECD sites to hire people who went to the training after passing matric. The teacher who went for training without having any knowledge of how things are run in the ECD sites. So, the training is new to that person which is better than the training which is serving as a corrective measure to those already in the field. The teacher who is trained first and go to work in the site after the training, is said to be a better option because he or she will only do what was taught in the training and that would mean doing things correctly since that teacher was not exposed to wrong practices before learning the correct practices.

P008: A person who is trained before working as a teacher in the ECD site is better. She comes clean wanting to learn how things are to be done in the ECD site. She takes the new knowledge from the training and practice it without knowing any other shortcuts or alternatives. She only does as she was trained and that will mean doing things correctly.

Zulu, Aina and Bipath (2022) emphasizes the view that ECD practitioners should acquire proper qualifications. That will make them have professional esteem raised which is also good for their confidence as they performance in their ECD classrooms interacting with the children and the ECD curriculum.

Mitter and Putcha (2018) also support the idea of pre-service trainings because it prepares the workforce beforehand for their roles. In the pre-trainings, students usually embark on both coursework and field work which gives them a feel of how teaching is done in the real teaching environment. Some countries like New Zealand do finance the initial training of ECD teachers whereas other countries like Ghana do not fund the trainings. The prospective teachers do pay for their trainings.

Darling-Hammond (2017) and Bawani and Mphahlele (2021) makes it clear that initial teacher training is key to production of effective and influential teaching force. In the ECD level, the effective learning and development are the results of competent teachers who enable a conducive learning environment. Pre-service teacher training should be able to produce 'learning specialists' (Van der Merwe, 2022) who are competent and will assist children or learners to learn more under their watch and guidance.

Limited financial support in different countries results in limiting the access to trainings by those desiring to be ECD teachers. The quality of the training programme itself is also a contributory factor in the ECD process. It matters how the training programme prepares the new teachers, how it grounds them in knowledge of the child development and the academic content areas. Nigeria believes that no education system can go above the quality of its teachers (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016).

The above findings and literature support make clear the fact that a country should desire to have quality teachers across all education bands including the ECD. If the country can provide quality material and infrastructure into the hands of unskilled teachers, it will serve no purpose. As such the quality training of ECD teacher becomes crucial for the successful curriculum implementation by the trained ECD teachers including these teachers who were assisted by the EPWP programme.

4.3.4.1.3. In-service training

Participants indicated that it is important for the trained ECD teachers to be offered some sort of revision and empowerment in the form of in-service trainings or workshops. According to them, qualification training alone is not sufficient. The participants need in-service training to keep them informed of the new things as well as giving them answers to the questions that arise as and when they are implementing the curriculum. The participants see the need for someone who is filling the gap of their initial trainers who were there to show them some way when the need arose.

P009: The first ECD teacher training we receive is very important to us. When we are still doing practical after each module, we have our trainers to ask from when we stuck. We can always ask them to explain to us some of the difficulties we experience when doing our practice teaching. Now that we are finished it is like we are on our own. At times we find ourselves not knowing how to implement some of the things we were trained to do. When we ask our senior colleagues here in the site, we find that they as well do not know. So it would be better to have some refreshing courses wherein we would revise what we were taught and be able to get clarity on the difficulties we encounter now.

Participant 002 wanted the in-service training to cover even the issue of the dress code for ECD teachers. According to her teachers should be constantly reminded of how they should dress since the manner of dressing plays a role in the delivery of lessons in the ECD classroom. Sometimes how a teacher is dressed can restrict that teacher when playing with children or when kneeling down to demonstrate how some games should be played. In her own words Participant 002 said:

P002: There are attires which are not conducive for this work more especially when we run around playing with children. In ECD it matters what you wear. You have always to be ready for the busy part of the programme. You also have to be ready for paint dirt and other material you come into contact with. If not wearing right clothes, you cannot do

your work properly. You will always be on guard of your formal attire. We need training on that also.

It is not uncommon to find teachers with qualification having challenges with the implementation of what they were trained to do in their initial training. Apparently, the professional environment requires some continuous development every now and then. It reduces the gap left uncovered during the initial training. Government is expected to identify the gaps for professional development and address those (Chinhara & Sotuku, 2020). This is in line with what Mitter and Putcha (2018) say that the in-service type of training enhances teachers' skills and keeps them informed of the current practices in their field of work.

The importance of on-the-job training is also seen by President Biden as of importance in the United States of America (US). The US is for high quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum to be availed for those ECD teachers who are already in working force (Weiland, 2021). Gregg and Hall (2020) also share the same sentiments by stating that sharing knowledge and strategies with those that can influence children is where we should start. That has to do with enhancing training to them that shall influence children and amongst those, are ECD teachers.

Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016 also consider professional development as a way forward to the problem of the existing ECD teaching force in Nigeria. Even those teachers who are trained in other phases other than ECE should also be put on board through professional development to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed in the ECE at pre-primary level. In support of professional development, Yang, Huang, Su, Zhu, Hsieh and Li (2022), bring in the concept of coaching in the professional development for ECD teachers. As such they advise that as and when the professional development programmes are taking place, the coaching approach should be employed.

One may wonder as to what form does in-service training takes. It may take place in different ways such as workshops, seminars, observational site visits, observing demonstration lessons, networking with other teachers from other schools, more especially the schools which show some good practice on what they are doing,

conferences and other peer observations (Chinhara & Sotuku, 2020). There are still some other forms or ways which can be developed such as social media groups and other platforms. All these methods can be used to improve what teachers do in the classroom with children which Van der Merwe (2022) agrees with other authors that learning is improved by improving what teachers do in the classroom.

4.3.4.1.4. Residential workshops

The other problem raised was that trainings take place at a central place which is still far from other sites. As such when teachers attend training travelling from home every day, they sometime arrive late to the training venues. At times they arrive well on time but because they would wake up in the early hours of the day to catch the transport, which made them to start their training being tired already. If they are given homework, they end up failing to do it meaningfully because they arrive back home late again. This is typical of Mutale cluster which usually meet at Tshilamba which is still about 100 kilometres from some of the site's villages. As such, the proposal is that trainings be made to take place where they can be accommodated for such number of days. Staying together would as well strengthen the chance for practitioners to study together during the evening. Studying together would also afford them time to assist one another.

P004: What more I can say is that let them (practitioners) have time to sleep over for some number of days or even if it is two consecutive nights, so that they will come back being soaked in knowledge... even in the evening they get time to assist one another with information while engaging with their tasks.

Andiema (2017), indicated that in Kenya, the in-service trainings are done residentially during school holidays. Although the possibility of disputes by teachers against working during school holidays can surface in some circumstances, this strategy of doing in-service training during school holidays is a better one since it does not create absence of teachers in the classroom during their professional development.

4.3.4.2. Professional support/development

4.3.4.2.1. Coaching and mentorship

Participants showed the effectiveness of mentorship and teamwork in the matters of the curriculum implementation. According to them, coaching and mentorship is much needed in the professional development of the ECD teachers. One participant who is also a principal of the ECD site made mention of the fact that in her site the staff members are without mentorship problems since the staff members are always gathering and planning their lessons. This process is said to be assisting when one of them identify a challenge. They tackle that challenge as a team. This is supposed to be a better option since the more they are, the more the ideas of solving the challenge. Participant 004) said:

P004: Our staff members do not have problems because I sit with them and do the lesson plan together. Where they do not understand they identify that problem and get assisted.

The fact of ECD sites doing their own teamwork and mentorship is in line with what the study conducted by Chinhara and Sotuku (2020) on continuous professional development for inclusive ECD teachers in Chiredzi in Zimbabwe concluded. In Zimbabwe, the district team emphasized that schools should hold their own professional continuous development programmes. In support of this view, Fonsén, Szecsi, Kupila and Linamaa (2023) reinforced the fact that effective leadership is important in the ECE centres to attain the quality of ECE programmes which contributes to the well-being and early learning of children. As such what the above participant is doing is in line with what these authors commend.

Yang, Huang, Su, Zhu, Hsieh and Li (2022), in their studies which looked into coaching of ECD teachers, concluded that coaching is a strategy which has been proven to be effective in the professional development of the ECD teachers. Through coaching and mentorship, teachers gain knowledge and improve in competencies whereas children on the other hand gain sound development from the knowledgeable teachers. Coaching and mentorship become more effective when it is coupled with the

supervision by coach and mentors. Coaches on the other hand are expected to be more than just ordinary supervisors who gives ordinary advice. An effective coach should contribute in developing the ECD teacher into becoming a strategist who is a problem solver and have confidence on what he or she is doing on daily bases together with their learning children Yang, et al., (2022).

Over and above the internal support offered by the principals to their staff members as on-site coaching and or mentoring, participants mentioned the need for departmental officials' visits. Participants are of the opinion that ECD teachers are neglected by departmental officials. They feel that it is important that officials should pay mentoring visits to the ECD site. Some participants preferred that the visits to be unannounced to avoid 'window dressing' which can be done by teachers in preparation of the expected visitors.

P008: My perception is that there is an element of negligence on the part of ECD teachers. If it were possible, I would advise that officials visit our institutions unannounced. I think that could help because if they come having announced they will always find things in order. Staff members will well prepare in advance.

At the same breath, the other participant also put blame on departmental officials. She says they are scarce and are hardly visiting the ECD sites for support. She compared the visits done to the nearby primary school with those that are almost none existing in her ECD sites. Her ECD site is a neighbour of a primary school. She says she sees departmental officials regularly visiting the primary school. She associates the presence of the departmental officials with the good performance of that primary school. So, she thinks that if ECD sites are regularly visited by Education Specialists, there would be good performance by teachers and children.

P003: Our site is near a primary school as you can see. We always see departmental officials' vehicles coming in and going out. That is why this primary school is performing well. If we were getting similar support from Education Specialists, we would be as well performing the way our

primary school is performing. Professional support is very important and it is really needed in our sites.

The above cited participant even expected the officials to take a role of assisting in the discipline of those teachers who are not cooperating in their responsibilities in the ECD sites.

The other support is expected from the trainers of these ECD teachers. They are expected to come and monitor the progress of their students here at the ECD sites as well as empowering the mentors in the sites. This is regarded as fruitful means which can positively contribute to the training process. Another participant put it this way:

P001: Most of the times what makes it worse is that after training the trainers will not come to our sites for many months. So we end up relaxing, but if we know that somebody will come every week, we are compelled to do what they want.

The issue of support to ECD teachers has been also an issue in Zimbabwe as recorded by Chinhara and Sotuku (2020). They indicated that government and other stakeholders are not offering enough support to schools as far as professional development is concerned. There should be programmes to assist ECD teachers who are found to be lacking competencies. To them, continuous professional development has an imperative role in sustaining ECD education. The above cited two authors recommended that government should work hand in hand with private sectors in order to support ECD teachers. Together they should assist with content and strategies for continuous professional development programmes for ECD teachers.

Monitoring and support by departmental officials is regarded seriously by other countries like Netherlands wherein officials from different departments visit and monitor childcare and pre-primary regularly. The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teachers are also expected to do the self-evaluations. Inspectors and internal evaluators undergo evaluation training as part of their pre-service programme. On top of that they continue to receive in-service training to assist them to do their evaluations

properly (Adamson & Litjens, 2016). It shows clearly that the support is given to the sites as well as to the monitoring officials.

Although government officials and trainers are expected to support trained ECD teachers in their centres, one would think that overdependence on them would not be right on the unfolding of the daily activities taking place in the ECD sites. In fact, trainers can only support during the time of training when ECD teachers are still registered students of their institutions. After the training of course the departmental officials can be expected continuing giving the support.

ECD sites should be disciplined by themselves to be able to perform their own educational functions without doing it to please the departmental officials. The fact that they think of 'relaxing' because the officials do not come to their sites is like they are forgetting that teachers are there for the development of children they recruited into their sites. They should be having the mind set of wanting to do well by the children who are within their care. Principals in ECD sites should be managing the daily processes competently not even thinking of departmental officials as part of the discipline in the site. Principals should be capacitated enough to can perform this discipline function.

4.3.2.3.2. Management workshops

Many participants suggested that in order for them to be able to work according to the expected ECD curriculum, ECD managers should be trained or workshopped on any matters which will warrant changes in the ECD sites. Managers of the sites should be trained in such a manner that they do not feel threatened by the new knowledge which teachers get from their respective trainings. At times the managers are said to be making things difficult for the teachers who intend to bring change. Instead of making it difficult for the trained teachers to bring change, the site managers (principals) should focus on encouraging the new teachers to apply change in the ECD sites. Changes should be done as was indicated by the training they underwent. One participant put it this way:

P008: I feel that even the managers should be trained so that they do not make things difficult for teacher. Teachers should feel welcomed to implement changes which were learnt from their trainings. Principals should be encouraging newly trained teachers to share their new knowledge and be encouraged to start practicing it in the ECD sites. Our seniors should stop thinking that we can consider ourselves as better than them or that we might be preferred by Site Management Committees if we introduce positive changes.

To show the seriousness of this management training, another participant suggested that ECD principals should be workshopped by the departmental officials on the aspect of making the environment conducive for newly trained teachers to apply change. They should be advised to embrace change, although it is coming with their colleagues. The participant put it in this way:

P007: I think it would be better if the department could take all the ECD principals to a workshop and train them to be able to allow their colleagues to teach the way they were trained. It should be clarified to them that they are not being overlooked in this process... they should be glad that change has reached their workplace and embrace it as a team achievement.

According to Cer and Solak (2018), teacher training is one of the components which plays a significant role in the education system of the country. The training of teachers includes how those teachers are selected, their initial training, their teaching practice, as well as their in-service training. The processes referred to by these two authors were seen unfolding in the findings of this study. All those aspects mentioned featured in the findings from the participants who went through the training of ECD teachers through the EPWP.

As Kendra (2021) indicated the importance of teacher training, mentorship and professional development, the findings of this research question continued to emphasise the same importance. For the knowledgeable other to be an expert who can successfully operate on the distance between the child and the Zone of Proximal Development, there is a need for the trained teacher to be kept abreast of the new

professional developments from time to time. This implies the necessity of mentorship, workshops, and other developmental trainings as indicated on the findings of this research question.

4.4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THEORY

The previous section discussed the findings from the four study objectives in detail with reference to literature. This section links those results with the theory that underpins this study. Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) is the theory underpinning this study. This theory is about the distance between what learners can do with the assistance of the teacher and what learners can do without the assistance of the teacher. When learners are still young and start learning in ECD institutions, they are more reliant on their teachers or capable peers for guidance than when they are when they get older. In this process teachers provide the children with active learning experiences which assist in the holistic development of the children. The major elements in ZPD is the MKO, scaffolding and Social interactions (Mcleod,2024).

ZPD is about tasks which are beyond the present ability of the young ones which can only be realized with the intervention of the More Knowledgeable Other. This MKO is mostly a responsible adult with enough skills and knowledge needed to assist the children in their learning (Mcleod,2024). The MKO should be able to prepare challenging tasks which are at the cognitive level of the child. The challenging tasks contribute to the maximum cognitive growth of the child.

This theory linking discussion is based on the major elements of the ZPD in relation with findings on the four themes as follows:

4.4.1. The More Knowledgeable Other

The training of ECD teachers through EPWP in rural Vhembe East district should be seen as part of creating the knowledgeable other for ECD centres. One of the research questions in this study probed on the aspects of training which had impact on how the trained ECD practitioners would teach or develop their learners in the ECD centres. The findings concluded that the ECD practitioners in this programme were

successfully trained. The ZPD then expects that the ECD practitioners should implement what they have been trained to do in the classroom (ECD centres) where learners are developed, depending on the learning distance between them and their ECD practitioners.

The trained ECD teachers should have thorough knowledge on the learning through play (Hadebe, 2015) which is a key method in the ECD. The successfully trained ECD teacher should in the ideal situation, be able to assist children in their holistic development. In the case where the successfully trained ECD teacher is not successfully implementing the ECD curriculum, factors which hinder the successful implementation should be looked into. The following discussion will as such be on the challenges as experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum.

4.4.2. Scaffolding

Scaffolding refers to the learning activities which are offered to learners by the MKO. This should be activities aimed at enhancing the cognitive growth of the child. The activities should be play based and age appropriate. In order for the MKO to be able to provide challenging and age appropriate activities, there should be learning equipment suitable for such activities and age cohort. Findings indicated the challenges related to lack of resources in the ECD site. Learning materials were part of the lacking resources.

Vygotsky ZPD theory considers play as an integral part of the children's development. (Irshad, Maan, Batool & Hanif, 2021). This theory promotes the fact that the MKO who is the ECD teacher in this context, should be able to afford learners with more opportunities to play meaningfully. For play to take place meaningfully there should be relevant play materials. Lack of resources such as learning or play material had a negative bearing in the development of children in the ECD site. Even if the trained teacher would be ready to be meaningful in the learning journey of the child in the ECD centre, without toys and other play material, it would be very difficult. This would mean that the child could not be fully developed since the lacking learning resources are key in the development of the child through play.

4.4.3. Social interaction

This interaction gives learners a space to develop and strengthen their abilities and skills. Although ZPD portrays the teacher as the knowledgeable other who is relied upon on the development of the learners, the environment under which they operate should be conducive for successful learning to take place. The findings on this study indicated challenges which included inadequate infrastructure, interference by stakeholders, lack of support by superiors and resistance to change.

Infrastructure in the ECD site should be conducive for the teaching and learning of the young ones which is dominated by playing. Although Madondo (2020) confirms that it's typical for rural ECD centres to have infrastructure constraints, it is ideal that the ECD sites should be well spaced. Participants mentioned that their playrooms or classrooms are small to an extent that they could not set up playing corners for their learners. Without such required space learners cannot play or socially interact meaningfully.

The distance between the children and the teacher should be properly furnished in order for learning to take place successfully. If the infrastructure was well structured, then the knowledgeable other would be expected to excel in his or her task of assisting children in their journey of discovering new things and solving their own learning problems gradually.

For the MKOs to lead the learners in the social interaction successfully, they should also be positive towards what they are doing with their learners. There should be harmony in the ECD site by all stakeholders which results in healthy learning environment which can promote and encourage the teachers to engage well in their space as knowledgeable others leading the young ones through their holistic development. However, participants raised issues including lack of support by their superiors, interference by other stakeholders referring to parents in particular and resistance to change by colleagues and principals. Teachers in the ECD sites should get enough support and guidance from their superiors, colleagues and parents.

Challenges that were portrayed in the findings relating to this element pose as threats to the proper implementation of the ZPD. If these challenges are addressed, the possibility is that the ZPD could be successfully realized in the ECD sites. Trained ECD teachers could successfully implement the ECD curriculum without much difficulties.

In order to improve the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained ECD practitioners, some findings suggested the ways which can be used to improve the curriculum implementation. Below follows the discussion which links those ways of promoting the implementation of ECD by trained practitioners with the ZPD theory.

4.4.4. Linking ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners with the theory.

The findings on this theme included training enhancement which was inclusive of National Curriculum Framework and curriculum support which was inclusive of parental involvement, cluster meetings and effective remuneration structure. If trained ECD teachers were afforded the necessary support as indicated in the findings discussion, the teachers would be in a better professional position to could cater for the expected professional intervention needed in the holistic development of the children. The teacher then would become the confident knowledgeable other who is anticipated by the ZPD.

In order to allow learners to learn effectively, MKOs might interact with other MKOs for peer level of support (Mcleod,2024). This element of the ZPD is in line with the finding wherein the participants indicated the need for cluster meetings. In such cluster meetings teachers share their best practices and assist one another where other where there is need.

In order for the ECD teacher to be professional and effective in the implementation of the ECD curriculum, the ECD teacher should be remunerated in the level of their qualifications since they are trained on the recognized NQF level. The space occupied by the teacher in the ZPD should be that of the confident professional teacher as opposed to that of the undermined volunteer offering services to a community ECD

structure. Below is the focus on linking the strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers with the ZPD theory.

4.4.5. Linking strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers with the theory.

Two findings from this theme were training of ECD teachers and professional support or professional development. The training of ECD teachers was inclusive of initial training which should take place before the teachers are embarked in the development of children in the ECD centre as well as professional development trainings which should be offered to all trained teachers found in the ECD sites. If trained teachers were continually trained (professional development), they would become more knowledgeable and more effective in their space between the learning matter and the child. ZPD's knowledgeable other should be a person who keep abreast with current methods and issues around ECD. As such, continuous development becomes an important role player in the education process of the ECD cohort.

4.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study focused only on Vhembe East District which means that only the experiences of ECD practitioners from Vhembe East were taken into account. This study cannot therefore be generalised to the whole country for example, since experiences in other provinces might be different from what is taking place in Limpopo province where Vhembe district is.

The interviews were conducted during the COVID 19 times. Although all COVID 19 protocols were observed, there is a possibility that some of the participants might have wanted to keep their experiences short due to the fact that they might have thought that the shorter the interview time the lesser the contact risk with the data collector. That could therefore affect the quantity of the information gathered from the participants.

4.6. CONCLUSION

It is good to note that the training and curriculum implementation challenges reflected in the findings of this study got some way of possible solutions suggested by the participants under the ways of improving the ECD teacher training as well as under the strategies for promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the rural Vhembe East District. The anticipation is that those suggestions will have some influence in the recommendations which are to follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter focused on the findings of the study, their discussion and supporting literature. This chapter entails, summary of major findings, conclusion, and recommendations of this study.

5.2. LINK BETWEEN DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The data collection strategy employed in this study allowed the study to achieve the objectives because the participants were interviewed, and they were able to respond to the interview questions which were based on the objectives of this study. The semi-structured questions allowed the probing which resulted to emergence of themes addressing the main objectives. The nature of open-ended questions allowed participants to give more information in their lived experiences.

5.3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.3.1. Main findings

5.3.1.1. ECD teacher training through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

The findings on this objective revealed that the trained ECD teachers are sourced from the ECD sites. They are found already working in the ECD centres without having qualifications. They are identified for the ECD training which offers them either ECD NQF L 4 or L 5. One of the prerequisites needed from them is that they should have grade 12 or matric in their possession. After being identified from their sites with the assistance of their site principals and district officials from the department of education, they fill their twelve-month contract with the district office of the department of education.

They further registered with the institution of service provider contracted for their training and start attending classes. Training is offered one week in a month for a

duration of about ten months taking into consideration the fact that they did not start training during the month in which they were contracted. The rest of the weeks in a month is scheduled for teaching practice which happen in the very ECD centres they work in.

After compiling their portfolio of evidence and are found to be competent by both their assessor who is usually their facilitator and the appointed moderator, they then go for graduations wherein they get their certificates and statement of results which are generated by the ETDP SETA which is the custodian of those qualifications. This is how the training of ECD teachers takes place through the EPWP and the department of education in Vhembe East district which is part of the Limpopo province in South Africa.

There is a finding which indicated a challenge of facilitators who are without experience in the ECD teacher training themselves. They are said to have never had an experience of the ECD classroom experience. They as such do not have much assistance when coming to the practical work which is of great importance in the training of ECD teachers. The participants who were facilitated by these types of facilitators took lead in practical lessons by themselves in the presence of the facilitator. Those facilitators are said to be highly educated in qualification for other phases not this unique one of ECD zero to five years' cohort.

5.3.1.2. Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in rural Vhembe East district.

From their point of view, the ECD teachers trained through the EPWP under the department of education indicated a number of challenges which affect their performance in their attempt to implement the ECD curriculum which they have been trained to implement. The fact that they are located in rural areas where the ECD sites' infrastructure is still a challenge affects negatively their level of curriculum implementation.

ECD is to take place where there is enough space in order for the learning material to be accommodated in the specific arrangement referred to as corners or learning areas. Their ECD sites are characterised by small sized classrooms which do not meet this

requirement. None of the participant was satisfied with the space they have for the proper display of learning material at once. Most of them display the corners interchangeably so that children end up having been exposed in the different learning areas. The teachers would however have wanted spaces which could accommodate those corners simultaneously so that children would enjoy them without unnecessary limits.

Parental interference in trying to control how teachers should do their work is also a challenge indicated by many participants. Apparently, parents do not understand the scope of ECD centres educationally. They want to see their little once being advanced in the literacy content. They want to see their children reading and writing before going to the school. This was indicated as a disturbing factor since ECD teachers end up compromising their curriculum in pursuit of parents' approval. What makes it more frustrating is that ECD centres are largely run from the money generated by the parents. The biggest cut from the parents' contribution goes to remuneration of teachers. As such the teachers violate the curriculum expectations in order to satisfy parents who choose whether to bring their children in the particular site or not. Parents' choice of the ECD site has bearing in the finances of the ECD site since the parent are the ones that pay.

It is surprising how ECD centres are not adequately funded by government since other programmes are adequately funded. In schools for example, children are enjoying free education in South Africa. Children are not paying a cent in order for them to access education. Further than that they receive free learning and teaching material (LTSM). They even receive free food in a form of National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). This study also reviewed on the importance of ECD which indicated the importance of ECD in the holistic development of children. If indeed it is that important, it would only be fair to see this programme being adequately funded since it is also able to contribute in the educational and social aspects of children which has a potential to improve the social development of the country which can reduce the social ills of the society. ECD provides school readiness which contributes on the life-long learning of the child. As such, it should not be lacking financially as it shows in the findings of this study as well as on other studies cited.

5.3.1.3. Promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the rural Vhembe East district.

The findings indicated that there is a need for ECD teachers to be trained further on the NCF document. They so far see the document as the central one in the implementation of the ECD curriculum. When they did their training through the EPWP, there was not much done on the document since they were following the Unit Standards which are not based on the NCF. In fact, some of them underwent their training before the coming of the NCF document. So, they indicated that they need intensive training on this core document in the curriculum of ECD. Another finding on the NCF document is that they need some supporting documents to be developed for the ease of the NCF implementation. They proposed that there be documents such as teachers' guide or activity scheduled documents which they likened to the CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) document in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

Enforcement of one curriculum is one of the findings made in this study. Participants felt that if all ECD sites could implement one curriculum the same way, it would discourage parents to negatively interfere the activities in the ECD sites. As is now, parents are able to compare the way crèches are doing differently and are therefore able to choose what they think is best practice even though they might be attracted by what is not right. If ECD sites were doing everything the same way, the competitions would not be in place and ECD centres would practice only what is right by the curriculum prescriptions instead of attracting parents by what is against the ECD curriculum.

One other finding suggested that effective remuneration of ECD teachers could improve their will to work effectively. To them remuneration for one's work encourages persons in performing in their work as compared to working without getting remunerated. Their wellbeing is influential in their way of doing things even in their responsibility to carry out the curriculum implementation.

There is the finding about mentorship and support by the departmental officers, training providers and principals/ managers of the ECD site. The participants see the

mentoring and support as an aspect which is important to them, but which is not happening in their environment. To them, it is important that they have an assigned professional who is to assist them on their preparations and interaction with children. They need assistance in understanding some curriculum documents as well as how to utilise them.

5.3.1.4. Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

Strategies were forwarded on how the teacher training for ECD teachers could be improved. There had been three main findings which cover the training of ECD teachers, mentorship and support programmes as well as management workshops. In the training aspect the first aspect is the fact that there should be coverage of training which will see to it that all teachers in the ECD sites are trained. Those that are trained find it difficult to implement correctly alone if the rest of the teachers are not exposed to training.

The other finding was that teachers should be trained first before they start teaching in an ECD site. This approach has an advantage of training them before they start practicing wrong things in the site. Training ECD teachers after they have started working untrained makes it difficult for them to change their old ways which they are already accustomed to. So, if they get initial training, they go and start practising that which they were taught without difficulties. Literature also emphasised the importance of teachers' initial training and it is regarded as a must before teachers embark in teaching and developing children. The need for pre-training is more in the ECD age cohort since it is unique in its nature. Not anyone can just teach this age cohort.

One other finding was that trainings should be done residentially. Trainees should reside where the training is taking place in order to avoid their extreme early comings and the late arrivals to their homes in the evenings. Their safety is also at stake but further than that the fatigue negatively affects their performance in their learning process.

In terms of mentorship and support, the findings were that there is lack of mentorship by departmental officials from the department of education, training facilitators as well

as by senior staff members in the site. Trained teachers do need to be mentored and supported after the initial training. They also need meetings wherein they can engage with other teachers on regular basis assisting one another on issues they were trained on which needs further clarity from their counterparts in other ECD sites.

The other finding was on Continuous Professional Development wherein they indicate that after they are done with the ECD level 4 or 5 training, they need further training in terms of workshops and seminars to update on curriculum and professional matters. To them the initial training alone is not enough. As is they report that since they were trained in their levels, some of them have never attended any other developmental training.

The type of training itself was found to have some loopholes. Some practitioners are found to be cheating when compiling their files which are meant for final assessment which makes them to be either competent or not. Some participants complete the files faithfully by themselves whereas some get previous colleagues who underwent the same training to do it for them. This then makes the training results to be not genuine in cases of those that did not do their work on their own. They end up owning certificates of qualifications in which they were not competent.

Lastly the findings were on management workshops. Those participants who are not in management in their ECD sites have indicated that when they get new information from their initial training, they want to implement it when they are back in their sites. Unfortunately, some of them find resistance from their seniors. They do not allow them to implement those changes because they feel as if the junior member is now undermining them. The seniors do not see it in the light of new information which will enhance their work. Participants would like to see their principals and other senior staff members being workshopped in order for them to be able to effect change where it is due.

5.3.2. Main conclusions and recommendations

5.3.2.1. How ECD teachers are trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

This study established that there are some countries which set higher standards as minimum qualifications needed for the ECD teacher to teach in the ECD classroom. For instance, the Slovak Republic requires a bachelor's degree for one to teach in a pre-school. Other countries require a minimum of a diploma of two years or a degree. It also makes sense that highly qualified teachers are able to do better in terms of child development. The longer and higher the qualification the better.

I would therefore recommend that South Africa starts considering offering higher qualifications for pre-school teachers. If children are taken care of by qualified teachers, they have a bigger chance of being better developed educationally. It is high time that as a country we start investing in the real foundation of our education. If the educational foundation is concrete and correct, chances are that the end product envisaged by the education system will be achieved. As a country we seem to mind about Grade 12 results than investing early for such results. Offering higher qualifications than ECD NQF L4 and L5 could assist in improving the quality of our ECD in the community sites as well as in private sites. A higher minimum qualification such as a three-year diploma or an initial degree is therefore recommended.

Regarding the finding wherein participants are reported to have been trained by facilitators who lacked relevant qualifications and experience, the recommendation is that the accrediting body which is the ETDP – SETA and the training providers should see to it that those facilitators have relevant qualifications and experience before engaging them in the training of ECD teachers. Even if the particular trainer has higher qualifications beyond the ECD age cohort, they must first find exposure in the ECD setting because that is where expertise is needed. The EPWP is a government initiative and as such it should be mindful of the quality produced from its trainings.

So far there are many ECD practitioners who have National diploma and those that have level 5 diploma in ECD. Those teachers can be developed through learnerships to do assessor courses and other required modules if there are any needed for them

to acquire and become training facilitators. In that way there could be a pool of relevant people qualifying to facilitate in ECD L4 and 5 training. Those that are interested could further do the moderation courses and also create a pool of relevant qualified assessors.

5.3.2.2. Challenges experienced by trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district.

Since sites have shown to be struggling in making the spacious classrooms, government should be taking it upon its shoulders to provide the so much needed infrastructure for the delivery of ECD curriculum by the trained ECD teachers. Without such intervention, the present situation will continue defeating the aim of ECD which is to develop children holistically. Municipalities should also assist in developing reasonable structures for ECD centres within their area of operation. If government acknowledges that the children should attend the ECD which it has shown by developing curriculum documents in support of ECD existence, it therefore makes sense that it should be minding about where the ECD processes are taking place.

Coming to the issue of parents controlling curriculum matters: government should again see to it that it budgets for the remuneration of ECD teachers. If parents continue funding wages of ECD teachers, they will always have the upper hand in the sites, which will continue to cause non implementation of curriculum by the ECD teachers. As such government, through the department of education, should take responsibility of paying the teachers. It only makes sense that government should pay people taking care in one of its APEX priority area. For quality curriculum to be delivered, teachers need to feel appreciated by being paid for the work they are doing.

Relevant stakeholders should take their roles responsibly. If they are not playing their roles, it will be difficult to implement the curriculum successfully. If government does not provide resources which are scarce due to lack of funds in the sites, or if parents are still enforcing English to be medium of instruction, curriculum implementation will still be negatively affected although teachers are trained and knowing what to do. If these challenges can be resolved, children will exit the ECD centres fully developed.

In terms of the funding of the ECD programme, the recommendation is that government should adequately fund the ECD programme like it does with the programmes taking place in schools. That would also improve the status of the trained ECD teachers who are struggling to make ends meet whereas they are trained at the expense of government through EPWP and are serving the children in the ECD sites on full time basis but without proper remunerations. If ECDs are well funded, LTSM would not be a problem any longer and ECD teachers would enjoy putting effort in their curriculum implementation being motivated by the remunerations.

If indeed ECD is a priority as it has been indicated, then it would make sense for it to be properly funded. The full contribution of the ECD curriculum cannot be realized if ECD is still lacking the important things which make it what it is. A programme which has educational benefits like ECD cannot be left on its own financially. Investing in the early stage of education should be considered even more than on later phases of education. When building a house, the foundation should be considered a fundamental importance since it carries the whole super structure and the roof. So is the investment in education, more funds should be on the foundation of education, which is on ECD as the basis of education.

5.3.2.3. Ways of promoting the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the rural Vhembe East district.

The recommendation on the implementation of the ECD curriculum is that there be development of supporting documents around the NCF as requested by the findings on this matter. Teachers' guide is a necessary document in the implementation of the curriculum. The National Curriculum is relatively new to them as they revealed in the findings. Indeed, teachers cannot on their own make it meaningfully. They need documents which unpack further the content of the main document. In fact, they need more guiding documents because the NCF was not part of their initial trainings (level 4 and 5). The department of education could assist with provision of such guiding and unpacking documents.

Further than documents which could assist trained teachers on curriculum matters, there could be variety of LTSM for learners ranging from age-appropriate readers,

picture books and content addressing workbooks. This would ease the work for trained teachers. When looking at what they detailed to be on their modules and Unit Standards offered in their training, I noticed the fact that none of what they did was on learning material development. This certainly calls for the availability of such material readily provided in the ECD site. Even highly qualified teachers with degrees find such materials ready in schools. As such the NQF level 4 and 5 teachers would also need such material more.

Regarding the remuneration of ECD teachers the recommendation is that government should see to it that ECD teachers are remunerated according to their nature of work based on the qualifications they possess. No person can work effectively on a hungry stomach. If their work is not financially rewarding, it will always be hard for them to put all their meaningful effort into it. It only makes sense that they be paid properly for the work they are doing like everyone else. Officials who are monitoring them from the department of social department and the department of education are all remunerated. It does not make sense that they can expect excellent performance from people who are almost volunteers.

The other motivation to the remuneration of the trained ECD teachers for the pre-schools is that the department trained them through their EPWP to empower them to implement the ECD curriculum competently. How then can we expect trained personnel with accredited qualifications to do work for free? Obviously, people get educated and seek jobs for their better living as well. If this is not attended the ECD might suffer lack of excellence in the ECD sector for longer and that will mean the country not maximizing the childhood development in the ECD sites. It is only commendable that those that are in the centre of the prioritized sector of ECD be recognized as serious vehicles in the delivery of the ECD. Compromising them is the same as compromising the development of our children in the ECD sites, which affects their lifelong learning.

The other recommendation is with regard to the issue of mentorship and support wherein the department of education is not seen monitoring and supporting as expected in terms of curriculum development and or implementation. The

recommendation is that the department need to develop a ratio which should speak to a number of sites per monitor or mentor. This would ensure that the trained ECD teachers get the support needed for them to implement the curriculum successfully.

5.3.2.4. Strategies for improving the training of ECD teachers through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district.

The recommendation on the training finding is that the department of education should take audit in order to establish the number of ECD practitioners who are still working without qualifications and target all of them for the trainings which suit their levels of education. Those that can be trained on higher levels such as NQF level six and above be assisted in terms of funding to access such kind of training. The ones that are suitable for the NQF levels 4 and 5 as well be identified for trainings as they are doing now through EPWP so that they get some orientation on professional matters instead of working in ECD sites without qualifications.

Another recommendation on ECD training is that the initial training should be done before the teacher starts working on site. It should be done the same way teachers in schools are trained. Those that are interested in teaching children in the ECD phase should undergo training first. This will see to it that no one enters the ECD class without initial training. The development of the children who are in the care of the not yet trained teacher is compromised while the teacher awaits training. If the teachers are admitted to work in sites after they have qualifications some educational risks are avoided if not minimised. Further than that, the ECD teachers should as well be provided with in-service training throughout their career.

It is important for ECD sites to hire ECD teachers who are already trained and qualified for teaching in this age cohort. This might mean that government should establish institutions of training which can render such trainings to those students coming directly from grade 12 and want to access ECD teacher training. They can access trainings such as three-years diploma or ECD NQF level 6 or any qualification which is at RQV 13. This would upgrade them to be like other teachers who are in schools. This would promote professionalism in ECD sites which is to the advantage of children learning in those sites.

The other recommendation is on in-service training which takes place after the initial teacher training. Teachers should from time to time be targeted for on-job training which can take place during school holidays as was reflected in the findings. The department of education should plan this and inform the teachers months in advance so that the teachers could make arrangements well on time. This type of training should take place residentially in order to avoid the fatigue that comes with extensive travelling in and out of the training venue. The other benefit of the residential workshop is that trainees get a chance of assisting one another during their free time.

In terms of professional development, the recommendation is that the department should commit to assisting ECD teachers the same way it is done with those in schools. The development of the young ones is equally important since it is the foundation of the lifelong learning. As such there is a need to uphold the professional expertise of teachers of this age cohort. This might mean that the department should employ office-based personnel to do this ECD teacher assistance. Those office-based educators will have also the responsibility of initiating meetings needed by ECD teachers amongst their peers or counterparts.

In cases where the department does not have enough manpower to train the ECD teachers on certain curriculum and or ECD site management, the recommendation is that the department should involve the NGOs for such trainings. The relationship between the department and the NGOs is important in the smooth running and the improvement of the training of ECD teachers in our country as a whole. There are non-accredited courses which the NGOs can offer such as improvising learning materials from waste materials. Such trainings can be added on top of the NQF levels which these participants were trained on.

In the case of participants who might not have completed the work on their own but ended up receiving the qualifications, the loopholes should be closed. Since that is already an identified gap in the present way of attaining the ECD NQF level 4 and 5, the recommendation is that the qualification should change the assessment form from only compilation of the file as portfolio of evidence to coupling it with some interviews where the candidate defends what is in the file to ensure that he or she knows and understand what the file entails. Besides the oral interview, written examination could

as well ensure that the candidate is acquiring the qualification which he or she was genuinely assessed for. That way we would be ensuring that the candidates are no longer possessing qualifications they did not qualify for.

The last recommendation on training is on workshop for managers of the sites. The recommendation is that they be involved in the training of their staff members. The training facilitators should involve them in the capacity of mentors. Principals should be trained to be mentors whenever there is a teacher in training from their site. Some briefing meetings should be set in place on how they should do it. In other words, when the ECD trainings are done through EPWP, they should be trained afresh on mentoring and coaching of their teachers. This could bring harmony in ECD sites since the principals would not have to hear the changes from their teachers. They will be part of those changes themselves.

5.3.3. Recommendations for further studies

This first recommendation is based on limitations. This study was limited to Vhembe East as its location. The recommendation is that further study be conducted to include the whole of Vhembe. If this study could have included Vhembe West as well, it would have given a more comprehensive view. The result could be the same or could be different. The recommendation is that the future study should increase the sample to include even Vhembe West. If possible, it would be further comprehensive if it includes the whole of Limpopo as well since the whole province also implement this ECD training through the EPWP under the same conditions. This would produce a more comprehensive view than the Vhembe district only.

Another recommendation is for further studies to include other stakeholders in the sample of participants. If this study for example, included parents' perceptions in the ways which could promote the implementation of the ECD curriculum in the ECD sites, they could have come with new findings which could be pointing to teachers themselves which could not come out this time because teachers could not raise them on their own. In another study cited by Andiemba (2017) parents indicated that one of the reasons affecting the delivery of the ECD is the absence of teachers in the

classrooms. Teachers themselves as participants in this study are less likely to bring out this finding since it reflects on their negative doing.

It is recommended that a separate study be undertaken to propose the development of the framework on training of teachers who are supposed to work in ECD centres. Such study must be aimed at detailing how the training of ECD teachers should take place from the first year to the third year.

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

EXPLORING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING THROUGH EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE RURAL VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT

Gender:

Age:

Level of education:

Teaching experience in ECD:

The following objectives will be the main questions while follow-up questions would be guided by the questions listed.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- How are ECD teachers trained through EPWP in the rural Vhembe East district?
- What are the challenges experienced by the trained ECD teachers when implementing the ECD curriculum in the rural Vhembe East district?
- How can the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners be enhanced in the rural Vhembe East district?
- How can the training of ECD teachers through EPWP be improved in the rural Vhembe East district?

Questions on “Exploring Early Childhood Development teacher training through Expanded Public Works Programme in the rural Vhembe East District”

1. May you please explain how you were identified for the training?

2. How was the training structured and what is your perception of that structured training?

3. Which are the challenges you encounter in the ECD site when you start implementing what you were taught during the training? -----

4. How do you think the mentioned challenges can be addressed?

5. From your perception, what can be done in order to enhance the implementation of ECD curriculum by trained practitioners in the ECD site?

6. Do you have suggestions on how the ECD teacher training can be improved? Please provide them



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Certificate Number	UZREC 171110-030 PGD 2019/52						
Project Title	Early Childhood development teacher training through expanded public works programme in the rural Vhembe East District						
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	L Ramabulana						
Supervisor and Co-supervisor	Prof AP Kutame				Prof T Mbatha		
Department	Social Sciences						
Faculty	Education						
Type of Risk	Med Risk – Data collection from people						
Nature of Project	Honours/4 th Year		Master's		Doctoral	x	Departmental

The University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) hereby gives ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project. The Researcher may therefore commence with data collection as from the date of this Certificate, using the certificate number indicated above.

- Special conditions:**
- (1) This certificate is valid for 1 year from the date of issue.
 - (2) Principal researcher must provide an annual report to the UZREC in the prescribed format [due date-13 December 2020]
 - (3) Principal researcher must submit a report at the end of project in respect of ethical compliance.
 - (4) The UZREC must be informed immediately of any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the documents that were presented to the meeting.

The UZREC wishes the researcher well in conducting research.


 Professor Mahlomaholo Geoffrey Mahlomaholo
 Acting Chairperson: University Research Ethics Committee
 Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation

13 December 2019

CHAIRPERSON
UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND RESEARCH
ETHICS COMMITTEE (UZREC)
REG NO: UZREC 171110-30

13 -12- 2019

RESEARCH & INNOVATION OFFICE

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To whom it may concern.

I hereby confirm that I edited **RAMABULANA LUFUNO's**

thesis entitled

**EXPLORING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHER TRAINING
THROUGH EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE RURAL
VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT**

in November 2022.

I wish this colleague well in their endeavours.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine Hutchings". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Catherine Hutchings