TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF READINESS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF GRADE ZERO/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor Philosophiae Educationis at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

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AUGUST 2012
DECLARATION

TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF READINESS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF GRADE ZERO/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY

In accordance with Rule 4.6.3 I, Ezron Mangwaya, student number S200060442, declare that this thesis, submitted for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae Educationis in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

SIGNATURE:----------------------------------------------------------

DATE: -------------------------------------------------------------
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ABSTRACT

Up to 2005 early childhood education in Zimbabwe was organised, directed and run by non-governmental organisations, churches and private individuals. Such an arrangement meant that the curriculum, personnel and strategies used to implement the programme were varied. In 2004 the Ministry of Education directed that all primary schools attach two classes of children aged between 3 and 5 years with effect from 2006, thus effectively making early childhood education part of the formal primary school structure. The research presented in this thesis focuses on teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education in Zimbabwe. Located in the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research the study draws on a wide range of research methods. In particular a multiple case study was used to explore teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in a former government group B school, a church run school, a rural school, a former government group A school and, a council run school. Some of the key findings of the study are:

• School heads who are the principal gate keepers in primary schools were not provided with any preparation for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

• School reliance on fees and levies, without direct Ministry of Education financial assistance, meant that resource conditions - hence state of readiness - greatly differed from one school to another.

• No ongoing support was provided to school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers.

• The quality of teaching and learning at the early childhood education level, in the multiple case study, depended on the nature of teacher preparation, availability of appropriate resources, adequacy and appropriateness of teacher support, and teacher state of preparedness.

The study recommends interventions that curriculum policy planners and implementers can use to create conditions that enable schools to be ready for installing, implementing and institutionalising the early childhood education innovation.

Key words

Grade zero; state of readiness; implementation; primary school; early childhood education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADEA</td>
<td>Association for the Development of Education in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention of the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEO</td>
<td>District Education Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early childhood education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGS</td>
<td>Higher General Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Partnership in Africa Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>School Development Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Statutory instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIC</td>
<td>Teacher-in-charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Education Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The field of international development has recently been consumed by a shift in contemporary educational discourse, one that moves early childhood education and care closer to the forefront of what is considered progressive policy formation. International aid agencies, such as the World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), UNESCO, UNICEF and others (Freeman and Dohoo, 2003), have promoted the creation and expansion of early childhood education programmes in developing countries. Many developing countries, including Zimbabwe, have been caught in this storm of educational policy reform and have, consequently, demonstrated a new commitment to educational provision for pre-primary learners. According to Evans (2000) the period of early childhood has been identified as the most formative in a child’s development, one that will have long-lasting - even permanent – influence on his/her adult life. From birth to age eight, a child gradually masters increasingly complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling, and interacting with people and the world around him. Abundant evidence from diverse fields – physiology, nutrition, health, sociology, psychology, and education shows how these early years are crucial to the development of intelligence, personality, and social behaviour (Hubbard, Stein and Mahan, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005).

Myers (2000) asserts that roughly three stages of early childhood development lay the foundation for future growth. The most rapid period of brain development (cell growth and neural connections) takes place in the first two years of life. Although the structure of the brain is determined biologically and is considerably developed in the prenatal stage, a child’s interaction with his/her environment will develop the critical brain connections that set the pathways for intellectual, physical, emotional, immunological and social functions (Freeman and Dohoo, 2003). The ability to walk, manual dexterity, and other motor skills are developed in the first two years. From ages two through five, a child develops language skills, fundamental social skills,
and the base for “learning to learn” that translates into school readiness. Character and personality are largely formed, and major social and moral values are transmitted. From ages six through to eight, a child consolidates earlier learning, begins to learn conceptually and manipulates ideas, and enters the “age of reason.” From the foregoing it can be observed that for Myers (2000), Freeman and Dohoo (2003) and indeed for many scholars who have investigated learners between 0 and 8 years early childhood education is very broad. Grade zero, on the other hand, refers to pre-primary school learners and has specific age boundaries (3-5 years). Grade zero logically thus qualifies as a subset of early childhood education. It may thus seem odd to use grade zero and early childhood education interchangeably. For the purpose of this study, however, policy circular 14 of 2004 uses grade zero and e.c.e. interchangeably hence the use of this coupling in this study.

Evans (2000) further highlights that if a child’s body and brain develop well his learning potential increases. Conversely, neglect of a child’s biological and mental needs at this critical and formative stage can have a negative impact, resulting in delayed or debilitated cognitive development, stunted growth, and physical impairment. When a child’s inherent physical, social, and psychological capacities are not nurtured, they wither. The quality of care during this period, through early childhood education, thus greatly affects the development of the child, his/her health, his/her psyche, and his/her capacity for future learning.

Provision for early childhood education in Zimbabwe can be traced to the pre-independence era. During that period early childhood education was generally referred to as nursery schools, pre-school education, creche and early childhood education and care. The differences in nomenclature were meant to distinguish early childhood provision by age of learners with the first two categories referring to those learners (ages 5 - 6) who were preparing to join the formal primary school system and the latter two referring to learners between 3 - 4 years of age. Zvobgo (2007) asserts that, during this pre-independence era, early childhood education was largely provided in affluent urban areas. Rural areas had no such provision. The dawn of independence ushered in a demand for early childhood education by the black working class and this led to a proliferation of pre-schools in urban centres and some such centres were created in rural areas. Dyanda, Makoni, Mudukuti and Kuyayama
(2005) observe that the pre-schools which mushroomed at this time were privately owned, did not have a uniform curriculum and were staffed by people with different qualifications. It is such a set-up which the government of Zimbabwe was trying to streamline when it introduced Grade zero/early childhood education in 2006. The fundamental question that this research asks is: What are teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for this innovation? Before this question can be addressed a background to this study is provided. The background is presented in two parts. The first part traces international developments that foreground the emergence of early childhood education. Such an approach not only provides the historical background of early childhood education but also its justification internationally. I follow this up, in the second part, with a portrayal that traces early childhood education provision in Zimbabwe from colonial times to the present situation.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Children and young people constitute more than half of Africa’s population (African Union, Economic Commission for Africa, NEPAD Secretariat and UNICEF, 2003). Therefore, proper care of and investment in children, through sound early childhood education programmes, can ensure a bright future for the continent with well developed human capital and enhanced productivity. The most recent impetus for early childhood education and care growth in Africa can be traced to the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 20 November 1989 and its rapid ratification from 1990 (Aidoo, 2006). In March 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, launched early childhood education and care as an essential part of the global movement to educate all children. The world declaration on EFA (UNESCO, 1990) observed that since learning begins at birth it was imperative to give priority to early childhood education.

In September 1990, the World Summit for Children was held in New York to give the highest level endorsement to the survival, development and protection rights of all children without discrimination of any kind. Jomtien’s endorsement of early childhood education and the enthusiasm that led to the CRC being ratified more quickly and by more countries than any previous human rights instruments (UNICEF, 2001) gave
rise to the proliferation of government early childhood education programmes. These programmes were partly supported by multilateral, bilateral, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charitable organisations in Latin America, East Asia, Middle East and North Africa but to a much lesser extent in Sub-Saharan Africa (Jaramillo and Mingat, 2003). Aidoo (2006) further points out that in April 2000 a follow up conference on EFA, the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, provided an opportunity to review and assess early childhood education and care experiences to date. The conference made a renewed commitment to expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education. The call for comprehensive early childhood education and care received yet another highest level political endorsement (UNICEF, 2003) when the United Nations Millennium Summit of September 2000 adopted eight millennium development goals (MDGs) to be met by 2015. Six of the MDGs related to young children and women, and thus to early childhood education. According to UNICEF (2003) the six MDGs can best be met when the rights of children to health, education, and equality are protected. The six MDGs in question are:

- eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
- achieving universal primary education
- Promoting gender equality and empowering women
- eliminating gender disparities in schooling opportunities
- reducing by two thirds the death rate of children under the age of five, and
- reducing by three quarters, the ratio of maternal deaths to live births and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (UNICEF, 2003:145).

According to Young (2002) the expanding vision of early childhood education and care since 1990 has further been promoted by a growing body of literature that advocates, justifies and reviews early childhood activities world-wide. This has helped clarify the concepts, scope and best features of early childhood education as well as the rationale for governments and their development partners to invest in early childhood education and care programmes. The work of, among others, the Consultative Group of Early Childhood Care and Development and the Working Group on Early Childhood Development of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has contributed significantly to the common view of the
principles and main features of early childhood education and care policy provision (Vargas-Baron, 2004). This agreed view is summarized below:
Early Childhood Education: Guiding Principles and Approach

- All children have the right to develop to their full potential regardless of race, colour, gender, caste, language, opinion, origin, disability, birth and any other characteristic
- All rights of a child are indivisible, interrelated and have equal status and importance as rights
- Every child must have the best start in life
- A holistic approach is required for the total well-being and development of the child: emotional, physical, intellectual, linguistic and social
- Early childhood interventions begin from the critical stage before birth and continue through the life cycle into the early years of formal schooling (prenatal to 8 years)
- Early childhood interventions are best integrated with respect to infant stimulation, health, nutrition, social and cognitive development, education, water and sanitation, social and legal protection against violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination
- Early childhood education programmes must have a gender perspective to ensure equality and equity between the girl child and the boy child
- Early childhood education interventions respect and build on the cultural beliefs and practices that are part of the development of children in each society as long as they do not thwart the realization of the rights of the child
- Early childhood education programmes empower parents through education and other support, and promote community involvement in policy development, programme design, implementation and management
- Early childhood coordination and broad partnership of parents, communities, governments, institutions, bilateral and multilateral partners, civil society, faith-based organisations and NGOs are vital in order to realize the indivisible rights of children and meet their critical needs
- National government commitment to early childhood education policy and investment in the provision of early childhood education services are crucial to the realization of the rights and optimal development of all children.

Extracted from: Vargas-Baron (2004: 97)
In Zimbabwe early childhood education and care can be traced, as intimated earlier on, to the pre-independence era. During this colonial era early childhood education services were provided in line with Statutory Instruments and Education Acts which portrayed bias, racial discrimination and segregation. For instance, whereas the Child Protection and Adoption regulations of 1972 provided for the establishment of custodial and health care centres for African children between ages 0 - 3 years, the Nursery School regulations of 1973 specifically stipulated that provision of nursery education should benefit pupils who are not Africans to prepare for formal learning. The table below clearly illustrates the differences as spelt out in the two sets of regulations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Child Protection and Adoption Regulations of 1972</th>
<th>The Nursery School Regulations of 1973</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Regulated the establishment of black creches for 0 - 3 year olds</td>
<td>• Regulated establishment of white nursery schools for 0 - 6 year olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administered by the Department of Social Welfare</td>
<td>• Administered by the Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People with some health training e.g. nurses and midwives would man the creche</td>
<td>• Manned by qualified whites who were nursery school teachers. Blacks were caretakers and cleaners of premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focussed on custodial and health care of children</td>
<td>• Curriculum was structured to develop basic learning and developmental skills but not the 3 Rs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Meant to prepare children for formal learning.

A number of observations can be made from the provisions of the two sets of regulations. Firstly, the creches to be established for African children, under the Child Protection and Adoption regulations of 1972, were to be under the Department of Social Welfare. This means that the Ministry of Education was not in any way linked to these centres. Secondly, no curriculum was suggested under the Child Protection and Adoption regulations of 1972. On the other hand, the Nursery School regulations of 1973 (which were developed for white children) provided for nursery schools under the Ministry of Education. These nursery schools' curriculum was meant to develop basic learning and developmental skills. From these observations it is evident that while the 1972 regulations served a paediatric function, the 1973 regulations served a pedagogic function which advantaged white children only. This meant that the early childhood education service, meant to provide a foundation for future development was utilised by the elite (non-Africans) thereby perpetuating the social and economic injustices at the earliest stage of child development.

After attaining independence in 1980 the new government's intervention, with respect to these discrepancies, only began in 1982 when the Child Protection and Adoption regulations of 1972 and the Nursery School regulations of 1973 were repealed (Ministry of Education 2006). New early childhood education and care programmes were initiated under the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. The United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) (2000) country report on Zimbabwe states that the government realised that early childhood education and care programmes were necessary in order to promote the holistic development of children. These programmes would also enable early childhood education learners to reach their full potential for formal school and life-long education. This realisation, by the Zimbabwe government, led to the establishment and mushrooming of rural early childhood education centres with the majority of them operating under trees and manned by untrained staff.

In 1988 the status of early childhood education and care was enhanced when it was brought under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, 1989). This was a major turning point since early childhood education had all along operated under a ministry (Community Development and Women's Affairs) which had little to do with education. By placing early childhood education under the
Ministry of Education the Zimbabwe government was acknowledging that early childhood education and care was an integral part of the formal education system. Early childhood education was thus declared a basic human right like all other forms of education. In view of this development, the following policy objectives were adopted in order to achieve the broad early childhood education and care goals:

- to make early childhood education a community based programme in order to enhance the social and cultural development of the child
- to mobilise communities to build and furnish early childhood education and care centres with government assistance
- to institute a registration system for and intensify the registration of early childhood education and care centres
- to mobilise communities to provide clean water and sanitation facilities for the centres
- to provide adequate and affordable early childhood education and care to all children in the 0 - 6 year old group
- to ensure that early childhood education and care centres provide quality services by providing qualified teachers, supporting the provision of classrooms and teaching-learning materials
- to make the mother tongue the language of instruction at early childhood education level, and
- to monitor the performance of early childhood education and care centres to ensure that they provide quality services.

Source: Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (1989)

Although the government, through the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture took the lead in the development of early childhood education programmes, it should be highlighted that the Ministry of Education only provided a policy framework which guided the operations of early childhood education centres run by a variety of stakeholders outside the ministry. These stakeholders included, among others, local authorities and communities and their centre development committee structures, non-governmental organisations, church groups, as well as private organisations and individuals.
These various stakeholders effectively ran early childhood education programmes which prepared children for non-compulsory primary education which begins at the age of six years (Education Act, 1987). Thus before this age, several programmes variously known as creches, nursery schools, day care centres, kindergartens, preschools and reception classes served children from three years of age. In theory each name connotes a different target group and different content, differentiated primarily by age. The first four programmes are usually designated for children up to four years of age and are designed to provide mainly custodial care. On the other hand, preschools and reception classes are usually meant for older children and are more concerned with school preparation (Dyanda, Makoni, Mudukuti and Kuyayama, 2005). In practice, however, the name most establishments go by has more to do with marketing, with mixed age enrolment being the norm. UNESCO (2006) observed that from pre-independence up to 2003 early childhood education in Zimbabwe, as represented by the above named categories, was largely run by local authorities, private individuals, non-governmental organizations, voluntary organisations and self-help groups. The Ministries of Women's Affairs and Community Development and Labour and Social Services coordinated rural preschools. The Ministry of Education only provided a policy framework for early childhood education operations with minimum guidelines for its supervision. Since education at this level was largely in the hands of private providers, financing of early childhood education has remained unclear. Home based preschools in urban areas have mushroomed, albeit at the expense of quality education. It has been documented that much of the curricula of private preschools are outdated and inadequate for this age group and the home environments are not conducive to learning (UNESCO, 2006). According to UNESCO coordination and collaboration across all levels and ministries in the government is essential for a strong and cohesive early childhood education policy (Aidoo, 2006; UNESCO, 2008).

Given the above set-up there was thus an urgent need for a coherent policy on early childhood education. According to the Ministry of Education early childhood education was thus to be, first and foremost, absorbed into the general education development policy framework and made part of a coherent, systematic,
comprehensive and proactive development reality in Zimbabwe (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Realising that there was no coordination in the manner in which early childhood education programmes operated in particular, and in the manner in which education and training was operating in general, the Zimbabwe government set up a commission of inquiry into education and training to examine how the education system could be revamped. One of the terms of reference of this commission (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999) was to identify areas in education and training that required reform on a short term, medium term and long term basis. The commission identified early childhood education and care (term of reference 2.1.2) as a decisive area, where the foundation of the basic principles and philosophy of Zimbabwe’s education system was to be laid. The commission thus recognized the importance of this stage in a child's life and education. It also took note of the fact that there was no universal access to education programmes for children below the age of six years (Nziramasanga, 1999). In the commission's view, an improved and extended system of provision of education for children in this age bracket would provide extensive long term benefits for the nation. Such an educational change/reform was to be implemented by the Ministry of Education.

Educational change can be categorized either as a first order or second order change (Fullan, 2007). First order changes are those that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently being implemented without disturbing the basic organisational features; without substantially altering the way children and adults perform their roles. Waks (2007) adds that first order changes are initiated to enhance the existing organisation by correcting deficiencies in organisational policies and procedures. Such changes assume that the existing goals and structures are adequate and desirable. In my view, first order changes are thus not intended to alter the structure of an organisation/school but rather to maintain it as it is. In theory this arrangement should improve coordination, supervision and monitoring as well as resource allocation. Second order changes, on the other hand, seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organisations are put together, including new goals, structures and roles. As an example of a second order change that has taken place Waks (2007) points to a replacement of the common school by a graded elementary
school in the mid-nineteenth century America. This change involved structural differentiation: the graded school had new parts put together in a new way. Children were grouped in age-graded classrooms, where previously they had been grouped in benches within a single one-room school, according to their discernible academic progress. From the foregoing, second order change, which Waks (2007) also calls fundamental change, means putting an existing organisation/school in a new working order through functional and structural alterations. It means change in educational ideas, norms, and organisational arrangements. Although Fullan (2007) asserts that most changes since the turn of the century have been first order changes, it is my contention that the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education was a second order change. The change was new to primary schools in Zimbabwe, and hence meant that new structures, goals and roles had to be developed. The foregoing has implications for the various school contexts in which early childhood education was introduced. I shall return to this point in chapters 4 and 5.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education instituted a policy that directed all primary schools to attach at least two grade zero/early childhood education classes for children in the 3 - 5 year age group to their schools. From the findings of the Nziramasanga Commission (1999), it was observed that the majority of Zimbabwean children, particularly those in rural and poor areas did not have access to early childhood education, which is also known as grade zero in Zimbabwe. Dyanda, Makoni, Mudukuti and Kuyayama (2005) assert that the commission recommended that all children go through grade zero, an early childhood education programme, before entry into the first formal school learning grade in order to increase access and give every child a fair start. Grade zero or early childhood education was mandated to be implemented in primary schools with effect from 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006). This study seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions of primary schools' state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In many instances where an innovation is introduced in the school system, a lot of questions cross people's minds, especially those who will be directly affected such as teachers, students and other stakeholders. Such questions normally arise where
innovations are imposed on the implementers with little or no consultation. Grade zero, as an innovation, was introduced in all Zimbabwean primary schools using a policy directive from the top (Ministry of Education, 2004). Using directives as a way of introducing educational change is consistent with the fidelity or technical-rational perspective of curriculum implementation. One inherent danger of adopting this curriculum implementation approach is that ministry directives may be pronounced when schools are not yet ready to implement them. This study thus investigates teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

This investigation sought to answer the question: What are teachers’ perceptions of the state of readiness of primary schools for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education? In an attempt to answer this question adequately the research was structured around the following sub-questions:

• What are teachers’ views on the nature of their preparation for the introduction of early childhood education?
• How do teachers assess the appropriateness of resources for teaching grade zero/early childhood education in primary schools?
• How do teachers perceive the adequacy and usefulness of support systems that have been put in place for their use at the early childhood education level?
• What are school heads and teachers-in-charge’s perceptions of the state of preparedness of grade zero/early childhood education teachers?
• How do teachers assess the quality of teaching and learning at the early childhood education level in primary schools?

1.5 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This investigation aimed to establish teachers' perceptions of primary schools' state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. In order to address this aim the study was guided by the following objectives:
1. to establish how teachers were prepared for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.
2. to assess the appropriateness of resources for teaching grade zero/early childhood education.
3. to ascertain the nature, adequacy and usefulness of support systems in place for grade zero teachers.
4. to examine school heads and teachers-in-charge’s views on the state of preparedness of current grade zero/early childhood education teachers.
5. to explore how grade zero/early childhood education learners are currently being taught in primary schools.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher assumes that all primary schools in Zimbabwe introduced grade zero/early childhood education classes at the beginning of 2006 as directed by the Ministry of Education. It is also assumed that between 2004 (when the policy was instituted) and 2006 (when the policy was implemented) primary teachers’ college lecturers, education officers, district education officers, primary school heads and their deputies, teachers-in-charge, and early childhood education teachers were adequately prepared for this innovation. Further to this, it is also assumed that all primary schools had some basic infrastructure and the requisite curriculum guidelines before grade zero/early childhood education was launched.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Programme implementation in education, as observed by Brewer (2002), is dependent on availability of resources, nature of support systems in place and teacher preparedness. This study is significant to curriculum planners and policy makers with respect to the preparations required before educational programmes can be rolled out on a national scale. It is evident from this study that between policy enunciation and implementation enough groundwork needs to be done if new programmes have to take off smoothly. In this instance such groundwork needed to
take into account that as a second order change grade zero/early childhood education required new goals, structures and the performance of new roles. The study also highlights, to school heads, parents and other stakeholders, the need for forward planning with respect to preparing teachers for new programmes, availability of appropriate resources, appropriate teacher assignment, appropriate teacher support and how grade zero/early childhood education learners should be taught. It is this study’s contention that effective implementation of educational programmes, including early childhood education, can be realized when the preceding factors have been adequately taken care of or addressed. Schools that are ready for new programme implementation have stakeholders who are not only aware of the preceding factors but who also go all out to address them with a view to facilitating implementation. It has been pointed out elsewhere in this study that not much research has been conducted into the state of early childhood education in Zimbabwe hence little has been documented on this phenomenon. This study is thus significant in that it contributes new knowledge to the area of early childhood education installation and implementation in Zimbabwean primary schools.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS

Acknowledging that there are many ways of determining schools’ state of readiness for new programme implementation this study focuses on what the implementers - teachers in this case – say and feel about their schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/ e.c.e. While the concept e.c.e. covers the teaching of learners in the age range 0 to 8 years, for this study the teaching of pre-primary school learners between ages 3 and 5 years is the main focus. The teaching of pre-primary school learners has been labelled e.c.e. in line with policy circular 14 of 2004’s specifications. The study describes, through teachers’ voices as well as my own observations, the five school contexts with a view to portraying conditions in each school type. Through such portrayals teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. become evident. The study was conducted from 2010 to 2012.
1.9 LIMITATIONS

I acknowledge that this study was affected by a number of limitations. First and foremost, are financial constraints. Collecting qualitative data from five primary schools for a period of three months requires substantial capital to be able to travel to and from the schools. Some of the distances between the schools ranged between 20 and 30 kilometres.

Another limitation that affected this study was the attitude of school administrators and teachers towards the implementation of grade zero/early childhood education. In an implementation as directed situation, like in Zimbabwe, these groups of professionals did not feel a sense of ownership of the grade zero/early childhood education programme. Consequently, school heads and teachers did not always seem enthusiastic to provide adequate information on both the genesis of this programme as well as on how they were implementing it. In addition to these limitations, data collection was done while schools were in session. School time tables, in Zimbabwe, are normally packed from morning till the end of the day (Tsodzo, 2001). One limitation that arose in such a set-up is that selected participants seemed to give me half of the attention that was required. In a situation where school heads require teachers to focus on Key Result Areas, (Ministry of Public Service, 2005), teachers seemed not to provide the researcher with complete data on issues under investigation. Notwithstanding these limitations, I sourced for funding to support research activities as well as making appointments with school administrators well in advance. Such an arrangement minimised the effects of the limitations identified above.

1.10 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The following terms are defined and/or clarified as they are used in this study: grade zero, innovation, paraprofessional and readiness.

*Grade zero:*

Mhondiwa in the Sunday Mail of 25 June 2006 observed that grade zero is a transition stage between pre-school and formal school. Grade zero can thus be
considered as a synonym for early childhood education covering learners in the age range of three to five. For this study Grade zero is used to refer to learners who are preparing to enter the formal primary school.

Innovation:

Smith (2008) views an innovation as a deliberate, novel, specific change, which is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of a system. From this point of view, it seems helpful to consider innovations, like grade zero/early childhood education, as being willed and planned for, rather than as occurring haphazardly. The element of novelty, implying a recombination of parts or a qualitative difference from existing forms, seems quite essential. Innovations in education ordinarily have a defined, specified character, rather than being diffuse and vague.

Paraprofessional:

According to Davids (2003), a paraprofessional is an individual who is not a member of a given profession but assists a professional. He or she is called an assistant, helper or supporter. In the context of this study, a paraprofessional is an individual who has had no professional training as a grade zero/early childhood education teacher.

Readiness:

Turner (2008) defines readiness by focussing on five dimensions. Readiness can mean a state of preparedness for action, a mental disposition to action, a likelihood to do something, promptness in apprehending or reacting and availability of resources. In the context of this study readiness refers to a state of preparedness by Zimbabwe primary schools for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

1.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is spelt out in detail in chapter 3. Notwithstanding this, a brief outline is provided below. This study, placed in qualitative research,
draws heavily on the interpretive research paradigm. The research is explorative in nature and represents an attempt to establish teachers’ perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The research design could be described as a multi-sited case study that focuses on five primary schools in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. Typical of this research design questionnaires, interviews, a journal, observation, and document analysis were used as data gathering techniques.

1.12 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is spelt out in detail in chapter 2. This notwithstanding, a brief outline is provided in this chapter so as to alert the reader to the theoretical lenses that have been used to analyse issues of readiness raised by e.c.e. practitioners in Zimbabwean primary schools. This theoretical framework is guided by the technical-rational/fidelity, adaptation and the enactment perspectives. These three perspectives represent different approaches to curriculum implementation. The technical-rational perspective, for instance, emphasizes central planning, organisation, coordination and control. This perspective presumes that authority and responsibility flow in an unbroken line from the highest executive to the lowest operative. It is a perspective utilized in centralized education systems like in Zimbabwe. Countries which have adopted this implementation perspective emphasize compliance and uniform programme implementation in all schools. While such an emphasis tends to ignore the context in which educational programmes are implemented, this perspective was used in conjunction with the adaptation and enactment perspectives, as part of the theoretical framework, to compensate for the shortcomings of the former with a view to understanding how innovations are introduced and implemented in the centralized Zimbabwean early childhood education system.

1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides a background to the study, a statement of the problem, research question and sub-questions, research aim and objectives, assumptions of the study, and significance of the study as well as its delimitations and limitations. Chapter 2
reviews literature on educational change, implementation perspectives and requirements for early childhood education. Chapter 3 describes the research paradigm and design, the sample as well as data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents data on the five cases explored with respect to teachers’ perceptions on primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the results and findings of this study. In chapter 6 conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

1.14 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided some insight into the problem at the centre of the study. The background to the study has also been explicated. The significance of the study section of this exploration draws the attention of policy makers, planners, school heads and all relevant stakeholders in the education system to take proactive measures which ensure that appropriate conditions are created before curriculum innovations are introduced in schools. Delimitations and limitations of the study have also been pointed out. A brief description of the research methodology that was used in this study and an outline of the study conclude the chapter. The next chapter reviews literature relevant to the problem under investigation.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Grade zero/early childhood education is a change or reform that was introduced in the Zimbabwean education system as a result of the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999. In order to establish teachers’ perceptions on whether primary schools were ready or not for this reform/change I begin this chapter by locating this inquiry within the broader literature on educational change. In this respect I summarize literature on educational change as a way of laying the theoretical foundation of the study. I further discuss three implementation perspectives – two of which have dominated curriculum thought for the greater part of the 20th century and one that is beginning to establish itself as an alternative explication of how implementation should be understood. This third perspective attempts to eliminate and/or minimize the shortcomings of the first two perspectives and could thus significantly enhance our understanding of implementation. I conclude this chapter with a review of literature on the requirements for early childhood education.

2.2 THE CONCEPT PERCEPTION

I begin this section of the literature review with an examination of the concept perception. Generally perception can be viewed as our sensory experience of the world around us which involves both the recognition of environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. Cherry (2012) observes that through the perceptual process we gain information about properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival. Perception, thus, not only creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment. In a
study of students’ perceptions on incorporating technology in learning Parr (1999) established that students’ perceptions influenced the success of integration, specifically the amount of technology use, the ways in which the technology was used as well as students’ expectations about learning. Similarly the way policy, like circular 14 of 2004, is perceived has a significant impact on how it is implemented. This study of teachers’ perceptions on Zimbabwe schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. is thus important in establishing how teachers not only understood the concept e.c.e., but also the ways in which grade zero/e.c.e. is implemented in schools and the extent to which primary schools were ready for that innovation. It is through teachers – who mediate between the change agenda and the actual change in the classroom (Swanepoel, 2008) – that the actual state of primary schools’ state of readiness can be ascertained. It should, however, be pointed out that teachers’ perceptions will be influenced by a number of factors including, but not limited to, how they were trained, their professional qualifications, their past experiences, feelings, imagination, values, memories, beliefs as well as their cultural setting and background. The concept of teacher perceptions, in the context of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e., thus brings to the fore the importance of teacher subjective meanings (Fullan, 2007). These meanings can best be understood in the context of the broader meaning of educational change which I now turn to.

2.3 MEANING AND NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

When experts in education talk of reform, they in fact refer to educational change. Therefore reform and change could be used interchangeably as is the case in this study. “Educational change is a generic term that subsumes a whole family of concepts such as innovation, development, and adoption. It includes changes that can either be planned or unplanned”(Marsh, 1999:130). This study focuses on planned change. The planning and preparation of the reform process usually consumes considerable time and energy. This is so because of the consultative process with stakeholders and setting of a workable framework for the reform process (Ornstein, Pajak, and Ornstein, 2011). If the planning phase is underestimated, the success of the curriculum reform process might be severely
jeopardized. Hence, as the saying goes, if you fail to plan the reform process you plan to fail.

Looked at more closely educational change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of growth and development that involves reorganization in response to felt needs. According to Morrison (2008:13) “It is a process of transformation, a flow from one state to another, either initiated by internal forces or external forces involving individuals, groups or institutions leading to a realignment of existing values, practices and outcomes.” Needs assessment is an important consideration in planning an educational change. In the context of this study, as intimated in chapter 1, the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) had established that there was no universal access to educational programmes for children below the age of six and that early childhood education was run by an assortment of private stakeholders. In addition, curricula in private centres were outmoded and inadequate, and there was no coordination and monitoring of early childhood education programmes. The existence of a need (which in the context of this study is taken to mean a discrepancy, a want, a deficit) leads curriculum or educational planners to assess the size of the need, the priorities of the needs, the number of people likely to be affected, the consequences if the need is not met, how the needs can and should be met, the resources required to meet the needs and how to operationalize the needs (Gultig, Hoadley, and Jansen, 2002). The introduction of grade zero/early childhood education was thus meant to address the need for this form of education as well as regulating the operational arrangements of this programme.

In our quest to understand the concept educational change we can be guided by Morrison (2008) who argues that from the mid-1970s onwards there is a clear body of literature which suggests that the following characteristics typify an educational change. Firstly, change is structural and system changing. Regarding change as structural is a recognition that change is one part of an organisation which will have a knock-on effect on other parts of the organisation. In the context of this study the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education was going to affect the management of the rest of the primary school. Secondly, change is a non-linear, dynamic and multidimensional process which embraces multiple perspectives. In the
context of e.c.e. change would thus embrace aims and objectives, functions, structures, knowledge, skills, behaviours, beliefs, roles, relationships, content, pedagogy, resources, assessment and evaluation. An examination of the preceding dimensions and constructs is evidence that change is not an event but a process. It occurs over time. Thirdly, Morrison (2008) argues that change is personal and therefore calls for investment in people. It is people whom we drag by the hair in the hope that their minds and hearts will follow. As all this happens, organisations in which people work, like schools, play a fundamental role in facilitating people’s realisation of their goals. Fourthly, change is learning wherein schools become learning organisations. Learning would thus involve the acquisition and sharing of new information by school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers. Whatever is learnt and shared can then be used to influence educational policy. Looked at this way effective change integrates top-down and bottom-up strategies.

The principal feature that runs through these characteristics is that change concerns people more than content. This is a critical factor, particularly in the human services sector like education. Change changes people but people change change (Morrison, 2008:15). The best laid plans stand or fall on the people involved. Macro decisions about change are mediated (accepted, subverted, altered, diverted, rejected) by micro politics of institutions. The key point here is that educational changes/reforms are not simply implemented: they are interpreted, mediated, and recreated. This happens because practitioners (school heads, T.I.C.s and teachers), whose task is to implement changes or reforms, come with their own contexts, value systems, history and experience (Sofou and Tsafos, 2010). In the light of the foregoing it is thus important to focus more on the human factor when considering educational change.

Most changes in education assume that teachers are highly skilled practitioners with excellent subject knowledge. They also assume that teachers work harmoniously with their colleagues (Ornstein et al., 2011). This view disregards the cellular nature of schools and the professional isolation of teachers. In practice teachers work independently in their classrooms and so when change is introduced in schools they grapple with it as individuals. Almost all innovation literature speaks of the importance of personal engagement of those involved in any reform process. Fullan (2007)
highlights the importance of recognizing the subjective meaning of educational change. In addition he argues that where complex change is involved, people do not and cannot change by being told to do so. It thus seems reasonable to suggest that curriculum policy planners should track what happens to policy documents up to the classroom level. Teachers too, should be clear about what they are expected to do – that is they should be clear of the new roles they are expected to perform if educational change should be fully realized. Karwoski (2011) asserts that when teachers are not clear of how they should operationalize change they resort to symbolic adoption. It can be argued that teachers will not develop a sense of ownership if they are not clear of what the change means and how it should be put into practice.

It has been highlighted above that practitioners at the institutional level should have a clear understanding of what the educational change means with respect to how they should implement it. Fullan’s (2007:18) assertion is instructive in this regard:

Neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms.

Implied in the above excerpt is that the manner in which significance is attached to an innovation/change by those involved appears to be of particular importance for successful innovation implementation. Subjective meanings not only colour the manner in which teachers perceive and define both their work and the working environment but also steer their behaviour. For this reason, researchers have been calling for greater attention to teachers’ personal experiences and subjective perceptions of innovations (Louis, Toole, and Hargreaves, 1999; Maes, Vandenberghhe, and Ghesquiere, 1999; and Vanden Berg and Ros, 1999). The challenge here is how those involved in change at the institutional level (school heads, T.I.C.s and grade zero/early childhood teachers) can come to understand what it is that should change and how it can best be accomplished, while realizing that the what and the how constantly interact and reshape each other.
A phenomenological perspective, according to McLaughlin (2000) locates implementation issues in social affiliations and opportunities for personal discourse, rather than individual actions or organisational routines. Such a relational or social system frame of educational reform takes the promotion and support of teachers’ learning communities, both inside and outside of the school as integral to their ability to respond successfully to pressures for change. Teachers should thus have opportunities to talk together, learn and reflect together and examine student work together. McLaughlin (2000) emphasizes the importance of a strong up-close professional community in which teachers can wrestle with the demands of a new curriculum and acknowledge how difficult it is for policy to change practice. According to Edwards (2012) the connection between policy and practice will be made or missed in teachers’ professional communities. Teachers cannot undertake alone the type of new learning and change in beliefs and practices that reformers assume will occur while, without the commitment of strong professional communities, change will probably be superficial or not evident at all.

Darling-Hammond (2000) corroborates the above view when she argues that policy makers should shift their efforts from designing controls intended to direct the system to building the capacity of schools and teachers. This has implications for e.c.e. implementation in the Zimbabwean centralised, top-down context as shall be shown in chapter 5. The new paradigm of educational improvement that Darling-Hammond believes should emerge, points towards investment in the human capital of the educational enterprise – the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers and school administrators. It asks that more attention be given to the development of schools as inquiring and collaborative organisations. Professional communities are likely to foster such a development.

Educational change often falters because curriculum planners do not take into account the various and unique contexts in which it will be realized (Sykes, Schneider and Plank, 2009). A “one size fits all” approach which is normally adopted is fraught with danger. That schools differ from one another is indisputable. For instance when grade zero/early childhood education was introduced in Zimbabwe this reality seems to have been completely ignored. That there are former government group A schools in affluent urban areas, former government group B
schools, church-run schools and council schools in poor African townships and rural schools with next to no resources seems not to have been considered at the planning stage of this educational change. I will return to this point in chapter 5.

From the foregoing literature review it would appear that the success of an educational change depends, to a large measure, not only on its successful management but also on the specific contents and characteristics of the change itself. In this respect Morrison (2008:16) identified the following as pointers to successful educational change:

- its centrality (how far the change is perceived to alter the core patterns and norms of the institutions)
- its complexity (how many groups within the institutional setting will be affected by the change and the difficulty or ease of its implementation)
- the nature and amount of the change (the level of difficulty which the innovation has for the individual)
- the consonance/compatibility/congruence of the change (the degree of fit between the innovation and the existing institutional practices and values)
- the visibility of the change (how far the change is public)
- the communicability of the change (how straightforward the change is to communicate)
- the divisibility of the change (the possibility of trialling the change on a partial and limited basis)
- the clarity of the proposed change
- the relative advantage of the change over existing practice
- the reversibility of the change
- the ease of solution that the change presents to a problem
- the scale of the benefit that the change brings
- the contribution to the overall vision of the organization that the change will bring, and
- the specificity and concreteness of the change proposals.

From the above it would appear that change is likely to be successful if it is: congruent with existing practices in the school; understood and communicated
effectively; triallable and trialled; seen to be an improvement on existing practice by the participants; and seen to further the direction in which the institution is moving (Levin, 2001). On the other hand change is likely to be unsuccessful if it is: over complex and not understood; poorly communicated; over demanding on the individuals and existing resources; unclear; untested; of questionable benefit over existing practice; unclear on its benefit in meeting the institution’s general direction; too incompatible with existing practices, values and beliefs of the organisation and the people in it; and brought in without real consultation.

After having reviewed some of the major texts on educational and/or curriculum change, I now pursue the main question of this study, namely, what are teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education? In order to address this question, it is imperative that I review implementation perspectives that have dominated curriculum thought over many decades in the last century or so. It is my contention that allegiance to these curriculum implementation perspectives contributes to teachers’ perceptions of schools’ state of readiness or lack thereof. From the outset I should highlight that since the mid-1970s implementation has been viewed through, either, the fidelity/technical-rational perspective or the mutual adaptive/non-technical perspective (Fullan, 2007). Lately the enactment perspective has also been utilized to explain curriculum implementation. In this section I provide an overview of these perspectives, and demonstrate that each of these perspectives presupposes a certain expected role of the teacher (including school heads and T.I.C.s). It is my contention that teacher roles, as determined and/or defined by the adopted implementation perspective shape teacher perceptions.

2.3.1 Technical-rational perspective

This perspective, also known as the fidelity perspective, has been the most extensively used approach to understanding policy implementation. The perspective places a premium on planning, organisation, coordination and control. A key presumption underlying this perspective is that “…authority and
responsibility should flow in an unbroken line from the highest executive to the lowest operative” (Smits, Kuhlmann, and Shapira, 2010:241). This exemplifies what Elmore (2004) called forward mapping. The problem posed by this view of curriculum policy implementation is that it assumes that policy makers control the organisation as well as political and technical processes that affect implementation. In this view the causal arrow of change travels in one direction – from active, thoughtful designers to passive, pragmatic implementers (Rogan and Grayson, 2003).

Tending to be top-down oriented, the technical-rational perspective attends to the administrative and procedural aspects of policy implementation while ignoring or downplaying the influence of context. Consequently, studies utilizing this perspective are likely to view local variation in implementation as a dilemma rather than as inevitable or potentially desirable (Snyder, Bolin and Zummalt, 2002). In this perspective implementation is measured according to an objectified standard: fidelity to policy design. Furthermore, because it treats policy design and implementation as two distinct processes, it also neglects to assess the degree to which political and ideological differences embedded within the overall policy development affect policy implementation (Malen, 2006). Since the design phase is often left unproblematized, the failure of policy is placed on the implementation stage rather than the formulation of policy itself. There is an assumption in the implementation literature that execution, not the formulation of policy, is the root of unsuccessful outcomes; yet the formulation of policy can also be based on false or incomplete assumptions or understanding about the nature of the change, the curriculum, instruction and so forth (Ornstein et al., 2011). To be sure, it should be pointed out that there is an important distinction between successful policy execution and successful outcomes. A policy can be successfully implemented in terms of fidelity to procedures but executing policy faithfully does not mean that it will produce intended outcomes.
2.3.2 Mutual adaptation perspective

The mutual adaptation perspective reflects an important departure from the technical-rational view of policy, which has been criticized for not being sensitive to the culture of schools or daily lives of educators (Honig, 2006). The groundbreaking Rand Change Agent study helped to usher in a new era of policy research that started to take seriously the importance of local level implementation and adaptation (Fullan and Pomfret, 1977). The five year study (1973-1978) examined federal programmes in the United States of America (USA) and found that effective projects were characterized by a process of “mutual adaptation” rather than uniform implementation. They found that although policies can enable preferred outcomes, even fully planned, highly coordinated, and well supported policies ultimately depended on how individuals within the local context interpreted and enacted policies; in other words, local factors dominated policy outcomes (McLaughlin 1990 as cited in Sykes, Schneider and Plank, 2009). McLaughlin argued that implementation should be seen as a “mutually adaptive process between the user and the institutional setting – that specific projects, goals and methods be made concrete over time by the participants themselves” (McLaughlin as cited in Snyder et al., 2002:78). From this perspective not only is mutual adaptation inevitable but it is desirable. It is at this point, as Elmore (2004) testifies, that bottom-up policy design processes like backward mapping enter the policy development stage.

In contrast to the technical-rational view, research examining policy implementation using mutual adaptation draws attention to previously neglected aspects of policy implementation. Because research on implementation has demonstrated time and again that while pressure from the top can only provide the catalyst for change rather than guarantee effective implementation or sustainable change, scholars utilizing this viewpoint began to highlight the importance of local context in understanding policy outcomes. Rather than a top-down, hierarchical view of the change process, mutual adaptation underscores the importance of bottom-up interpretations and responses to policy intentions. Bottom-up theorists argue that policy is really made at the local level and emphasize the actions, perceptions, and interaction among implementers.
Studies adopting this perspective all suggest that reform implementation involves an active and dynamic interaction between local educators, reform policy, and the social, organisational, and political life of the school (Malen, 2006). Considering that conditions and needs vary by local context, negotiation, flexibility, and adjustment on the part of educators and reform designers are key to successful reform (Kennedy, Chan and Fok, 2011).

A limitation of the mutual adaptation perspective, however, is that it does not fully capture the differential relationships among multiple actors and agencies in the policy process. By focussing on the micro-level aspects of change, this branch of policy research does not examine the extent to which macro-level factors, differential access to power, and actors’ positions may support, constrain, or coerce responses (Matland, 1995). Additionally, by treating policy formulation and implementation as separate processes, mutual adaptation also tends to locate local implementers as the main source of policy success or failure. Similar to the technical-rational orientation, there is an assumption that execution (e.g. lack of fidelity) rather than the design of a policy is the root of failed implementation (Snyder et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the mutual adaptation perspective broke new ground in helping us understand why and how policies were adapted to suit local contexts and it continues to be a useful framework for these reasons.

2.3.3 Enactment perspective

The technical-rational and mutual adaptation perspectives have been the two dominant views on policy design and implementation (Synder et al., 2002) and reflect larger debates surrounding the macro-micro theoretical divide (that is top-down and bottom-up). Realizing the limitations of such dichotomies, researchers acknowledge the need to examine the interconnections between policy design and implementation. As Cohen, Moffet and Golden (2007:65) point out, there is a “mutual dependence” between policy and practice; policy relies on implementers to realize goals while practice depends on policy to frame action and offer resources. More importantly, “public policy, to put it flatly, is a continuous process, the formulation of which is inseparable from its execution. Public policy
is being formed as it is being executed, and it is likewise being executed as it is being formed” (Cohen et al., 2007:66). Furthermore the relationships between policy and practice are not static or linear but may vary along several dimensions (clarity/ambiguity of goals, clarity/ambiguity of means, and conflict/cooperation (Matland, 1995). The enactment perspective builds on the importance of context in the mutual adaptation view by elaborating on the interconnections between actors and explaining exactly how context has shaped policy implementation. This perspective has been used in various research studies examining educational reform and policy (Coburn, 2006; Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan, 2002; and Hubbard, Stein and Mehan, 2006). This perspective places implementers at the forefront of reform efforts, highlighting the process by which they interpret, adapt, or transform policy (Bascia and Hargreaves, 2000). In particular the perspective shows how actors (teachers, T.I.C.s and school heads) mediate reform, and how their beliefs and experiences influence the implementation of reform.

Researchers in the enactment tradition assume that people’s actions cannot be understood apart from the setting in which the actions are situated; reciprocally, the setting cannot be understood without understanding the actions of the people within. Such a relational sense of context does not privilege any one context; rather it highlights the reciprocal relations among the social contexts in the policy chain (Hall and McGinty, 1997). Spillane, Reiser and Reimer’s (2002) examination of standards-based reform in Mathematics in the USA shows that teachers’ implementation of reform is mediated by their own experiences, the context in which they are working, and the policy environment – three separate but intersecting planes that together produce policy implementation and outcomes. The enactment perspective’s main contribution has been to explicate in detail how local actors interpret and enact policy (Spillane et al., 2002; Coburn, 2006). Rooted in social psychology and organisational theory, the enactment framework presents social actors as complex meaning-makers who do not merely react to external stimuli but engage in interpretation in order to act upon their environment.

Enactment tends to stress cognitive processes and tends to down play other aspects of human relations, including the dynamics of power and ideology (Weick
et al., 2005). Additionally, enactment tends not to address contestation, emphasizing shared understanding, as noted by Coburn, (2006). Meanwhile, differential access to decision-making positions, as well as resources, means that some social actors have more power to shape social reality. Studies of school and organisational change often show that those in power have more opportunities and leverage to regulate behaviour by shaping what is valued or discounted and what is privileged or suppressed (Scott, 2001). In education ministries and schools, for instance, leaders have strong voices in the construction of messages: they can shape where and how enactment happens, they can frame policy messages and its interpretation, and they can provide material support (Datnow, Park, and Wohlstetter, 2007). The ways in which policy makers and other decision makers generate confidence in the policy maintains its legitimacy. Therefore enactment needs to be considered within a wider institutional context that may set the conditions for the process and frames the types of enactments that may occur.
Below I summarise diagrammatically the characteristics of the three perspectives that have been discussed above.

**Table 1: Curriculum implementation perspectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Technical-rational/fidelity</th>
<th>Mutual adaptation</th>
<th>Enactment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction of change</td>
<td>Uni-directional</td>
<td>Bi-directional between policy and site of implementation</td>
<td>Multi-directional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy process</td>
<td>Treats policy process as discrete linear stages</td>
<td>Treats policy formation and implementation separately; focuses on mismatch between policy intentions and implementation outcomes. Thus, some mutual adaptation perspectives are viewed as variation of fidelity viewpoint</td>
<td>Treats policy formulation and implementation as part of one process; focuses on the role of actors in shaping policy and interrelationships between multiple institutional layers and actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sphere of influence</td>
<td>Top-down and hierarchical</td>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
<td>Open multi-layered system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of context</td>
<td>Generalized view of context (macro)</td>
<td>Importance of local context and culture (micro)</td>
<td>Relational sense of context; includes socio-political and intergovernmental relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Fidelity; planning and control, views variation as dilemma</td>
<td>Adjustment and negotiation; views variation as expected outcome of local context</td>
<td>Adjustment and negotiation but also contingent manoeuvres from policy context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extracted from Sykes et al. (2009)
The above table provides an overview of the perspectives that have been used to explain curriculum implementation. Part of my rationale for providing this curriculum implementation framework is that assumptions and theories of action underlie every policy design and implementation. I thus provide a comparative overview of these perspectives in order to help summarize the features of each and how I see them playing out along various dimensions. I have specifically analysed how these perspectives differ along key dimensions, including beliefs about the direction of change, assumptions about the process of change, sphere of influence, role of context, and values. The above discussed curriculum implementation perspectives and their respective dimensions will be used in chapter 5 as a basis for analysing teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The next section of this chapter reviews literature on the requirements for grade zero/early childhood education. Specifically, literature on the nature of teacher preparation, availability and appropriateness of resources, adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems, preparedness of early childhood education teachers and the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level have been reviewed.

2.4. TEACHER PREPARATION FOR NEW PROGRAMMES

Wherever planned curriculum change and innovation have been introduced one of the initial actions taken by an organization is to ensure that the implementers are adequately prepared for the new innovation. In the education field, when a new curriculum programme, like grade zero/early childhood education, is introduced it is therefore necessary for teachers to be conscientised on the nature and meaning of the programme, how it will be introduced and its impact on school administration, personnel and resources. Fullan (2007) observes that one of the most fundamental problems in education today is that teachers do not have a clear, coherent sense of meaning about what an educational change (like early childhood education) is for, what it is, and how it proceeds. The above set-up can cause superficiality, confusion, failure of the change programme, unwarranted and misdirected resistance, and misunderstood reform. In my view what is needed is a coherent picture that people
who are involved in or affected by the educational innovation, like grade zero/early childhood education, can use to make sense of what they and others will be doing. Indeed any innovation will not be assimilated unless its meaning is shared.

It has been indicated earlier on that Zimbabwe utilizes the technical-rational / fidelity perspective in curriculum implementation. The perspective does not generally facilitate curriculum innovation meaning sharing. This is so because in this perspective curriculum planning, development and analysis are removed from the hands of teachers on the basis of technocratic rationality. This rationality increasingly takes place within a social division of labour perspective in which thinking is removed from implementation and the model of the teacher becomes that of the technician or white collar clerk. In the process such technical rationality incorrectly assumes that innovators and classroom practitioners construe practice in the same way. Consequently, there is failure to recognize and make allowance for the inevitable "slippage" between the original conception of an innovation, like early childhood education, and its interpretation at the site of implementation (Zigler, Gilliam and Jones, 2006). The implication of the foregoing for e.c.e. implementation in Zimbabwe is that teachers are likely to be not clear of how they should perform their new roles. This is likely to lead to a disjuncture between policy and practice. I shall return to this issue later in this chapter and in chapters 5 and 6.

2.4.1 Teacher preparation through policy clarification

In developing countries, where government ministries of education attempt to clarify and explain policies, like early childhood education, Gordon and Browne (2004) point out that more often than not officers who are assigned to this duty are not always competent to do so. This is compounded, according to Gordon and Browne (2004), by the limited time usually set aside for policy clarification throughout the country. Studies in centralized education systems (Smits et al., 2010; Elmore, 2004 and Rogan and Grayson, 2003) confirm that instead of concentrating on participants' understanding of educational change, the worry is on how much information has been disseminated in shortest possible time. Indeed little substantive change can occur if the local staff (teachers) who are to make the desired development work in daily practice, have no idea or ownership of what is intended, if they are confused
about what the priority change agenda for the institution is, and if their role in its implementation is not clear (Pretorius, 2004). Studies of successful change, in post secondary and higher education, repeatedly show that teachers will be motivated to engage in and stick with a quality improvement effort when it is clear that their role and active contribution are essential to its success, especially when they feel that they are genuinely involved in deciding what will happen (Pretorius, 2004).

It is in the light of the foregoing that I agree with Taylor (2004) when he declares that teachers need to be given a clear idea of new behaviours which will be required of them. This clarity of expectations is one of the most crucial issues in planned innovation. Spodek and Saracho (2006) propose that one way to assess the clarity of expectations in a school is to ask school heads, deputy heads and teachers-in-charge to explain what the change is going to accomplish. The same question should be asked to teachers. If both groups offer the same explanation, then the school probably has a fairly uniform set of expectations that have been communicated directly or indirectly. This line of thought, once more is steeped in the technical-rational perspective because of its emphasis on teachers ‘being given a clear idea of new behaviours expected of them.’ Perhaps employing an enactment perspective could better assist teachers to engage the innovation, like grade zero/e.c.e., with a view to developing appropriate behaviours for implementing the innovation at school level.

2.4.2 Teacher preparation through conferences, seminars and workshops

According to Nutbrown, Clough and Selbie (2008) conferences, seminars and workshops have been used to prepare teachers for new curriculum innovations. In their view conferences are platforms which bring together participants from various schools to deliberate on problems experienced in implementing some aspects of a curriculum. Conferences can also address new curriculum innovations to be introduced in schools as a way of preparing teachers for the new innovation. In the latter case, all school heads or their representatives and selected teachers from each school in a cluster congregate at a selected centre to take part in the initial awareness campaign on the introduction of a new curriculum innovation. Facilitators
at such conferences, according to Taylor (2004), are normally Ministry of Education personnel charged with the responsibility to ensure that the intended innovation is implemented in schools. Dalziel and Schoonover (2011:63) suggest that such conferences should:

- emphasize common interests of all participants
- specify all assumptions about the impact of the change, including potential problems
- communicate plans clearly
- ask for feedback
- avoid suppressing negative opinions from participants, and
- focus on clear outcomes.

The above observations by Dalziel and Schoonover (2011) are applicable where innovations are carefully planned and where the technical-rational/fidelity perspective is not over-relied upon as a way of enforcing compliance.

Workshops and seminars have also been suggested as a means of preparing teachers for new curriculum innovations. Such workshops and seminars can be held at cluster or school level. According to Warner and Sower (2005) individual teacher needs should be the primary focus of intervention if new innovations, like early childhood education, are to take root in the school system. This is so because unless there is a common understanding and agreement on what the innovation is supposed to “look like” when it is implemented, it is probable that there will be wide variations in the amount and quality of use of the innovation. From a technical-rational perspective such diversity is not only difficult to manage but it also suggests that teachers have not been adequately prepared for the innovation. This can result in no positive programme outcomes or perhaps negative outcomes. This clearly demonstrates that variation is looked at as a dilemma (Snyder et al., 2002). From an adaptation and enactment perspectives, however, such variation is inevitable and potentially desirable. I shall return to this point in chapter 5.

Click (2004) asserts that workshops and seminars are sometimes called hands-on experiences. Participants get actively involved in doing or in making artefacts to
broaden their practical skills. In grade zero/early childhood education workshops teachers can, among other things, learn songs, practice using some teaching methods, make curriculum materials, and practice reading or telling stories. Each workshop or seminar should thus be planned like a journey with a beginning, middle and a goal. This ensures that workshops and seminars are coherent learning experiences for participants. Race and Smith (2005) add that when organizing workshops and seminars participants’ experiences should be regarded as the greatest resource. Allowing for ongoing feedback from participants is one way of acknowledging the importance of this resource.

Additionally, workshops and seminars make teachers, and others involved in early childhood education, aware of a career path obtaining at that level of the education system. Caruso (2007) points out that a career ladder enables early childhood education teachers to see the career development options available to them. Competency areas that describe the core knowledge and skills, and the education and training necessary for a role at a specific level are identified, accompanied by a statement of salaries and benefits. Oftentimes, each level of the ladder is divided into smaller steps so that individuals can be rewarded - personally, professionally and financially - as they make progress. Staff members are thus able to see the big picture, the variety of opportunities available to them, and the steps they need to take to attain their professional goals (Caruso, 2007:175). Such a view of a career path suggests that forward mapping, which characterizes the fidelity/technical-rational perspective is utilized as a basis for upward staff mobility. In the enactment perspective, however, the core knowledge and skills are discussed before they are made use of since social actors (teachers) are considered as complex meaning-makers who do not merely react to external stimuli but engage in interpretation in order to act upon their environment.

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussing the career path of grade zero/early childhood education teachers at workshops and seminars is an acknowledgement, by government and policy makers, of the importance of the skills held by these professionals. O’Callaghan (2004) highlights that such acknowledgement gives grade zero/early childhood education teachers’ pride, develops in them a high sense of commitment, and raises their status. In societies which do not accord grade
zero/early childhood education teachers this level of respect and status, almost everyone who works with young children has at some time, in one way or another, been given the impression that their job requires few skills, or as Caruso (2007:157) puts it, “…it is one that any woman can naturally do.” In this context grade zero/early childhood education staff, are characterized as “baby sitters,” and many teachers are seen as “merely supervisors of children’s play.” Such negative perceptions about grade zero/early childhood education teachers need to be addressed at such workshops and seminars. This is so because helping grade zero/early childhood education staff members to view themselves as professionals, with a clear career path, can be difficult when the knowledge and skills needed for their work are not recognized by the public or sometimes even by the state or government. Low pay, which reflects a lack of recognition of the difficulty of providing a quality programme for children and staff training required, further erodes grade zero/early childhood education teachers’ confidence and desire to stay in the field. When teachers know, among other things, what grade zero/early childhood education is, the content to be covered at that level, how grade zero pupils should be taught, the relationship between the primary school and grade zero/early childhood education classes, how to administer grade zero classes in the primary school set-up as well as having a clear career path they will have been adequately, it is hoped, prepared for the introduction of the innovation.

2.4.3 Levels of use and teacher preparation for new innovations

One concept fundamental to understanding whether teachers have been prepared for their role in a new innovation is the concept “levels of use”. This concept portrays the skills a teacher has acquired towards performing his/her role. The level of use thus indicates skill/competency levels: it shows the sophistication or complexity at which the skill or competency can be demonstrated. It therefore depicts what a teacher can do with respect to implementing a new innovation, like e.c.e. Loucks and Hall (1978) avow that when innovations are introduced teachers often find themselves on a continuum of eight stages in their ability to implement them, as shown in the illustration below:
### Table 2: Levels of use in innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of use</th>
<th>Behavioural indices of level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1 Renewal</td>
<td>User seeks more effective alternatives to established uses of the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Integration</td>
<td>User making deliberate efforts to coordinate with others in using the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVB Refinement</td>
<td>User makes changes to increase outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVA Routine</td>
<td>User makes few or no changes and has an established pattern of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Mechanical use</td>
<td>User uses innovation in a poorly coordinated manner; makes user oriented changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Preparation</td>
<td>User is preparing to use the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Orientation</td>
<td>User is seeking out information about the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Non-use</td>
<td>No action is being taken with respect to the innovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extracted from: Loucks and Hall (1978)

When defining levels of use heavy emphasis is placed on overt teacher behavior (Roopnarine and Johnson, 2005). For instance, a teacher at level of use 0, nonuse, is described by the absence of innovation related behavior. The individual teacher is not looking at, reading about, using, or discussing the innovation. All interviews and observations of the individual teacher (on grade zero/early childhood education) indicate no steps towards involvement with the innovation. The orientation level of use is a state in which the teacher has recently acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation and/or has recently explored or is exploring its value orientation.
and its demands upon the user and the user system. The preparation level of use is one in which the teacher is preparing for first use of the innovation. The state in which the teacher focuses most effort on the short-term, day-to-day use of the innovation with little time for reflection is the mechanical level of use. At this level changes in use are made more to meet user needs than client needs. The teacher is primarily engaged in a step-wise attempt to master the tasks required to use the innovation, often resulting in disjointed or superficial use. At the routine level the innovation use is stabilized. Few, if any, changes are made in ongoing use. Little preparation or thought is given to improving innovation use or its consequences.

Hall and Hord (1984) opine that the state in which the teacher varies the use of the innovation to increase the impact on clients within the immediate sphere of influence is called refinement. Variations at this level are based on knowledge of both short and long-term consequences for clients. The next level is integration. This is a state in which the teacher is combining his/her own efforts to use the innovation with related activities of colleagues to achieve a collective impact on clients within their common sphere of influence. The highest level of use is renewal. This is the state in which the teacher re-evaluates the quality of use of the innovation, seeks major modifications of or alternatives to the present innovation in order to achieve increased impact on clients. In addition, the teacher examines new developments in the field, and explores new goals for self and the system. A close examination of the above levels of use, portray the teacher as the chief actor in innovation implementation. From non-use to renewal emphasis is on what the teacher can do with respect to implementing an innovation (enactment perspective).

There is a typical progression in a teacher's movement through the levels of use. While the progression is not strictly locked up in steps, in general people move in sequence from nonuse to renewal. Such progression assumes that the innovation, like grade zero/early childhood education, is appropriate, principals and other change facilitators do their job, and time for such progression is set aside. In many instances the decision to begin using or implementing an innovation may not be an individual’s choice (Hall and Hord, 1984). Frequently, in implementation as directed systems where the fidelity/technical-rational perspective is made use of, the government decides that an innovation, like grade zero/early childhood education,
will be introduced. Thus teachers may move into the preparation level of use as a consequence of decisions of others.

Analysing the above levels of use, Leithwood (1992) observed that teachers are considered to be ready for an innovation if their levels of use display refinement, integration and renewal. These higher levels of use are a result of the extent to which teachers have been prepared for the new innovation like the grade zero/early childhood education. Such teacher preparation is possible where systematic curriculum planning is conducted before implementation. In countries which adopt the “panic approach” to curriculum planning, as alluded to above, implementation is expected to follow immediately after policy enunciation. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) had however observed that if teachers are not “made ready” for new innovations but are expected to implement them, then they can be expected to operate between the non-use and the mechanical levels.

2.5 AVAILABILITY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF RESOURCES

For any programme to take off effectively there must be adequate and appropriate resources. Time must be spent in sourcing for resources as a way of preparing the ground for the implementation of new programmes. This section of the literature review identifies and examines resources that should be available if new programmes like the grade zero/early childhood education are to be fully implemented. Aggarwal (2004) posits that schools that are ready to implement educational programmes are shown by, among other things, their provision of learning equipment, organisation of classes and provision of suitable buildings. With respect to buildings Taylor (2004) suggests that classrooms to be used by early childhood learners should be well ventilated with plenty of light coming through the windows. Read, Gardner and Mahler (2003) further advocate for windows scaled down to children’s size so that they can have a chance to look around and see what is happening outside.
2.5.1 The classroom, its environment and furniture requirements

The Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument (SI) 72 of 1999 stipulates that accommodation/classroom facilities at an early childhood education centre should provide for at least 2.25 square metres for each child. Emphasizing the importance of learning space Meier and Marais (2007) observed that the size of the classroom influences how children learn. Children are active doers who learn best through first hand experiences. This point serves as a guide in planning an indoor or outdoor environment that will enhance young children’s development. A good deal of thought should thus go into planning the environment, for it extends or limits the experiences of the learner. In chapter 1 I indicated that the five selected school contexts do not have similar learning facilities hence planning the school environment for grade zero/e.c.e. learners will differ from school to school. The Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument 72 of 1999 further stipulates that flush water closets, in an early childhood education centre with enrolments in excess of more than seventy-two children should be provided in the ratio of one for every twelve children. Separate toilet facilities should be provided for staff and wash basins should be provided in the ratio of one basin for every six children. Tassoni, Beith, Eldridge and Gough (2002) also add that small steps should be erected to help children reach the toilet.

According to Cotton and Conklin (2005) furniture used in early childhood education classrooms should be comfortable to both staff and students and should be aesthetically pleasing. In this respect the furniture should be of proper height and proportions, durable and of light-weight. Brewer (2002) also adds that the selected furniture should be easy to arrange to meet changing classroom needs. Such furniture includes, among other items, chairs, tables and shelf units on wheels. An observation that can be made about the above requirements is that variation is not expected for e.c.e. to be properly implemented. Such a view reflects a technical-rational approach to curriculum implementation. As observed earlier on, this perspective has its own weaknesses. One such weakness is ignoring context when suggesting provision of classrooms and furniture for grade zero/e.c.e. learners.
2.5.2 Teaching and learning resources

In order for schools to be considered ready for the introduction of new programmes, like grade zero, they must have relevant and appropriate teaching materials. The materials should provide a variety of different experiences, stimulate cognitive growth, provide opportunities for the child to develop socialization skills, encourage creativity and provide a means for the child to develop fine and gross motor skills. Atmore (2003) concurs with this view when he remarks that materials and supplies for early childhood education must satisfy the demands of the programme offered. Play materials are very important in the teaching of early childhood learners. Goldberg (2005) also is of the view that play is the great avenue for learning in early childhood education programmes. This implies that grade zero/early childhood learners should be provided with lots of materials with which to interact. Davin and Van Staden (2004) are also of the same view when they avow that there must be provision of all kinds of raw materials on which the child can exercise his imagination and unlimited muscular activity. The school should thus provide a large assortment of big and small equipment that creates many opportunities for all kinds of physical activity. Children need equipment for crawling through, climbing up, balancing on and hanging. Furthermore, children need equipment that provides opportunities for rhythmic activities such as balancing, jumping and swinging. Brewer (2002) is of the view that apparatus for climbing, swinging, sliding and crawling should be provided in the outdoor environment. While the above may be what is ideal for the implementation of grade zero/e.c.e., conditions on the ground – the context – may be such that it is difficult to provide lots of teaching-learning materials for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. In such a situation making the best use of what is available in a given context may be the most viable option.

Notwithstanding the preceding it should be pointed out that developmentally appropriate equipment and materials are important ingredients in a quality environment for young children. Play equipment should be durable for active use and sufficient in quantity to encourage social play. Bruce (2004) adds that storage of materials on open shelves at children's level makes them accessible and facilitates cleaning up. Children's cooperative, creative and constructive play is facilitated when equipment is accessible to them, organized to promote independent use, and
periodically changed to provide variety. Schools, which can provide the above equipment and teaching resources can be said to be ready to implement new educational programmes.

2.5.3 Human resources

Availability of appropriately qualified human resources is a key factor in programme implementation (see 2.6 for more on grade zero/e.c.e. teacher preparedness). For primary schools to be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education enough teachers must be in place. According to Decker and Decker (1992) an adequate staff-child ratio based on ages and needs of children served and a small group size are major factors in programme quality. The Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 specifies that at every early childhood education centre there shall be:

- one teacher to a minimum enrolment of twenty children
- one supervisor to a minimum enrolment of sixty children, and
- one additional teacher to every seven children with identified disabilities.

More often than not innovations and reforms, in developing countries, have been introduced in the education systems without governments ensuring that adequate human resources are in place. Typical examples, cited by Avenstrup (2002), are the introduction of universal primary education in Tanzania in the early 1970s; the expansion of junior secondary schools in Botswana; the introduction of Higher General Secondary Education (HIGSE) in Namibia; and the introduction, in the early 1980s, of education with production in Zimbabwe. It is difficult to describe a country as ready to introduce an educational innovation if human resources are, either thin or non-existent on the ground.

2.5.4 Financial resources

Besides human resources, availability of financial resources is an important indicator of schools’ state of readiness for introducing new programmes. Hargreaves (2000:8)
states that most innovations fail because, “...the change is poorly resourced or resources are withdrawn once the first flush of an innovation is over.” To avoid the foregoing Zivai (2002) maintains that, successful innovations are budgeted for. Research (Dyanda et al., 2005) indicates that up to 2005 the Zimbabwe government did not provide a budget allocation for early childhood education despite having attended and ratified both the Jomtien (1990) and the Dakar (2000) conferences which directed countries to give priority to early childhood education funding. Grade zero/e.c.e. is a Ministry of Education mandated initiative (circular 14 of 2004). In line with a technical-rational approach schools were directed to introduce this innovation in 2006. Surprisingly the ministry did not budget for its own initiative. This is one weakness of this approach where schools are expected to fund the programme despite their widely varying resource capacities. In Zimbabwe, grade zero/early childhood education has always been a community project. Nziramasanga (1999) affirms that the community was expected to fund early childhood education and care through fees and levies. Notwithstanding the Zimbabwe government’s position on early childhood education funding it is evident that without a budget it is difficult to hold conferences, workshops and seminars for grade zero/early childhood education teachers. It is also difficult to acquire material resources for use in early childhood education centres. It is in the light of the foregoing that Zivai (2002) proposes that for any educational reform to succeed there is need for a parallel economic reform. Hatch (2002:80) clearly illustrates the low levels of funding with respect to innovations in education in developing countries:

The private sector will use up to 20% of their resources to make substantive changes to their organizations whereas in education we rarely spend more than 1% on change efforts. Staff members are often expected to donate their time. Expecting change at bargain basement rates is unlikely to succeed.

In Zivai’s (2002) view attempting innovations without enough funds is ‘chasing the wind.’ This view is corroborated by Finn (2001) who argues that where adequate financial resources are set aside, programme implementation is generally smooth and positive but where financial resources are limited the reverse is true.
2.6 ADEQUACY AND USEFULNESS OF TEACHER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

To be able to apply themselves diligently and produce good teaching, grade zero/early childhood education teachers need support. The availability of clear support systems in a school is one clear indication that the school is ready to implement both existing and new curricula. In a school teacher support can be provided by parents, school heads, the government and non-governmental organisations.

2.6.1 Parental support

Parental involvement and support, in the view of Van Wyk (2006), is a dynamic process whereby educators and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the learner. The process involves collaborating on educational matters, setting goals, finding solutions, and implementing and evaluating shared goals as well as inspiring and maintaining trust between the home and the school. Such collaboration between teachers and parents, at school level, once again highlights the importance of addressing challenges in specific school contexts so that programme implementation can be facilitated. Such an approach is consistent with both the adaptation and enactment perspectives of curriculum implementation. I would, however, like to point out that levels of collaboration between teachers and parents will differ from one school context to the other. Hill and Taylor (2004) observed that parental support and involvement in early childhood education programmes is an important factor in student achievement. According to them, one of the most basic statements that can be made about parental support in education is that when it happens everyone benefits. This observation is corroborated by evidence from a study conducted in the USA by the Iowa Department of Education (2000:9) which pointed out that “... research has conclusively shown that parental involvement in early childhood education, as a form of support, benefits students, teachers, parents and schools.” Epstein and Salinas (2004), list the following as benefits of parental support for students:

• development of a more positive attitude towards the school
• higher achievement levels in students
• higher quality and more appropriate activities; and
• heightened interest in education by students.

Research has shown that learners who receive attention from their parents early in their lives are able to deal with school work independently later (Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004). Hill and Taylor (2004) also concur that parental involvement promotes, for the learner, a positive experience of the school. Thus when providing early childhood education services for very young children good relationships between parents and staff make the child feel emotionally secure, and contribute towards the parents’ trust of early childhood education personnel in schools. Meier and Marais (2007:149), commenting on good relationships between parents and teachers draw attention to a recognition of teacher-parent complimentary roles based on trust. Such a relationship should be based on honest communication and shared decision making. Brown (1999:88) further affirms that the aforementioned relationship is beneficial to parents in that they are made aware of how they could meaningfully assist their children with school work. Seefeldt and Galper (2002) also assert that parental support for teachers and the school improves teacher morale, and student achievement.

In the Zimbabwean context parents can support grade zero/early childhood education teachers by paying fees and levies, buying textbooks, crayons, picture books, school uniforms, and pencils and by attending meetings and parent-teacher consultation sessions. With regards to parent-teacher consultation sessions, Beaty (2000) observed that teachers who call a student’s parents to school only when there is a fire to put out, miss great opportunities to achieve teaching goals through acknowledging and communicating student progress to parents.

While parental involvement is important as a way of supporting grade zero/early childhood education teachers, there may be barriers which may impede such involvement. According to Meier and Marais (2007) parents may not have time to attend to school functions, may feel that they have nothing to contribute, or may not feel welcome at school.
When the above barriers negatively affect parental involvement in grade zero/early childhood education, Singh et al. (2004) propose guidelines which teachers can use to empower parents. Firstly, parental involvement should be built into teachers’ work schedules but for this to happen opportunities should first be created for teachers to be trained to work with parents. Parents also need to be kept informed about the importance of their involvement including being informed about curriculum and teaching matters. The school should create opportunities for all parents to use their skills. This way parents feel that they can contribute to school activities irrespective of their economic or educational background.

2.6.2 Support through staff development

Teacher support has traditionally been, and continues to be, offered through staff development programmes. In general terms, staff development relates to the means by which a teacher cultivates those skills whose application will improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the anticipated results of a school are achieved. Coppola, Scricca, and Connors (2004), view staff development as a process whereby the competence and confidence of teachers lie, not in serving the educational system in a passive manner - becoming efficient and effective in what it demands of them - but, in actively seeking to contribute to the growth of the system. To be able to do this staff development in schools should thus have aims and objectives that relate to the needs, not only of teaching and ancillary staff, but also of the pupils and of the organization within which they all function. This notion of staff development as a harnessing of personal and organizational energies to meet individual and institutional needs is expanded by Click (2004:92) thus:

Staff development is a deliberate and continuous process involving the identification and discussion of present and anticipated needs of individual staff for furthering their job satisfaction and career prospects and of the institution for supporting its academic work and plans, and the implementation of programmes of staff activities designed for the harmonious satisfaction of those needs.

The following aims derived and/or deduced from the above definition further shed light on what staff development should focus on. Some of these aims, amongst
others, (Coppola et al. 2004) which also apply to grade zero/early childhood education, include:

- to maintain appropriate staff expertise and experience for current and projected courses
- to ensure that each member of staff is or becomes and remains a fully competent and responsive teacher and so is able to do his job more effectively in his present role
- to encourage staff to contribute to innovation in their field of teaching
- to enable staff to broaden and update their knowledge and to advance their personal development
- to equip staff with knowledge to cater for the social welfare as well as the academic needs of students, and to develop an awareness of students’ needs and educational experiences
- to enhance the satisfaction gained by each member of staff from his /her work, by making full use of staff capabilities throughout their careers
- to encourage, in staff, a positive response to change so as to broaden experience and to prepare for new and challenging roles inside and outside the institution, involving different or increased responsibilities, and
- to encourage staff to periodically review and discuss their individual progress, in tests and opportunities and to ensure that abilities and wishes of staff are known by those responsible for coordinating staff development programmes.

Coppola et al.’s (2004) list incorporates the themes which appear amongst the aims of many staff development programmes at school and post-school level in many developed nations, namely:

- the maintenance of educational competence
- the extension of pedagogic skills
- the extension of professional knowledge
- the encouragement of flexibility in teaching and judgment
• the fostering of personal and interpersonal growth, and
• the stimulation of self awareness and responsibility.

In a school situation school heads can support grade zero/early childhood education teachers by arranging that teachers attend staff development sessions which address their specific needs in teaching and learning situations. Stated differently, to be useful, staff development sessions should be focused on what teachers in individual schools need to know and be able to do for students. Teachers should work together to design and implement professional development sessions based on shared visions, concerns and strengths. The assumption here is that such teachers are qualified to teach at the selected level, for instance at grade zero/e.c.e. level. While teacher interaction is encouraged in the enactment perspective, where teachers hold inappropriate and varying qualifications such interaction may be counterproductive. Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (1998) argue that where teachers hold appropriate qualifications such an arrangement or form of support should build “professional communities” committed to promoting student learning. Data about appropriate teaching approaches, media and class management procedures should be used to encourage teachers to work collaboratively on helping students reach agreed upon standards (Edwards, 2012). Teachers need continuous learning opportunities, as a form of support, that are focused, reflective and coherent. To achieve this, Woods (1996:29) suggests that school heads need to carry out an audit of teacher expertise of their staff and create a climate in which teachers are able to develop and share their expertise with other teachers. According to Catron and Allan (2003), schools with clear staff development programmes are ready to implement both existing and new curricula.

2.6.3 Support from non-governmental organisations

Non-governmental organizations can also offer useful support to teachers. Historically there has been little collaboration, in most African countries including Zimbabwe, between governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The rift between governments and NGOs was due to the perceived regime change agenda supposedly held by NGOs. Shortly after independence, however, there was a move toward greater collaboration. Moffet (2000) suggests that this thawing of
relationship and the subsequent collaboration came about because of a number of pragmatic reasons. Firstly, NGOs are generally created by people who are responding to needs at the grassroots, and are thus in touch with what happens at community level. NGOs thus rely on the enactment perspective of programme implementation where interaction and context are given prominence. Secondly, NGOs are autonomous and have greater administrative and financial flexibility and can implement new initiatives more rapidly than government agencies. In addition to this governments, given their limited resources, cannot deliver all services. Collaboration between governments and NGOs can occur in several ways. It can begin with government creating a national initiative, like grade zero/early childhood education, and then inviting NGOs to implement that programme at the local level. Alternatively, collaboration can occur when an experimental project developed by an NGO is deemed to be successful and then adopted by the government to be implemented on a wider scale. In Zimbabwe, Nziramasanga (1999) highlights that non-governmental organizations provided training opportunities for paraprofessionals at the inception of early childhood education and care. Such training, which was donor funded, focused on how to take care of children at learning centres.

2.6.4 Support through supervision

Botha (2004) asserts that the school head’s job is to get things done by working with and through other people. Consequently one regular duty of a primary school head is to supervise teachers. In the context of the introduction of early childhood education/grade zero in primary schools, this means that the school head supervises teachers who operate at this level. Regular supervision is an invaluable form of teacher support. According to Woods (1996:31) such supervision should focus on “the quality of teaching provided, its effect on the quality of learning, the range of teaching techniques used and their fitness of purpose, the teachers’ knowledge of subject matter, and the degree to which work matched students’ attainments and abilities.” An observation one can make from Woods’ (1996) contention is that a school head who is able to focus on the range of skills suggested is one who is, not only familiar with how children in grade zero/early childhood education develop, but also one who has sufficient professional training and grounding in the theories and
approaches used at that level of the education system. It is in this respect that Darling-Hammond and Ball (1998) avow that successful implementation of curriculum innovations depends on the extent to which school heads have been adequately prepared for their work.

Put in another way, successful implementation of new programmes, like grade zero/early childhood education, requires a combination of pressure and support. Pressure alone, for example ministry policy directives on the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in schools (technical-rational perspective) may be sufficient if implementation does not require resources or normative change. However, in isolation pressure cannot change attitudes, values, and practices that have become routinized. Nor can support alone, bring about significant change because of the demands and tasks already required of people in the system that is attempting the implementation of a new practice (Hord 1995). Miles and Huberman (1994:14) also affirm the power of pressure and support, but highlight that “…there must be an intelligent combination of the two. Too much pressure is bullying; too much support suggests to teachers that they will need crutches for years on end.” In the context of teacher supervision, when school heads visit classrooms and observe first-hand the status of grade zero/early childhood implementation (enactment perspective), they become more informed and can appropriately supply resources to support staff in innovation implementation. It is in this regard that Hyson (2004) maintains that effective school heads visit classrooms often to lend support, and provide pressure as they are discovering what is happening in classrooms. They collect data not only through formal observations and instruments, but also through informal methods like walking in the hallways, dropping in on classrooms, visiting departments and grade level meetings, and having casual conversations in the staffroom, or while crossing the parking lot.

The regional education office, a government department, also supervises school heads so as to assist them to realize Ministry of Education objectives. One of these objectives is to ensure that primary schools successfully introduce and implement grade zero/early childhood education programmes. The regional office normally supervises schools through education officers. As a form of teacher pressure/support, monitoring school standards through teacher supervision is
intended to improve the quality of teaching in grade zero/early childhood education classes.

2.7 PREPAREDNESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS

In order for primary schools to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, they must have adequate staff who are properly trained. Confirming the need for qualified staff, Atmore (2003) contends that poorly educated teachers can teach only what they know and so cling to the textbook and depend on the narrow, formal framework of the system to give them a sense of security. The quality of teachers is very important when it comes to the implementation of programmes. Atmore (2003) further observes that a curriculum is as good as the quality of its teachers. Positively, a curriculum is enriched by the creativity and imagination of the best teachers.

2.7.1 Level of education and training

According to Patton (2000), research indicates that children learn more from good teachers than from bad ones in almost all circumstances. In support of this assertion Darling-Hammond and Ball (1998) report that teacher expertise - what teachers know and can do as measured by the level of teacher education - had the greatest influence on student learning. In their view “…nothing can compensate for a poorly trained teacher who lacks the necessary knowledge and skills to help children master a given curriculum and the ability to accurately assess students’ progress” (Darling-Hammond and Ball 1998:179). In essence, when any learners receive instruction from unqualified teachers or sub-standard qualified teachers, that is a clear sign that schools are not ready for implementing educational programmes. While the above observations are correct it should be pointed out that from a technical-rational perspective policy design and implementation are two distinct processes. Consequently there is an assumption that execution, not the formulation of policy, is the root cause of unsuccessful programme outcomes, yet the formulation of policy (circular 14 of 2004) could have been based on false or incomplete assumptions or understandings about the nature of the change, the curriculum or the
quality of the implementers. Thus when policy decisions are made on new programme implementation, it is necessary to take into account the nature and training levels of personnel who will implement the programme.

In this regard Archer (2002) observed that research suggests that, at a minimum, early childhood education/grade zero teachers should have a solid general education and a good subject mastery. Students whose teachers know their subject matter/content perform better than those whose teachers have little or no subject mastery. In support of the above view, Daling-Hammond (2000) found out that three years in a row with poor teachers almost wiped out an early childhood learner’s chances of keeping up in school.

Becoming a professional teacher of young children is a developmental process. It requires courses with emphasis on child development as well as on principles and practices of working with young children. For instance, an assistant teacher of grade zero/early childhood education learners should have had courses or be taking courses in child development and in methods of working with young children. Warner and Sower (2005), citing the American Governing Board (2004), suggests the following as approved qualities of different categories of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers:

- an early childhood assistant teacher is a paraprofessional with no specialized early childhood preparation who implements programme activities under direct supervision
- an early childhood associate teacher is a semiprofessional with minimal early childhood training who independently implements activities and may be responsible for a group of children, and
- an early childhood teacher is a qualified professional with an undergraduate degree in early childhood education with special focus on child development and is responsible for a group of children.

An examination of the above teacher categorizations indicates that different teachers teach learners at this level. It is also evident that the less educated early childhood education teachers assist the professionally qualified.
With reference to pre-school centres in Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Education regulations (1999) quoted by Mudzi (2000) indicate that urban early childhood centres can be registered only if the head or senior members of staff have the following qualifications:

- a recognized nursery school teaching qualification
- a recognized primary school or other teaching qualifications, and
- a minimum of two years teaching experience in a nursery school.

The above regulations clearly affirm the need for qualified personnel. The regulations’ requirement was to have at least one qualified teacher at the centre in urban preschools. In rural areas the following staff qualifications would suffice for centre registration:

- teachers should be between 18 and 55 years of age
- teachers should hold a minimum of a Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC), and
- the local primary school head should be the overall supervisor of the centre.

Where people with ZJC were hard to come by, the Secretary for Education would accept, for appointment, people who have the ability to work with children. What is evident here is that conditions for preschool registration in rural areas were not as stringent as in urban areas.

From the above recommendations, it would, thus, seem to suggest that most grade zero/e.c.e. teachers in urban schools, if these were the ones reassigned to primary schools in 2006, hold nursery school teaching qualifications. Similarly, it would also suggest that most grade zero/early childhood education teachers in rural areas do not hold any teaching qualifications. This seems to be further supported by Dyanda et al.’s (2005) assertion that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education had no policy on the training of early childhood education teachers although there were five training colleges that train teachers for infant classes. Mudzi (2000) further highlighted that the so-called trained teachers in urban preschools were not considered to be qualified by the University of Zimbabwe. Such teachers, however, did a commendable job to alleviate the critical shortage of early childhood education
teachers. For teachers to be recognized as qualified, thereby making primary schools ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, they need certain prerequisite skills. They also need to have covered a curriculum that enables them to handle such classes. In this regard Burchfield (2006:4) opined that a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher should:

- have studied theoretical principles of child development and learning
- be able to develop practices and programmes that are developmentally appropriate for young children
- be able to establish a daily schedule to foster continuity and provide large blocks of time so that children can do complex, integrated in-depth study
- encourage creativity in grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms by giving children extended time to work on projects, a pleasant environment in which to work, appropriate materials and a supportive environment
- be able to develop a plan for the transition of children from pre-kindergarten to primary school programmes, and
- encourage parental and family involvement in the school.

2.7.2 Personal teacher attributes

According to Beaty (2000) the teacher is one of the most important single factors in determining what a school experience will be like for children. It is not only the teacher’s skills but also attitudes and feelings that will influence what the teacher does for, and with, the children. In this respect Read, Gardner and Mahler (2003) assert that a teacher of young children must enjoy being with them. For instance, to meet the daily demands of a group of active young children, a teacher needs to be in good physical health and emotionally stable. Moods can interfere with children’s responses in teaching-learning situations. Consequently teachers need to have confidence, a capacity for warm relationships, and a zest for living and learning. Such teachers, according to Meier and Marais (2007:73) should:

- be nurturing towards children
• accept diversity
• be skilful communicators
• be good role models
• be patient and encourage children to accomplish tasks independently
• be willing to undergo ongoing professional development
• allow children to learn through play at their own individual pace, and
• work cooperatively with other members of staff as well as with parents.

Primary schools with such teachers can be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

2.7.3 Teaching experience

Another factor that is important when considering the preparedness of a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is teaching experience. Research studies, cited in Taylor (2004), suggest that children learn more from experienced teachers than they do from less experienced ones (Darling-Hammond 2000; and Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 1998). Experienced teachers are those who have taught grade zero/early childhood education classes for a long enough period to have tried various methods of teaching. These are the kind of teachers who, for example, have prepared several groups of learners for the formal primary school system, and who know and take into account the background and circumstances of the learners they teach. Such teachers are also able and confident to assist new recruits into the profession and advise them on what works and what doesn’t work (McLaughlin, 2000). Schools with such experienced teachers can be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. classes. The foregoing requirements suggest that a staff audit and needs assessment should be conducted by curriculum policy planners before new programmes, like grade zero/e.c.e. are introduced. Where policy planning is divorced from implementation (as is the case in the fidelity perspective) no such audit and needs assessment is conducted and this might negatively affect programme implementation.
2.8 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT E.C.E. LEVEL

The concept teaching is very broad. At the micro level, the classroom practices and strategies used by the teacher as well as the learning activities of students are key considerations. At the macro level, which is the focus of this literature review, teaching deals with, as highlighted by Taylor (2002), broader issues such as the existence of a curriculum guideline (syllabus), teacher conceptualization of curriculum aims and objectives, appropriateness of methods adopted, the place of assessment and record keeping in the learning process, and issues of teacher-pupil ratios.

2.8.1 Availability of a curriculum guideline/syllabus

One benchmark for measuring the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level is the existence of a curriculum guideline or syllabus. Curriculum guidelines spell out what content is to be taught and how it should be taught, as well as the teaching and learning resources to be used to facilitate effective learning. Nziramasanga (1999) confirms the above observation when he asserts that one fundamental in the teaching of grade zero/early childhood education is the existence of a curriculum. Such a curriculum should be aimed at a holistic development of children between ages zero and eight. Morrison (2004) observes that an early childhood education curriculum should address, among other issues, the following areas: art and craft; language; manipulative and block play; outdoor play; and dramatic play as well as music, movement and dance. The activities suggested in each curriculum area should suit the developmental level of the individual child.

More specifically, all programmes/curricula should have goals to guide activities and on which to base teaching methodologies. For grade zero/early childhood education, the following are the key goals suggested by Morrison (2004):

- the social interpersonal goals, which focus on helping the child to learn how to get along with other children and adults and how to develop good relationships with teachers
• the self-help skills and intra-personal goals which focus on modeling for children how to take care of their personal needs such as dressing
• the self-esteem goals which promote self-help skills to help children develop good self-image and a high self-esteem
• academic goals which involve teaching children to learn their names, addresses and phone numbers. These goals also facilitate children’s learning of colours, sizes, shapes and positions, learning numbers, pre-writing skills, shape identification, letter recognition, sounds and rhymes
• thinking goals which involve providing environments and activities that enable the children to develop skills essential to constructing schemes in a Piagetan sense
• learning readiness goals which involve facilitating readiness skills related to school success, such as following directions, learning to work alone and listening to the teacher
• literacy goals which involve providing opportunities for interaction with adults and peers as a means of developing oral language skills, and
• nutritional goals which involve providing food preparation experiences.

The goals suggested above clearly demonstrate that grade zero/early childhood education learners mentally operate at Piaget’s preoperational stage of cognitive development. According to Bruce (2004) this is a stage before a child masters logical mental operations. Children at this stage gradually develop the use of language and the ability to think in symbolic form. They are able to think operations through logically in one direction. Children at this stage are egocentric; they thus have difficulties in seeing another person’s point of view. This implies that when teaching such learners teachers should select activities which are at their level of thinking.

2.8.2 Use of props and various teaching methods

Gordon and Browne (2004) suggest some guidelines which teachers can use when teaching grade zero/early childhood education learners. According to them it is important to use concrete props and visual aids whenever possible. Children can be involved in the construction of such things as toy cars and building blocks using
different structures. They can be instructed to move objects by pushing, pulling or lifting. Children can roll objects to find out those that roll and those that do not roll. By so doing children have a great deal of hands-on experience. Children should thus be given a chance to experiment and explore using various materials. According to Morrison (2004) early childhood education learners are in the age of rapid motor skill development. Such children are learning to test and use their bodies. Catron and Allan (2003) aver that through the area of Art and Craft children are taught such concepts as drawing, painting, modelling, printing, weaving and colouring hence teachers of children at this stage need to structure their lessons taking into account learner characteristics. In the area of language development Jackman (2005) is of the view that grade zero/early childhood education teachers need to provide a wide variety of experiences in order to build a foundation for concept formation. Through language and play, concepts such as auditory discrimination, auditory memory, visual discrimination and writing skills, children are given a chance to develop their language skills. In this respect Beaty (2000) suggests that when an early childhood education teacher is teaching the concept of oral language and development, children should be encouraged to tell news and stories as well as to describe themselves. Finn (2001) also observed that early childhood education learners respond to questions using one word that conveys the meaning of a sentence. For instance a child may simply say “toilet” to express that the child wants to go to the toilet. Later on children add helping verbs, clauses, conjunctions and prepositions to complete their sentences. A teacher who is aware of this process, in language development, is ready to teach language skills to grade zero/early childhood education learners. The guidelines discussed above assume that grade zero/e.c.e. teachers have the requisite qualifications. Where untrained and underqualified teachers are used it may be difficult to realize the expectations spelt out above. Once again it takes us back to the need for utilizing both forward and backward mapping if effective grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is to take place.

2.8.3 Assessment and record keeping

Assessment and record keeping underpin all good educational practice. Consequently a consideration of how grade zero/early childhood education learners
are taught would be incomplete without a close examination of these issues. Rodger (2003) asserts that, these are essential elements in the monitoring of grade zero/early childhood education learners’ continuity and progression in the school system. The skills of diagnosing successes and challenges are fundamental to educators’ work and vital to children’s progress. Grade zero/e.c.e. teachers should be prolific record keepers. They should know how much information about children’s progress they have to keep, who information is gathered for, how information is to be used to improve the quality of education for young children either during pre-school experience or on progression to the primary school. Grade zero/e.c.e. teacher level of use (Loucks and Hall, 1978), namely, the sophistication or complexity at which the skill or competence can be demonstrated will determine how assessment and record keeping will be implemented. Where teacher competency levels are low due to lack of training, it may be difficult to satisfy the above conditions. On record keeping, Rodger (2003) proposes that this be done once a week in each area of learning. According to him this record should develop into a portfolio of the child’s achievement. To maximize its educational value, Archer (2002), adds that each child should be closely involved in the selection of evidence for inclusion in his/her portfolio, and in the review of the contents. Portfolios should thus be accessible to the pupils in the classroom and, in that the portfolio is an attempt to represent their achievements, pupils should have a sense of ownership of the contents. Portfolios can move with children as they progress through school, thus providing information for successive teachers and thereby facilitating continuity and progression. Grade zero/early childhood education teachers who display such assessment and record keeping skills are aware of how learners at this level should be taught, and therefore they are ready for the introduction of this innovation.

2.8.4 Time tabling early childhood education

Click (2004) maintains that early childhood learners should be taught in a systematic way. Teaching at this level should thus be time tabled. The head of a school has a number of resources at his/her disposal - teachers, teaching areas, classrooms, finance, and time. A time table is the means by which these resources are marshalled to provide the greatest possible educational opportunities and
alternatives for pupils in the most cost-effective manner. In developing countries the
emphasis on cost-effectiveness cannot be overstated. The more efficiently resources
are utilized the better the education for the greater number of children. Time tabling
is useful whether one is using the technical-rational, adaptation or the enactment
perspective because orderliness or logicality increases organisational and
programme effectiveness. In a school situation the time table should be pupil-centred
so as to maximize learning opportunities. This can be achieved if the time table is
arranged with a variety of activities, with subjects spaced to sustain the children’s
interest and motivation, and taking into account age, concentration span, ability
range, and class sizes. Click (2004) suggests the following time table for grade
zero/early childhood learners who begin lessons at 8.00 a.m. and end the day at
12.00 noon:

**Table 3: Early childhood education time table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.00 a.m-8.30a.m.</td>
<td>Free play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.30a.m-9.00a.m.</td>
<td>Toilet routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00a.m-9.10a.m.</td>
<td>First activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.10a.m-9.30a.m.</td>
<td>Rhymes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30 a.m-10.00a.m.</td>
<td>Morning snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00a.m-10.30a.m.</td>
<td>Toilet routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30a.m –10.40a.m.</td>
<td>Free play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.40a.m-11.45a.m.</td>
<td>Second activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.45a.m-11.55a.m.</td>
<td>Tidying up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.55a.m-12.00 noon</td>
<td>Dismissal rhyme and prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extracted from Click (2004)

Teachers who are ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education
in primary schools would thus be able to develop time tables which take into account
the characteristics of children between ages 0 and 8 years of age.
2.8.5 Learning through play

Grade zero/early childhood education pupils learn through play. In the early childhood education programme, children are seldom doing the same thing at the same time. Read, Gardner and Mahler (2003) are of the view that an observer may see one group of children engaged in dramatic play on the home-making corner; another group building with blocks; a child or two working in the woodworking corner; another child painting; a small group making play dough and another child watching others play. Play is an important avenue for learning, so ample opportunity must be provided for a variety of play experiences.

Young children need many opportunities for looking, touching, listening, tasting, smelling, and moving. They also use play as a way to discover more about themselves and their world. Catron and Allan (2003) assert that, in play children recreate what they have observed, rehearsing roles and making representations of objects. Discovery of how things work, of how to manage feelings and relationships, and developing concepts about the world around them, all are part of the active process of learning. Morrison (2004) avows that children’s involvement with materials and the prepared environment is the primary means through which they absorb knowledge and learn. Piaget also believed that play promotes cognitive development and was a means by which children construct knowledge of their world. Jackman (2005) adds that as children learn through play, teachers use the mother language to give instructions and to ask questions. Teachers who are ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education understand the central role of play in teaching and learning at this level.

2.8.6 Teacher-pupil ratio

In order to teach grade zero/early childhood education classes effectively the teacher-pupil ratio should be controlled. In this connection Darling-Hammond (2000) points out that researchers such as Krueger (1998), Mosteller, Light and Sachs (1996) and Robinson and Wittebols (1986) have found that greater gains in student achievement occur in classes with 13 to 20 students compared to larger classes. Nziramasanga (1999), in agreement with the notion of small grade zero/early
childhood education classes, suggested that a realistic teacher-pupil ratio would be 1:20 or 1:24. Smaller classes allow for maximum teacher attention to learners both during lessons and in assessing their work. It is indeed possible to identify pupils’ problems and to individualize teaching when dealing with fewer pupils. From the foregoing it can therefore be suggested that one indicator of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education is the teacher-pupil ratio in use during teaching and learning. There is, however, a growing body of literature (Blatchford, 2003; Finn, Pannozzo and Achilles, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2006) which is of the view that small classes do not necessarily lead to efficient and effective teaching. According to this literature, if what teachers should implement is dictated to them by the central authority, with no consultation or involvement, then small classes will not necessarily lead to teacher commitment. This once more is a clarion call for policy planners to, not only take into account the context in which the policy will be implemented but also to involve teachers, who are the foot soldiers in the whole curriculum implementation process.

2.9 SUMMARY

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlighted that educational changes or innovations are instituted so as to satisfy identifiable needs. In the context of this study access to e.c.e. was limited to those members of the Zimbabwean society who could afford it yet every child requires such pre-primary education so as to be ready for formal education. This need led to the introduction, through circular 14 of 2004, of early childhood education in all primary schools. Using circulars or mandates is consistent with the technical-rational/fidelity perspective of curriculum inception and implementation. The literature reviewed highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of adopting this curriculum implementation perspective. As a result of some of the observed weaknesses of the fidelity perspective an alternative implementation approach was suggested. This perspective, called adaptation, emphasizes the importance of local context in curriculum implementation. Rather than a top-down hierarchical view of change, the mutual adaptation perspective underscores the importance of bottom-up interpretations to policy intentions. Like the technical-rational perspective, however, the adaptation perspective separates policy
formulation from its implementation. In an attempt to address the limitations associated with separating policy formulation from implementation the enactment perspective has been suggested as an alternative. Building on the importance of context in mutual adaptation, this perspective examines and elaborates the interconnections between actors as a way of explaining how context shapes policy implementation. In this perspective implementers are placed at the forefront of curriculum reform efforts. Notwithstanding the implementation perspective adopted, the reviewed literature underlines that effective implementation can be realized if implementers are sufficiently prepared for the innovation; when appropriate resources are made available for innovation implementation; when adequate and useful teacher support systems are in place, and when teachers are professionally competent to implement the curriculum innovation. The next chapter examines the research methodology used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2 a literature review on educational change, implementation perspectives and requirements for early childhood education was conducted. This chapter focuses on methodological issues relating to conducting research in education in general and, more specifically, on issues relating to teachers’ perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe. The study is qualitative in nature and makes use of the case study design. The methodology is discussed in terms of research paradigm, choice of research design, data collection, the process of data analysis and ethical considerations. Finally, generalisability, reliability and validity issues are also examined.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

In the not too distant past, literature on research methods included debates between people who favoured qualitative approaches or quantitative approaches. As Thomas (2003:112) succinctly points out, “On each side of this controversy there have been people who demeaned the beliefs of those on the other side”. Debate about quantitative and qualitative methodologies tends to be cast as a contest between innovative, socially responsible methods versus obstinately conservative and narrow minded methods (an opinion of advocates of qualitative approaches) or precise sophisticated techniques versus mere commonsense (an opinion of supporters of quantitative approaches).

The preceding observations lead us to an examination of the paradigms used in educational research. A research paradigm/perspective, according to Wisker (2001:121), is “…an underlying set of beliefs about how elements of the research area fit together and how we can inquire of it and make meaning of our discoveries”.

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Do we believe that objects, people and events interact and link logically, and logical conclusions can be determined through our study of this? (quantitative approach). Or do we believe that the way we see the world and our beliefs affect how we interpret our research field and items within it, and that we are studying and interpreting interactions between people, objects and relationships? (qualitative approach).

A particularly lucid explanation of the above research paradigms is offered by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). According to these scholars the positivist (quantitative) paradigm focuses on reality that exists external to the observer, internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity of data. This paradigm, in my view, cannot fully account for interactive inquiry where sets of facts can be understood in a variety of ways because they are value-laden. By contrast the qualitative (post positivist) paradigm assumes “...a relativist ontology, where there are multiple realities. Realities are in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual person or groups holding the constructions” (Guba and Lincoln 1985:206). According to De Vos (1998) the qualitative researcher is of the opinion that the only reality which exists is that which is constructed by the participants involved in the research situation. Thus, multiple realities may exist in any given research situation, namely, the reality of the researcher, of the participants investigated, and the reader or audience interpreting the results of the research.

The relationship between the researcher and the participant in qualitative research is quite different from that in quantitative research. In the latter there is no strong emphasis on the “relationship” between the researcher and the respondent, even though the subject may be a person. In qualitative research, the researcher and the participant are seen not only as the observer and the observed respectively, but the researcher may require the participant to assist in the interpretation of the data, in terms of comments on the researcher’s interpretation of the data, in order to ensure that the data are correctly interpreted and understood – that is, in the context of member-checking (Struwig and Stead, 2001).

Epistemologically, the qualitative-interpretivist paradigm promotes the interaction between the researcher and the research participants, so that the findings are
literally created as the investigation proceeds - a subjectivist epistemology. In consequence of the ontological and epistemological assumptions already made, the set of methodological procedures support a hermeneutic-dialectic process (Litchman, 2010). What this means is that the research based on this paradigm aims at the production of reconstructed understandings. It is not focused on validity but concentrates, instead, on trustworthiness and authenticity. It looks for the ways meanings are made through relationships and through the way discourse deals with, controls and represents events, facts and so on.

Stated differently, there are many ways of interpreting the experiences we have through our interactions. The meaning we attribute to these experiences constitutes reality, thus reality is socially constructed. The basic premise, in this respect, is that human experience is mediated by interpretation. Human beings are active in creating their world and through interaction they construct meaning (Merriam, 2009). Meaning, thus, is a product of social interaction rather than external sources as the positivists would like us to believe. People do not, however, always agree because meaning is negotiated as the individual “constructs, modifies, pieces together, weighs up pros and cons and bargains” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006:32). In short, a qualitative researcher’s knowledge of the world (epistemology) is transactional (recognizing that one set of actions causes other interactions and responses), and the methodology is dialectical and dialogic, recognizing that as different arguments are presented and set up against each other, knowledge and versions of the world move on through this interaction and dialogue, producing different understandings and expressions.

An examination of the characteristics of qualitative research may help shed more light on the foregoing discourse. Firstly, qualitative research is a process of inquiry undertaken to understand a human problem or phenomenon (Creswell, 2005) and gain insight into social situations through examining the meanings which participants attribute to them. It is a non-mathematical process of interpretation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), and, as such, relies on words, rather than statistics and numbers. As the qualitative researcher in this study I describe the data from a holistic perspective, taking into account the complexity of the social systems, rather than focusing on discrete variables as in quantitative research (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). This study
thus describes school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/early childhood education teachers’ perceptions (who, in this study are all categorized as teachers) of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

Secondly, qualitative research is an interactive process (Creswell, 2005), the process itself being more important than the outcome or information obtained. It is through this process of seeing, hearing and reading, and of looking, listening and engaging that the raw data are grouped and patterns formed, until themes emerge which explain the inner worlds of the participants. It is interactive because the researcher is part of the process and actively engages with the participants, as the main research instrument in the qualitative paradigm. It is, therefore, important that the researcher is aware of the effect that his/her presence, feelings and beliefs or world view have on the research process (Rossman and Rallis, 2012), and how he/she is, in turn, affected by the interaction. In the light of the foregoing, I entered into the research field with an attitude open to learning.

One characteristic of qualitative research is that it, as intimated earlier on, portrays multiple views of reality and is therefore an interpretive view of the world (Hammersley, 1992). There is more than one truth and the researcher’s point of view is only one of the many. For this reason qualitative researchers must make their roles explicit (Silverman, 2010). In this study my role was to observe and interpret the data gathered on participants’ perceptions or views on schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education. Every attempt was made to separate my views from theirs and to understand their perceptions from their point of view, and to indicate this in the narrative.

Qualitative research follows an inductive approach (Creswell, 2005), which implies that specific information is gathered from which themes are developed. Unlike in quantitative research, where the aim is to move from the general to the specific in order to test a pre-determined hypothesis, the researcher following a qualitative approach does not enter the field with any preconceived ideas or theories. Theory is constructed as the research progresses.
Qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, meaning that the researcher goes into the field to interview and observe participants in their own environments (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The data gathered is also naturally occurring and not forced or manipulated in experimental settings (Hammersley, 1992). In this study the data were gathered in the participants’ setting, namely, primary schools, and the interviews were semi-structured. Finally, qualitative research is exploratory in nature in that it aims to generate meaning from situations about which relatively little is known. Not much research has been conducted on teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education in Zimbabwe hence little has been documented on this phenomenon. Creswell (2005) points out that where little is known on a topic and the research is exploratory in nature, qualitative research is the design of choice because either concepts are “immature” or the variables are unknown. This qualitative study henceforth attempts to shed light on teachers’ perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

Having discussed the characteristics of qualitative research, it is pertinent to highlight that this study is located within the interpretive paradigm with a strong leaning towards qualitative research. Notwithstanding the traditional dominance of quantitative approaches projected from the natural sciences onto the social sciences, qualitative research methods employed by social scientists are increasingly being recognized and used by educational researchers (Litchman, 2010). The choice of qualitative research for this study coheres very well with the purpose of this inquiry, namely, to explore teachers’ perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The questions being investigated and the resources available (Cantrell, 1993) also dictated that, a qualitative approach be adopted for this study. In addition to the above justification, the choice of qualitative methodology for this study is also consistent with my own epistemological and ontological stance that reality, which is a social construction, does not create a single truth but multiple truths. Notwithstanding the above observation and the fact that social reality is mediated by the researcher’s experience, I acknowledge that this research, like all other research, will be subjected to issues of rigour, trustworthiness and validity, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
The point was made earlier on that this study is located in the interpretive paradigm. According to Besler and Ardichvili (2002), researchers need to adopt fresh ways of thinking about encounters with the “other”. The concept interpretive ‘zone’ is particularly useful in this respect because it defines a space where the knowledge, experience, and beliefs of outsiders and insiders interact to create new understandings. The concept ‘zone’ assumes the involvement of more than one party - at least two or more - competing, negotiating and interacting from different perspectives. Thus the term ‘zone’ (more than the term interpretation) moves us away from the traditional image of the researcher as a lone, isolated figure working independently on a problem to that of a socially embedded researcher grounded in social interactions. It is in the ‘zone’ that unexpected forces meet, new challenges arise, and solutions have to be devised with the resources at hand.

The notion of ‘zone’, as used by Besler and Ardichvili (2002), implies dynamic processes - exchange, transaction, transformation, and intensity. The characterization of zones differs according to the contexts and the aspects of the collaborative interactions that are emphasized. Zones range from neutral (scaffolding), through the conflictual (borders, struggles, wars), to the amicable (negotiation, alliances, overlap). The interpretive zone, Bresler and Ardichvili (2002:241) assert:

is socially and historically situated, that is, an imaginary location in which multiple voices converge and diverge through the tensions imposed by centrifugal and centripetal forces of action.

Interpretive research is useful in a variety of contexts. It helps the educational researcher to obtain in-depth data both within and outside the school. In the context of teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education data from within schools helped me to discover the internal dynamics of the grade zero/early childhood education teaching-learning situation and the hidden curriculum which almost always remains invisible in quantitative survey research. Thus the qualitative researcher’s emphasis on obtaining the emic (insider’s) as opposed to the etic (outsider’s) view of situations
and events (Litchman, 2010) may help them tackle problems facing the school system at its roots. In other words, investigating teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education from the perspective of the key actors assisted me to establish realities on the ground. This point is clearly explained by Cantrell (1993:84):

In order to uncover what people believe and to render the meaning about their actions and intentions explicit, interpretive researchers interact dialogically with the participants. Within these interrelationships values cannot be side stepped. Unlike positivists who attempt to separate values from facts and offer explanations of reality which are empirically verifiable, interpretivists accept the inseparable bond between values and facts and attempt to understand reality, especially the behaviour of people within a social context.

Interpretive researchers can thus be said to strive to capture human meanings of social life as it is lived, experienced, and understood by the research participants. They are therefore against, what Kincheloe (2003) calls context “stripping” which is an unfortunate feature of positivist science. It is in this connection that I propose that interpretive descriptions in this study transport the reader to the scene, convey the pervasive qualities or characteristics of the grade zero/early childhood education situation, and evoke the feeling and nature of that educational experience with a view to establishing teachers’ perceptions on whether Zimbabwe primary schools are ready or not for this innovation.

Capturing the social context is very important because interpretivists view each context studied as unique. Because they rely heavily on verbal descriptions, researchers are their main instrument of data collection, interpretation and written narrative. Gay and Airasian (2003:163) assert that in interpretive studies “the researcher is the research method”. To collect data on teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, the case study research design was used.
3.3 CASE STUDY

The research design adopted in this study can be called a multi-sited case study of five primary schools. It should be pointed out from the outset that there are different types of schools in Zimbabwe. Each school type, therefore school context, is different from the other. The location of a school, to begin with, is closely related to the quality and quantity of resources at its disposal. For instance some schools are well resourced while others are not. Additionally, some schools are well supported by private companies whilst others just rely on what fees and levies parents can afford. Furthermore, some schools make use of qualified e.c.e. teachers while others utilize unqualified and, sometimes, underqualified e.c.e. teachers.

A study of teacher perceptions on schools’ state of readiness based on five school types – hence five school contexts – provides strong chances for comparability (see 3.9 for more on this concept). The choice of a multiple case study for this research is therefore justified on the basis of attempting to establish teachers’ perceptions on the different school types’ state of readiness for the introduction of e.c.e. Having provided the rationale for adopting a multiple case study I now turn to the concept of a case study. According to Bassey (1999:36) a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a programme (like grade zero/early childhood education), an institution, a person, a process or a social unit. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (“the case”), this design aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study, which is also known as an examination of an instance in action or interpretation in context, is described by Bassey (1999:36) as an inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.” In the context of this study the phenomenon that is being investigated is teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. Grade zero/early childhood education was introduced in a particular context, namely, Zimbabwe primary schools. It was thus imperative to collect data from schools, particularly from key actors in the implementation of grade zero/early childhood education, who are school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers (in this study all these actors are categorized as teachers) - hence adopting an insider approach to this
Adopting an emic view or approach has the advantages of presenting a perspective (on teachers' perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools' state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education - addition mine) that is thicker, more nuanced and more analytically powerful than the thin mono-dimensional view often represented in etic approaches. Using careful observation, case studies can reveal the contradictions in perceptions of the participants in social situations, the complexity and embeddedness of social truths. Case study data are strong in reality because they are down-to-earth and attention holding.

The case study design is well suited for a qualitative and exploratory research, like teachers' perceptions of schools' state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, since it encourages interpretation and allows for complexity and richness of detail. Shifting the data collection processes to primary schools - where the innovation was introduced and using the school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teacher's voices in the process of interpretation provides teachers with an opportunity to contribute to knowledge. Such a focus on primary schools, using an insider approach, could contribute immensely to our understanding of the current state of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe primary schools.

Merriam (2009) further defines a case study by its special features, namely, that it is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. This particular study reflects all the four features. This study is particularistic in the sense that it focuses on the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education within a defined locality of Gweru district in Zimbabwe, thereby concentrating attention on the way particular groups of people (school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/early childhood education teachers) confront new innovations. By focusing on such information-rich participants, identified above, this multiple case study is therefore descriptive as it delineates the roles performed by these key actors in the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in primary schools. This study is also heuristic in its approach in the way it brings about the discovery of new meanings and understandings of what is known, in this case teachers' perceptions of primary schools' state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.
education. In this respect, Stake’s (2002:47) observations clearly illustrate this point:

Previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insight into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies.

Finally, this study is inductive in the sense that contextualized data were gathered in the form of descriptions from which generalizations, concepts and hypotheses could be developed. These special features of this case study enabled me to investigate, from different perspectives, teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, instead of being trapped in the positivistic assumption that “…there is a single objective reality - in the world out there - that we can observe, know , and measure” (Merriam 2009:17).

Criticisms that have been levelled against case study research include that they can be misunderstood to be accounts of the whole for they tend to masquerade as wholes when in fact they are but just a part of the whole (Merriam 1998). This multi-site case study of the sampled primary schools cannot be all primary schools since Zimbabwe has, indeed, more than five primary schools. Case studies are also criticized for their perceived lack of external validity or generalization and the fact that they do not contribute to the resolutions of generic education problems (Thomas and Brubaker, 2002). In the context of this study such criticisms miss the point because the study was conducted with the sole purpose of sharpening my understanding into teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The focus of this multiple case study is on gaining detailed information about a small population as opposed to being able to make generalizations about large numbers of people or phenomena. Denscombe (2007) uses the analogy of a torchlight, which I think is useful in this study. If you shine a torch up close to something, you see a small area in great detail. Alternatively, if you shine a torch some distance away, you will cover more area but you will not capture the same degree of detail. The torchlight metaphor is useful (in the context of this study) in thinking about the key differences between qualitative and quantitative research respectively. Notwithstanding the foregoing, I
could, however, argue that although the insights developed by this multi-sited case study may not be universally applicable, they are transferable to similar contexts where innovations are introduced in schools. Consequently, as Blignaut (2005) observes, readers are invited to extract those aspects of the findings that they deem to be transferable and which may be extended to other settings. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006:454) capture the possibility of transferring case study findings to other contexts vividly when they state that:

Transferability of a set of findings to another context depends on the similarity or goodness of fit between the context of study and other contexts. The transfers are made by the potential user of the findings who must compare and decide on the similarity of the two contexts.

3.4 SAMPLING

The nature of qualitative inquiries necessitates researchers to select their settings carefully. Because settings are typically unique, most qualitative researchers do not intend to generalize their findings to other situations. Much of the validity of qualitative research resides in the researcher’s skills and competence (Sowell, 2001). Consequently special attention to the selection of settings and participants adds to the confidence in the accuracy of research outcomes.

Qualitative researchers select purposive samples believed to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding (through selecting information-rich participants) of what they are studying. They use their knowledge and experience to select a sample of participants that they believe can provide relevant information about the topic or setting. In this connection Sowell (2001:52) opines that:

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources.

Corroborating this view Guba and Lincoln (1985:276) write, “Sampling is almost never representative or random but purposive, intended to exploit competing views
and fresh perspectives as fully as possible”.

In the context of this study I decided that it is essential to study five primary school contexts representing a government former group B school, a church run school, a rural school, a government former group A school and a council school. Within each of these schools the key actors, with respect to the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, are the school head, the teacher-in-charge (responsible for supervising grade zero/early childhood education programme) and the grade zero/early childhood education teacher. The decision to focus on these five school types was, in agreement with Blignaut (2005), informed by my desire to do justice to thoroughness that could aid an in-depth thick description (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004) of the participants in their respective schools. In addition to this, the decision to limit the study to five schools was also a practical one. The distances between the schools and the number of key actors in each school, means that a lot of resources would be required if the research extended beyond the five schools. A further consideration in the sampling of these schools is suggested Hughes (2003), who points out that the informants in these schools should be people who know their school culture well and can therefore talk about it with authority. For example, a new school head, teacher-in-charge or early childhood education teacher in a school would not be able to describe the schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, since he/she would still be in the process of learning how to operate within that school culture. Schools with heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers who have been in their posts for two or more years, were thus sampled for this study. Justifying the above procedures Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006) draw attention to the fact that, the researcher must develop a plan, to sample personnel and settings that, in his/her judgment, will provide an accurate picture of the issue being investigated.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Before data collection I negotiated entry into the research site with the Ministry of Education (head office), the Midlands Provincial Education Director, Gweru district education officers and school heads. Because data collection in qualitative research
is generally lengthy and in-depth, it thus involves more than a casual relationship between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, how I entered into the setting and made contact with the participants was extremely important since it influenced my relationship with the participants right from the beginning. If I had failed to enter the setting in an acceptable manner, that initial impression could have hampered the study from the beginning to the end by making participants hesitant to cooperate fully. I avoided this pitfall by starting the investigation slowly as well as avoiding being obtrusive. This enabled me and the participants to get used to each other. Below I provide an account of the data collection strategies that I utilized during the three months that were set aside for this purpose. While I discuss these strategies one after the other, in the actual research process these strategies were used simultaneously. This use of multiple strategies to collect data is one form of what Denzin and Lincoln (2008) call triangulation. Methodological triangulation combines dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations and physical evidence to study the same unit. Merriam (2009:70) emphasizes that the “rationale for this strategy is that flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies.” This, in my view, is a major strength of the case study research design.

3.5.1 Human instrument

While data collection in this study was done through questionnaires, interviews, observation, research journal and document analysis the human instrument was the key facilitating factor. Guba and Lincoln (1985) introduced the concept human-as-instrument to emphasize the unique role that qualitative researchers play in their inquiry. This qualitative research, like any other qualitative studies, focused on human experiences and situations. Consequently, as the chief research instrument, I not only realized the need for but also became flexible enough to capture the complexity of this human experience in the context of exploring teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.
Ary, Jacobs, Razarieh and Sorensen (2006), observe that only a human instrument is capable of talking with the people in the setting, observing their activities, reading their documents and written records, and recording this information in field notes and journals. As a human instrument I used my sense of sight, smell, touch and hearing to collect data on teachers’ perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

### 3.5.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed for use with school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers (see appendix 2). The questionnaire consisted of items that addressed issues of a biographical nature such as age, sex, academic and professional qualifications, home language and teaching experience. Participants were asked to tick responses that specifically applied to them. Data from the questionnaire were used to establish grade zero/e.c.e. teachers’ state of preparedness for the innovation. Additionally, other observed teacher characteristics also provided evidence on the selected schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to quality of teachers handling the programme. The questionnaire was thus, used as a point of entry into the main case study. A questionnaire is useful in that it provides educational practitioners with a chance to reflect on ideas as they present the written discourses. In this study the questionnaire was administered between September and November 2010.

### 3.5.3 Interviews

Interviews were the key instrument used for collecting data for this study. Researchers working in the interpretive-qualitative paradigm using interviews assume that:

People’s subjective experiences are real and should be taken seriously; that we can understand others’ experiences by interacting with them and listening to what they tell us, and that qualitative research techniques are best suited to this task. Rather than translating the stuff of everyday experience into a language of
variables and mathematical formulae, as we would do when following an explicitly positivist approach, the interpretive approach tries to harness and extend the power of ordinary language and expression developed over thousands of years ago, to help us better understand the social world we live in. (TerreBlanche and Durrheim, 2007:123)

In collecting data through semi-structured interviews, the researcher records direct words of the interviewees. Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing participants’ depth of emotions, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions. The purpose of interviewing is to allow the interviewer to enter into the interviewee’s perspective. It begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit. As noted by Merriam (2009), the researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind. Ary, Jacobs, Ravazieh and Sorensen (2006:72) corroborate the above view by asserting that:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. The purpose of the interview then is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective.

The information obtained through interviews is likely to be more accurate than that gathered through other techniques as respondents have the opportunity to obtain clarification about the meaning of a question. Gay and Airasian (2003) point out that interviewing facilitates deeper probing of issues.

In the context of this study individual semi-structured interviews were utilized. These interviews were guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored. Neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions and issues, were predetermined. Semi-structured interviews with school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/early childhood education teachers were conducted with regard to the nature of their preparation for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, appropriateness of resources for teaching e.c.e., adequacy and usefulness of support systems, preparedness of grade zero/early childhood education teachers
and teacher assessment of the quality of teaching and learning in e.c.e. classrooms in the primary schools. Participants were encouraged to provide answers based on their experiences of the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in primary schools. In this respect I emphasized that I was not looking for specific “true” answers. All interviews were conducted in English except where participants felt that they could express themselves more clearly in their mother language. Where this happened, I translated as accurately as possible any response that was provided in vernacular language. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. During the period of data collection, including during interviews, I developed a relationship of trust with participants.

All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. To cater for trustworthiness and credibility, member checking was used (Litchman, 2010). In the context of this study each transcript and any writing in which the participant’s words were used was fed back for their comments and potential editing. The whole research plan was based on this feedback process. Interviews were developmental in the sense that the first set of interviews informed subsequent interviews. This way interviews recorded the voices of the participants with respect to teachers' perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

3.5.4 Document analysis

Grade zero/early childhood education was introduced in Zimbabwe primary schools using the power-coercive strategy of innovation dissemination. Consequently, Zimbabwe circular number 14 of 2004 was distributed to all provincial education offices, district education offices and schools to effect the implementation of this innovation. In this study I perused, not only this circular but also all other subsequent circulars that were dispatched to schools with respect to grade zero/early childhood education. In this respect Zimbabwe statutory instrument 106 of 2005 and education director’s circular number 12 of 2005 were perused. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) which “gave birth” to the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education was also scrutinized.
In addition to the above documents, I also perused and analysed school documents relating to national, regional and district conferences, workshops and seminars held, who attended and what topics were covered. If the schools, in the case study, held their own staff development workshops on grade zero/early childhood education I also sought permission to peruse any documents relating to those workshops. Individual progress records, and portfolios (if any) were also analysed to establish, not only the nature but also the regularity and quality of grade zero/early childhood education pupil assessment. Minutes of staff meetings where grade zero/early childhood education issues were discussed were also analysed. This document analysis provided further light on teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

3.5.5 Journal

Smith (2006) describes the physical characteristics of a journal as being a bound note book or ring binder full of papers - a day book which is a place to record daily happenings.

In his own words:

A journal is a tool for self discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror of the soul, a place to generate and capture ideas, a safety valve for emotions, a training ground for the writer, and a good friend and confidante.

Smith’s (2006:86)

Throughout the research journey I kept a journal in which I regularly recorded those deeper thoughts and emotions that inevitably accompany any research study of this scope and magnitude.

Journals share the same qualities as logs and diaries such as recording experiences and events over a long period of time. In agreement with the above observation, Bogdan and Biklen (2006:62) remark that “A journal is a written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and
reflecting on the data.” In this study the journal included field notes which provided a chronological account of what happened, when, why and how. Writing and keeping this journal entailed conscious reflection and commentary, and in my view, also involved learning (for the researcher) at some level. This journal enabled me to reflect on teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe.

3.5.6 Observation

When educators think about qualitative research, they often have in mind the process of collecting observational data in specific school settings. “Unquestionably, observation represents a frequently used form of data collection with the researcher able to assume different roles in the process” (Creswell 2005:211). Observation, according to Paton (2001), is a process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at the research site.

Earlier on in this study I indicated that interviews were the key instrument used to collect data. There are, however, limitations to how much can be learnt from what participants say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, observation of the phenomenon of interest may be a good research method. Observation in the context of this study focused on, inter alia, the naturally occurring behavior of people and events in the participating schools. For example, I observed how the school head and the T.I.C. related, and communicated with grade zero/early childhood education teachers, the appearance of grade zero/e.c.e classrooms, the nature of play centres, the appropriateness of teaching/learning equipment/books/stationery, the state of buildings and where possible lessons taught. Where infrastructure and teaching/learning resources were concerned, a checklist on available resources was completed by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. I had intended to attend grade level meetings, staff meetings and parent-teacher consultation sessions as an observer but the opportunity to do so was never availed. As the observer I was fully engaged in experiencing the setting under study while at the same time trying to understand that setting through personal experience, observations and talking to other participants about what was happening. These observations were jotted down as
they were going to be useful in complementing interview data and in the interpretation of various situations. Best and Khan’s (2003) advice was taken into account throughout the observation. They advise that the following standards should characterize observations:

- observations should be carefully planned, systematic and perceptive
- observers should be objective. They should recognize likely biases and strive to eliminate their influence on what they see and report, and
- observations should be checked and verified; whenever possible by repetition or through member checking.

To be able to do the above, I adopted a participant observer role in this study. Such a role enabled me to be involved in activities at the research site as well as seeing experiences from the view point of the participants. Wellington (2000:18) asserts that “A participant observer is an observational role adopted by researchers when they take part in activities in the setting they observe.” As a participant I assumed the role of an inside observer who engages in activities at the study site while recording observations.

As a form of data collection technique observation has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include the opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, hence an opportunity to study actual behaviour. Some of the disadvantages of observation are that the researcher may be limited to those sites and situations where he/she can gain access. In some of these sites the researcher may have difficulty in developing rapport with some of the participants. This can occur if participants are unaccustomed to formal research. In this study the above cited disadvantages were circumvented through following the right procedures for gaining entry into the research site. Once entry had been granted, I as suggested by Merriam (2009), was relatively passive and unobtrusive in the first days, kept the first observations fairly short and did not interfere with school routines. This approach assisted to create rapport between the participants and me.

A wide range of data collection methods which were used in this study have been discussed. These methods were used in the study of the same phenomenon,
namely, teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. Combining many methods in one study provided for triangulation. Takona (2002) acknowledges that combining multiple methods, theories, and empirical materials assists in overcoming the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single observer and single theory studies.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative research typically generates large quantities of data that must be analysed for meaning making. Data analysis, in this respect, involves reducing and organizing the data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is important. Blatchfield (2005) observes that three steps are involved in data analysis, namely, organizing the data, summarizing the data and interpreting the data. A brief tour of each of these steps can be instructive. The first step in organizing is to reduce the data through a process called coding. Field notes, transcripts and other qualitative data are categorized. This enables the researcher to physically separate materials by theme or sub-unit. The next step is to summarize or to begin to see what is in the data. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) suggest that all entries with the same code be merged and that statements about relationships and themes in the data be made. Interpreting the data, which is the third step in the analysis process, then follows. This is the stage, as observed by Morgan (2007), where the researcher reflects about the words and acts of the participants, abstracting important understandings from them. It is an inductive process, in which the researcher makes generalizations based on the connections and common aspects among the categories and patterns.

Although presented separately in this study, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. From the outset of the first interview, the first review of questionnaire responses, the first observation, and the first document analysis the qualitative researcher is reflecting on the meanings of what he/she has seen and heard, developing hunches (working hypotheses) about what it means, and seeks to confirm or disconfirm those hunches in subsequent interviews and observations.
Such observations on the pivotal role of data analysis, led Sowell (2001) to describe data analysis as the pulse of the research process.

The foundation of data analysis and interpretation is the extraction of meaning from verbal data through gradual, carefully designed winnowing and meaning making processes. In this study this gradual process entailed two forms of analysis which Lankshear and Knobel (2004) refer to as informal and formal analysis. The former mostly occurred during data collection. At this stage the descriptive as well as self reflection notes in my journal could qualify as informal analysis. Formal analysis, involved the sorting of the data into categories in order to create meanings from the data.

The transcription of interviews was a vital part of the formal analysis process. This involved working through the recordings and in the process, generally identifying tendencies. More specifically this entailed reading all data from observations, questionnaire responses, documentary analysis, journal entries and interview transcripts. This was, as Creswell (2005) observes, a time consuming and labour intensive exercise which is, however, useful since it familiarized me with the data. Coding through content analysis was used in this study. Qualitative content analysis has been defined as:

- “a research method for the subjective interpretation of content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1278);
- “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2001:453).

The above definitions illustrate that qualitative content analysis emphasizes an integrated view of speech/texts and their specific contexts. Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. In this study codes were assigned to chunks of meaning making
Initially some themes were expressed in single words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. The codes took the form of straightforward category labels. I assigned a code to a text chunk of any size as long as that chunk represented a single theme or issue of relevance to my research questions. In this exercise I was guided by the fact that the importance of any code is its meaning. Codes were thus used to retrieve and organize the data chunks they represent. This enabled me to locate, separate, and regroup data chunks that relate to a particular research question. Henning et al. (2004) remind researchers that, in organizing data during analysis, they should be able to move backwards and forwards through the process from thematic patterns to raw data and vice versa.

The challenge I initially faced was the ability to condense the large chunks of data from transcripts and the journal. A related challenge was that after analysis of data for all the five sites in this case study, I had to address the five research questions so as to establish teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. In the context of this study, as observed by Kincheloe (2003), accurate data coding and the use of clear themes (as reflected in the research questions) enabled me to overcome the above stated challenges.

3.7 VALIDITY

The integrity of qualitative research depends on attending to the issue of validity. In qualitative terms validity refers to the accuracy or truthfulness of the findings. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006) are of the view that the term most frequently used by qualitative researchers to refer to this characteristic is credibility. How confident can one be in the researcher’s observations, interpretations, and conclusions? Are they believable? Looked at in this way credibility or truth value involves how well the researcher has established confidence in the findings based on the research design, participants, and context. The researcher has an obligation to represent the realities of the research-participants as accurately as possible and must provide assurance in the research report that this obligation was met. Hammersley (1992:69) asserts that “An account is valid or true if it represents
accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain, or theorize.” Krefting (1991:215) corroborates this view when he observes that a qualitative study is considered credible when it “…presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that the people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the description.” The term credibility, in qualitative research, is analogous to internal validity in quantitative research.

Validity asks the question whether we are measuring what we are supposed to measure. Validation is viewed differently within a positivist paradigm and in a post-positivist paradigm. In the former the correspondence theory of truth holds that research findings should correspond with reality. Thus in a positivist framework when there is correspondence the research results are labelled valid. It is in an attempt to dismantle this mental framework that Henning et al. (2004) assert that they have struggled with debates about what is good research and ended up proposing that valid (credible) research, in qualitative terms, manifests itself through competence and craftsmanship, on the one hand, and open communication on the other. Corroborating the above observation Kvale (2002:309) asserts that there has been a change in the direction of what makes a good research. Kvale’s words succinctly illustrate this point:

Tension has moved to the relationship between meaning and acts, between interpretation and action. When the dichotomy between facts and values is abandoned, aesthetics and ethics come into the foreground. When knowledge is no longer the mere reflection of an objective reality, but the construction of social reality, the beauty and use-value of the constructed knowledge comes into the foreground.

Validation is very much linked to a rationale or a justification of what has been done and how it has been done. In Kvale’s (2002:309) words “Validation depends on good craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings.” In this study member checking (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) was deliberately built into the research process as a way of enhancing validity. In this respect participants were given an opportunity to peruse transcripts and constructions developed from their contributions. The participants were free to edit, question or reformulate them where necessary. This
procedure also contributed to the validity/credibility of the research. In addition to the above, the use of different methods in this study, commonly referred to as triangulation, also enabled me to interrogate data from various angles, thereby further enhancing validity.

3.8 RELIABILITY

Qualitative researchers speak of dependability rather than reliability. In quantitative terms reliability has to do with consistency of behaviour, or the extent to which data and findings could be similar if the study were replicated. Unlike quantitative research where tight controls enhance replicability, qualitative studies expect variability, because the context of the study changes. Thus consistency is looked at as the extent to which variation can be tracked or explained. This is referred to as dependability. Some strategies used to investigate dependability include using an audit trail, replication logic, stepwise replication, code recoding, interrator comparisons, and triangulation.

3.9 GENERALISABILITY

There is a growing body of knowledge which suggests that generalizability - producing laws that apply universally - is not a useful standard or goal for qualitative research. Schofield (2000:74) summarises this body of knowledge succinctly:

The interpretivist rejects generalization as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience. For the interpretivist every instance of social interaction, if thickly described, represents a slice of life-world that is the proper subject matter for interpretive inquiry... Every topic ... must be seen to carry its own logic, sense or order, structure and meaning.

The question of generalisability cannot, however, be ignored and is thus an issue qualitative researchers have to deal with. It is clear that the classical view of external validity (generalisability) is unhelpful because the idea of sampling from a population of sites in order to generalize to a larger population is generally untenable in qualitative research. This view is buttressed by Guba and Lincoln (1985:62) who
state that:

It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behavior that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs. One can easily conclude that generalizations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behaviour.

Schofield (2000) alludes to the view that scholars have developed other ways of addressing the concept of generalisability that are useful and appropriate for qualitative research. In this respect qualitative research increases its generalisability by providing comparability. I do accept that the results that were obtained from this multiple case study are bound within a particular time and setting and may thus not be generalisable, but I also do believe that the results will indeed be transferable, as they will provide suggestions for intelligent interpretation of other similar cases (Morgan, 2007). Other researchers who will read this multiple case study, on teachers’ perceptions of Zimbabwe primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education, may be assisted in drawing conclusions about the extent to which the results may be assignable to similar situations.

3.10 ETHICS AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Anyone involved in research, especially in the social sciences “…needs to be aware of the general agreements about what is proper and improper in scientific research” (Babbie, 2004:401). Due to the personal nature of the research, attention to detail and prolonged stay in the research setting, a researcher using the case study method requires ethical standards of the highest order. Several authors on qualitative research (Litchman, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Cohen and Manion, 2002) have emphasized the need to be aware of ethical issues when conducting research. In this study I briefly reflect on issues relating to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

Before entering the research site I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education requesting for permission to conduct research in schools in the Gweru district.
Copies of this letter were also forwarded to the Midlands Provincial Education Director and Gweru District Education Officers. Furthermore, consent was also sought from sampled primary school heads. I made an undertaking to fully inform the Ministry of Education, the provincial and district education officers, school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers of my intention to investigate teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The purpose of the research and the benefits to all stakeholders were also explained. For school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/early childhood education teachers, informed consent agreement forms were completed and signed by both the participants and the researcher.

In research participants need to be protected from being identified. The obligation to protect the anonymity of participants and to keep research data confidential should be upheld by researchers. The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants does not reveal their identity. According to Cohen and Manion (2002) a participant is considered anonymous when the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant from the information provided. Where such a situation holds, a participant’s privacy is guaranteed. In the context of this study, participants completed questionnaires that bore absolutely no identifying marks like names and addresses. Since the principal means of ensuring anonymity is not using names of participants or any other personal means of identification, pseudonyms were used for schools and participants in this study.

Another way of protecting a participant’s privacy is through the promise of confidentiality (du Toit, 2003). This means that the researcher will not publicly connect the participant to the information provided. In the context of this study, the promise of confidentiality was incorporated into the rubric of the questionnaires which were completed. It is also argued that a participant in a face-to-face interview cannot expect anonymity but will get a promise of confidentiality. Such a promise was offered to participants during and after interviews.
3.11 SUMMARY

An explanation of research methodologies used in this study and their justification has been presented in this chapter. This multiple case study has been located in the qualitative-interpretive research paradigm. A comprehensive description of the data collection and analysis procedures has been made. Issues of validity, reliability and generalisability, in the context of qualitative research, have been clearly explained. Finally, ethical considerations upheld in this study have also been explicated. In the next chapter, I describe how the participants in the five research sites perceive primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I provide a portrait of each of the five primary schools that constitutes the multiple case study in order to establish teachers’ perceptions of their state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education (e.c.e.). In order to do this for each school, I describe the school type and its characteristics. As indicated in chapter three, a government former group B school, a church run school, a rural school, a government former group A school, and a council run school are described case by case. In each of these school types the key participants in this study are the school head, the teacher-in-charge and the grade zero/early childhood education (e.c.e.) teacher. Each participant's views or perceptions on their school's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education (e.c.e.) are presented. These views are supported with data from observations, document analysis and a researcher's journal. I now turn to the portrait of the first school, identified in this study by its pseudonym Westridge School in line with the requirements for anonymity.

4.2 WESTRIDGE SCHOOL

Founded in 1973, this government former group B primary school is situated in the western high density area of the city of Gweru. Before independence residential areas in Zimbabwean cities were classified either as low, medium or high density reflecting the socio-economic status of the inhabitants of an area. Low density areas were for the affluent whites whereas medium density areas were for mixed races and a few well-to-do blacks. High density areas were for the low income black workers. The township in which Westridge School is situated is predominantly inhabited by low income black families.
Westridge School has a modest administration block which houses the school head's office, the deputy head's office, the teacher-in-charge's office, the bursar's office and a staffroom that can accommodate about forty teachers. There are twenty eight classrooms at this school. Of these classrooms one is set aside for Music and another for Home Economics. The school enrols five classes for each grade level from grade one to grade seven. The current school enrolment, including grade zero/early childhood education learners, stands at 2 200 and its staff complement is forty four. This staff complement includes two grade zero/early childhood teachers and seven specialist teachers for Music, Home Economics, Physical Education, Art, Information Communication Technology, English and Mathematics. As pointed out by the teacher-in-charge 'each subject seems to be requiring a specialist teacher at this school. Each specialist teacher requires a subject base - that is a classroom.' Grade zero/early childhood education (e.c.e.) was to be introduced in this school context as required by the Ministry of Education policy directive. After this description of Westridge School I now turn to the head's perceptions of the school's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education (e.c.e.).

4.2.1 School head's perceptions on state of readiness

In constructing participants' perceptions/views on schools’ state of readiness for the implementation of grade zero/e.c.e., I relied principally on semi-structured interviews. These understandings were supplemented by observations, document analysis and information from the journals I created whilst on field work. I also used a questionnaire to collect participants' biographical data. In presenting these perceptions I do acknowledge that there are many ways of analyzing and presenting qualitative data (Wellington, 2000: 134), that data analysis is part of the research cycle, and that consequently it should begin early in the qualitative research cycle. That is what I attempt to do in this study. After gaining access to the school, I was granted permission to interview the school head first. Data from the questionnaire portrays the head as a forty year old male whose home language is Shona. He holds a Master of Education degree in Policy Studies. He has taught for over sixteen years in primary schools rising to the position of school head in 2004. He spent most of his teaching career in rural schools. He became head of an urban primary school
in 2005. He did not specialise in early childhood education at college. He has been at Westridge School for the last five years. The head indicated to me that he would use English, in the interview, but at times he would code-switch to his vernacular language (Shona - an African language) to enable him to clarify some issues.

After these initial formalities I set the interview rolling by asking the school head to briefly describe grade zero/e.c.e. at Westridge School, with particular focus on when the programme was introduced and the number of e.c.e. classes. This is what the school head had to say:

Grade zero/e.c.e. is a new programme in the school. The Ministry of Education wanted it (the programme) to be introduced at the beginning of 2006 but at this school we only started enrolling grade zero learners at the end of 2006. Actual grade zero/e.c.e. lessons started in January 2007.

(Interview, September 2010).

Asked why the school did not adhere to the Ministry of Education policy requirements that all primary schools attach two classes of pupils aged between 3 and 5 years with effect from 2006, the school head stared at me, for what looked like eternity, and then asked me to follow him. He took me on a tour of the school introducing me to each class at Westridge. Each of these classes, on average (as later established through document analysis) had about sixty two pupils. During this tour we went to one classroom packed with what looked like 4 - 5 year aged pupils. Two lady teachers were competing with learners' voices to try and restore order. We ended the tour by visits to the teacher-in-charge and the deputy school head. After introducing me to these officials we returned to the head's office. The school head then remarked:

Although you have been at this school for less than an hour now I hope you can appreciate why, as a school, we were not able to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. in 2006. Right now we have two grade zero/e.c.e. classes of seventy eight pupils crammed in one Music classroom.

(Interview, September 2010).
What is evident from the school head’s arranged tour was that he wanted me to personally see conditions on the ground so that I would be better placed to understand his responses to the questions I was posing. From the school head’s bodily language during the tour, I could sense that Westridge School experienced challenges as a result of introducing grade zero/e.c.e.

The second issue that we explored in the interview was how grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced to schools. In addition, I also wanted to know how school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers were prepared for the introduction of this innovation. His response to this question was:

Grade zero/e.c.e. came as a policy circular that was read out in a regular meeting of the D.E.O. (District Education Officer) and school heads. In fact it was one of the items on the agenda. The D.E.O. merely read to us the Ministry circular that expected all primary schools to introduce e.c.e. No explanations were given and no school head asked any question.

(Interview: September 2010).

Comments of this nature suggest that the school head was not pleased by the manner in which this programme was introduced in schools. From his comments one can infer that the D.E.O. should have clearly explained the policy and how it was to be implemented. Besides, school heads should have been accorded an opportunity to ask questions on how the programme was to take off. It is perhaps in this connection that Taylor (2004) points out that teachers and school heads need to be clear of what new behaviours will be expected of them during the implementation of new programmes.

Further probing on how grade zero/e.c.e. should have been introduced in order to be effective led the school head to suggest that the announcement made by the D.E.O. should have been followed up by workshops and seminars on the implementation of grade zero/e.c.e. in schools. According to the head all primary school teachers needed to attend workshops and seminars on grade zero/e.c.e. so as to enable them to interact with grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and learners in an appropriate manner. If, however, it became too expensive for the Ministry of Education (M.O.E.) then the
head, the teacher-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers could attend such workshops. In addition to this, the school head indicated that it was necessary to prepare teaching staff well before the introduction of this innovation. Probed on whether or not such workshops and seminars have been held, the head remarked that one workshop had been conducted for teachers-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Asked to identify topics that were addressed at this workshop the school head openly declared:

I do not know the topics that were covered. What I know is that the teacher-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers came to ask for permission to attend workshops arranged by the education officer from the district office. You see, they do not even want to come and report back to me.
(Interview, September 2010).

While Westridge school appears to have a structure comprising the head, deputy head, teacher-in-charge, senior teacher, junior teachers and pupils, it does not seem that the school has clearly laid out communication channels. If such channels existed the school head could have used them to get feedback from both the teacher-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers on issues raised in the workshops attended. In fact, follow up programmes could have been arranged, at school level, to ensure that latest developments on e.c.e., from workshops and seminars, are disseminated and implemented at school level.

The school head further lamented the practice by the district education office of not inviting school administrators to workshops. I quote him verbatim:

We administer schools. We are supposed to supervise everyone at the school, including grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. If we are left out (not invited) then how are we expected to learn what happens at grade zero/e.c.e. level?
(Interview, September 2010).

Clearly the school head wants to learn about grade zero/e.c.e. so that he can be functionally productive. From the above description it does appear that there was inadequate preparation of school heads for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.
I then reminded the school head of the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom (which we had visited earlier on) packed with, according to his earlier observation, seventy eight pupils. I asked the school head what such a set-up meant with respect to appropriateness of physical facilities like classrooms, toilets and furniture. According to the head, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils had no classroom of their own. Currently they use a Music room. Responding to my question on what happens to Music lessons since the room is now used by grade zero/e.c.e. learners this is what he had to say:

The shortage of classrooms is a big challenge at this school. You see, when grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced we were not told by the Ministry of Education how we were going to accommodate the learners. At this school, for instance, we have five classes for each grade for grades 1 to 7. These classes do not have adequate classrooms. Then someone has the guts to introduce two grade zero/e.c.e. classes over and above the normal load. As for Music lessons, these are taught from 12 noon when grade zero/e.c.e. classes will have completed their lessons.

(Interview, September 2010).

The school day in Zimbabwean primary schools is eight hours long. Each lesson at the formal primary school is thirty minutes long (Tsodzo, 2001). A Music teacher at Westridge teaches ten of the thirty five classes per day (school time table). To be able to do so the teacher requires five hours. This means that beginning at 12 noon the Music lessons would end at 5.00 p.m. During my fieldwork at Westridge by 3.30 p.m. all teachers would have gone to their respective homes. The school head confirmed this indirectly to me at the time I was making an appointment for the interview when he said:

Well, if you come in the morning I will be very busy. I attend to teachers, parents and pupils’ queries from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. From 10.30 a.m. I supervise a few teachers, and then I attend to ancillary staff from 2.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. The right time for our interview is from 3.30 p.m. everyday. At that time all the pupils and teachers will have gone home. Umm, since I will be attending meetings with other school heads for the rest of the week we can have the interview today at 10.00 a.m.

(Interview, September 2010).
From the above description the question one is bound to ask is, what happens to the Music lessons that are supposed to be taught up to 5.00p.m? While this study does not focus on teaching in the formal primary school, it is noteworthy to observe the implications of introducing a new programme, like grade zero/e.c.e., in an already congested school time table. Besides, the situation at Westridge does reflect failure to adapt, by the school administration, to the changed circumstances of the school. This is indeed one of the challenges that the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. brought to Westridge School.

With respect to furniture, the school head revealed that grade zero/e.c.e. learners were using benches and chairs borrowed from grade one classes. The impression created by the head was one where the majority of grade zero/e.c.e. learners had some furniture to use. Observations I made on the ground, using a checklist, were that there were enough chairs and benches for about twenty pupils only. The chairs and benches were not of the appropriate size. The rest of the learners sat on the cement floor during lessons. In the same vein the school head raised the issue of toilets for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. According to him the school has not been able to build toilets with child-sized chambers for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Currently grade 1 and 2 toilets are used by grade zero/e.c.e. learners. As a consequence of the above, the school head observed that grade zero/e.c.e. toilet training was being compromised. Every time grade zero/e.c.e. teachers take their pupils for some aspects of toilet training grade 1 and 2 pupils interfere.

The introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. was a way of ensuring that a smooth transition is created between pre-primary and the formal primary school setting. Westridge School, with its inadequate and inappropriate classrooms, toilets and furniture does not seem to be creating a smooth transition for its grade zero/e.c.e. learners. While the Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument 72 of 1999 stipulates that each grade zero/e.c.e. learner requires about 2.25 square metres space which allows him/her to learn through play, it does not appear Westridge school is able to provide such space. In addition to this, sitting on the floor during lessons is not a sign that the school is ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to availability of appropriate classrooms and furniture.
Besides focusing on classrooms, furniture and toilets, I also explored what teaching-learning materials were available for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. In this regard the school head pulled out a file which he referred to as an inventory of teaching-learning equipment for each class in the school. From this inventory he read out the following list of teaching-learning materials for grade zero/e.c.e:

- 10 picture reading books (previously used during pre-formal learning for the first 6 weeks at grade 1 level)
- 78 drawing books
- 6 boxes of crayons
- 1 ream newsprint
- 78 pencils.

Asked whether the above teaching-learning materials were enough, the school head acknowledged that they were not adequate. He then directed me to the teacher-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teacher if I wanted to know how much would be adequate and appropriate teaching-learning materials for grade zero/e.c.e. One observation that can be made about Westridge grade zero/e.c.e. teaching-learning materials is that they are grossly inadequate. This is evidenced by the seventy eight grade zero/e.c.e. pupils who have to share ten picture reading books. In addition to this, the head's inventory showed that the school did not have climbing ladders, swings, seesaws, ropes or even plastic balls for use by e.c.e. learners. Verification by me however revealed that ropes and plastic balls were available in the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom. If it is acknowledged that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils learn through play then Westridge School still has a long way to go with respect to providing appropriate indoor and outdoor teaching/learning materials for this category of learners.

Availability of financial resources is a key factor in programme implementation. Every year the Ministry of Education gets a budget allocation from treasury for infrastructure development, salaries and buying teaching/learning resources. Of late it would seem that very little money from the fiscus gets to schools hence they tend to rely on fees and levies paid by pupils.
Asked whether the school has a budget set aside for the grade zero/e.c.e. programme, this is what the head had to say:

There is no specific budget for grade zero/e.c.e. Umm, but like all other pupils at school, grade zero learners pay fees and levies. This money caters for the general recurrent expenditure items like paying water bills, electricity and rates. We also pay ancillary staff from this money. All renovations at school are done using this money. The amount left is then shared by the Finance Committee, among all school departments, including grade zero/e.c.e.
(Interview; September 2010).

Probed on what teaching/learning materials have been bought for grade zero/e.c.e. learners from the 2010 school budget, the head indicated that drawing books, boxes of crayons, newsprint and pencils had been bought. What seems evident from the preceding responses is that it would appear that grade zero/e.c.e. is not accorded preferential treatment, as a new innovation, in the school's budgetary allocations.

Turning to the issue of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers’ state of preparedness for the innovation I asked the school head about the qualifications and level of teaching experience of these teachers. The school head smiled and then said:

If you had come in 2008 you could have found two paraprofessionals teaching our grade zero/e.c.e. classes. I then lobbied the district office for two qualified teachers and we got these at the beginning of 2009. One of the two teachers holds a degree in early childhood education and the other holds a diploma in early childhood education. They are very knowledgeable about early childhood education. In fact, the teacher-in-charge and I learn a lot from the two teachers. As for teaching experience, this is their second year in the service.
(Interview, September 2010).

It has been indicated in chapter 2 that Burchfield (2006:4) asserts that grade zero/early childhood education teachers should:

• have studied theoretical principles of child development
be able to develop practices and programmes that are developmentally appropriate for young children, and

be able to develop a plan for the transition of children from kindergarten to primary school programmes.

Westridge Primary School had such teachers as part of the school establishment. As a professional who has been in teacher education for the past 29 years, I can vouch for the early childhood education programme in teachers' colleges and universities in Zimbabwe. It does provide graduands from these institutions with a sound theoretical and practical basis for effectively handling grade zero/e.c.e. classes.

An interesting observation can be made about Westridge grade zero/e.c.e. teachers' number of years in teaching. At the time of conducting this study the two grade zero/e.c.e. teachers were in their second year of teaching. Taylor (2004) asserts that children learn more from experienced teachers than they do from less experienced ones. At Westridge School grade zero/e.c.e. teachers cannot be said to be experienced. The two teachers are the first crop from a newly installed early childhood education teacher education programme and, as the school head observes, both the teacher-in-charge and him were learning a lot from these grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. The preceding description provides an indication of the state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Westridge School from 2009. As indicated earlier the grade zero/e.c.e. programme was implemented at this school from January 2007. At that time paraprofessionals taught grade zero/e.c.e. classes. This suggests that there was a time when Westridge School did not have appropriately qualified teachers for grade zero/e.c.e. classes.

The availability of clear, adequate and useful teacher support systems in a school is one indication that a school is ready to implement new curriculum innovations. In order to establish what grade zero/e.c.e. teacher support systems are available at Westridge School I posed the following question to the school head: “What forms of support are provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at your school?” This is how he responded:
At this school we make an attempt to support grade zero/e.c.e. teachers because we realise that what they are doing is something new. To begin with, we invite parents for consultation meetings. They come to discuss grade zero/e.c.e. issues. We also buy teaching/learning materials early childhood education teachers and learners use in their lessons. And as I said earlier, as school administration we allow grade zero/e.c.e. teachers to attend workshops managed by the district office. The teacher-in-charge also gives them feedback after lesson observation. (Interview, September 2010).

From the head's response parental involvement, supplying teaching/learning resources, facilitating attendance of workshops and teacher supervision are the ways in which Westridge School grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are supported. Further probing with special focus on each identified support system, revealed that parents attend general consultation meetings which deal with issues that affect the whole school. In fact, the school head pointed out that the only time parents of grade zero/e.c.e. learners attended a meeting focussing only on issues that affect early childhood education was in August 2010. The business of the meeting was to prepare for a graduation ceremony of grade zero/e.c.e. learners who were going to become grade 1 pupils in 2011. An analysis of the minutes of general consultation meetings and the grade zero/e.c.e. specific meeting revealed that no critical grade zero/e.c.e. issues were raised. From the foregoing it is clear that parental involvement in grade zero/e.c.e. was inadequate and not very useful.

In response to my request for elaboration on his claim that the school buys teaching/learning materials for grade zero/e.c.e. teachers, the head observed that to date a negligible number of grade zero/e.c.e. parents have paid fees and levies and so the school uses money paid by pupils from other grades to procure teaching/learning resources. As a result of this arrangement grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are provided with newsprint, pencils, drawing books and crayons to support their teaching. The school head wished he could do more but, according to him, “most grade zero/e.c.e. pupils come from low socio-economic backgrounds hence they are not able to pay fees and levies on time.” The school head further indicated that he had submitted an application to two non-governmental organisations requesting donations to buy grade zero/e.c.e. teaching/learning materials. He was
hopeful that he would get a positive response by the beginning of 2011. What is, however, evident is that, for now, Westridge School is not able to provide meaningful teaching/learning resources as a way of supporting grade zero/e.c.e. teachers.

The head also identified facilitating grade zero/e.c.e. teachers’ attendance of workshops as one way in which the school supports them. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the school head is not even aware of the topics discussed at workshops attended by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. One would have thought that the school head would be interested in topics covered at such workshops so that follow up school based staff development sessions on grade zero/e.c.e. could be mounted. Rivkin et al. (1998) argue that such staff development sessions usually build professional communities committed to promoting student learning. An analysis of school records on workshops held and attended did not show any such staff development sessions having been held at Westridge School.

Another form of teacher-support identified by the school head is teacher supervision. Observations made by Botha (2004) identify supervision as one regular duty of a primary school head (see chapter 2). In the context of this school, the head seems to have delegated this responsibility to the teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.). Probed on what the T.I.C. looks for when supervising grade zero/e.c.e. teachers, the school head opined:

Like any other supervisor the T.I.C. supervises children's written work, classroom appearance, records of work, teaching effectiveness and many other aspects of teaching. But to be clear about what the T.I.C. does, umm, perhaps you should find out from her. She has been in that position for more than fifteen years. (Interview; September 2010).

The preceding response portrays a school head who seems not to be aware of the distinction between formal school teaching and the teaching that occurs at grade zero/e.c.e. level. For instance there are unique and key grade zero/e.c.e. features like the use of play as a method of teaching and learning as well as the need for numerous play objects to interact with which he could have cited. The school head, sensing that he was out of depth on supervision expectations at this level pushed the
responsibility, for explaining these expectations, to the T.I.C. He justifies this decision by suggesting that, because the T.I.C. has been in the post for more than fifteen years, she should be able to articulate supervision expectations at grade zero/e.c.e. level. As indicated earlier, at this school grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced in 2007. This suggests that for eleven years the T.I.C. was supervising grades 1 and 2 teachers. What one may infer from the school head's response is that he was either not sure or not aware of how grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are supported through teacher supervision at Westridge School.

One of the questions that this study sought to investigate in a bid to establish the school's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. is how teachers assess the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. Acknowledging that the concept teaching is broad, I encouraged the school head to focus on broad issues in his response. The school head's answer highlighted the following:

- grade zero/e.c.e. teachers use the 1999 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) syllabus to prepare schemes of work and lesson plans
- early childhood education lessons begin at 8.00a.m. and end at 12 noon. and
- grade zero/e.c.e. classes are large with a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40, therefore providing adequate teaching-learning materials is a challenge.

Highlighting the existence of a syllabus reflects that grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is based on some agreed upon curriculum guidelines. What is however interesting is that, while grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced in Zimbabwean primary schools in 2006, the syllabus document in use at Westridge School was produced in 1999. To further probing on why the school does not have a current syllabus the school head responded thus:

The introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. was more of an announcement than the start of a real programme meant to transform the Zimbabwean education system. As a result of this so many things need to be put in place before we can talk of schools, including the Ministry of Education itself…being ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The syllabus we are currently using was developed for use by unqualified officials in the Ministry of Cooperatives and Community Development. (Interview, September 2010).
Going by the school head's observations Westridge School is using a syllabus that is not consistent with the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommendations which “gave birth” to the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. in primary schools. The school head's comment that grade zero/e.c.e. lessons begin at 8.00 a.m. ending at 12 noon indicates that teaching at this level is time tabled. This is consistent with observations made by Click (2004) that quality teaching at the early childhood education level should be systematic. The school head, in this respect, explained that the T.I.C. draws up the grade zero/e.c.e. time table. Attempts to establish how the time table looks like were not entertained by the school head who referred all questions on this aspect of teaching grade zero/e.c.e. to the T.I.C. He was, however, more forthcoming on the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher-pupil ratio which stands at 1:40. He was of the view that grade zero/e.c.e. classes at Westridge were too large to allow meaningful learning to take place. According to him these large classes make it even more difficult for the school administration to provide adequate teaching-learning resources for grade zero/e.c.e. learners.

This section of the study has explored the school head's perceptions/views on Westridge's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. What is evident from this exploration is that the school is ready for grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to level of academic and professional qualifications of the current crop of teachers. It does, however, appear from the school head's account that Westridge still has a lot that requires to be done with respect to availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources, and putting in place adequate and effective teacher support systems as well as improving the quality of teaching and learning at the e.c.e. level. In the next section, I explore the T.I.C.'s perceptions/views on Westridge's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

### 4.2.2 Teacher-in-charge's (T.I.C.) perceptions on school's state of readiness

My second interview at Westridge school was with the teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.). I begin this section by providing a brief portrayal of who this teacher-in-charge is. Data from the questionnaire reveals the T.I.C. as a fifty eight year old female whose home language is Ndebele. She holds a T4 certificate and a diploma in education.
At T4 she specialised in teaching infant grades, namely, grades 1 and 2. Her diploma was a general primary education course. She has taught at infant level for over thirty years and has been a T.I.C. at Westridge School for the last fifteen years.

Before the interview I asked the T.I.C. to suggest a language that she was comfortable with in the interview. She indicated that she was going to use English and Ndebele. As it turned out in the interview, the T.I.C. by and large used English and instead of reverting to Ndebele, her home language, she used Shona. Asked why she did not use Ndebele as originally suggested, she pointed out that from the days I taught her while doing an in-service Diploma in Education in the 1990s, she knew that I was not very good at Ndebele hence her choice to revert to Shona which is my home language. I translated all extracts where Shona was used into English.

Turning to the interview I inquired how she came to know about the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. and how teachers-in-charge were prepared for this innovation. In response she remarked that:

The school head called for an urgent staff meeting in October 2005. In this meeting he read out a Ministry of Education circular that required schools to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. in 2006. The head told the meeting that grade zero/e.c.e. will be supervised by the T.I.C. As for the preparation that I got, what I can only say is that after the head's announcement not much happened. It was only in 2008 that I was invited to attend a workshop on how to administer grade zero/e.c.e. classes. I then attended another workshop in 2010 but I can't remember the actual dates. (Interview, September 2010).

What is evident from the above response is that the T.I.C. came to know about the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. through a circular. That between 2008 and 2010 only two workshops were held does not reflect thorough preparation of the T.I.C. for supervising grade zero/e.c.e. Probed on the topics that were addressed during the workshop, the T.I.C. identified the following:

• administration of grade zero/e.c.e. classes
• resources for early childhood education
• methods of teaching
• role of play, and
• discipline in grade zero/e.c.e. classes.

While the T.I.C. acknowledged that these were critical topics on early childhood education, she however bemoaned the time set aside to cover the above topics. For instance, the two workshops she attended were supposed to be full day workshops but ended up being half day workshops. This, according to her, resulted in presenters rushing through the topics without affording the participants hands-on experience and time to discuss issues. As she later pointed out “People of my age need to go through the topics slowly so that we understand.” Comments of this nature do reflect that the T.I.C. was not adequately prepared, through these workshops, for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

Our next focus in the interview was the availability of appropriate resources. To narrow the focus I asked the T.I.C. to comment on the availability of classrooms, furniture and toilets. Her response was:

At this school we do not have grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms. Currently we use the Music room as the base for the two classes and because of this arrangement, grade zero/e.c.e. teachers have complained bitterly. At one point they found all the plastic balls missing. As for furniture, except for the few benches and chairs used by very few learners there isn't much to talk about. At the moment grade zero/e.c.e. pupils use grades 1 and 2 toilets. That is our arrangement at this school. (Interview, September 2010).

Comments by the T.I.C. confirmed what the school head had reported on in my earlier interview with him, namely, that grade zero/e.c.e. learners do not have their own classrooms, have limited inappropriate furniture and that there are no special toilets for these learners. She, however, raises an important consequence of sharing classrooms, namely, theft of plastic balls. This directly affects the teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. learners since they learn through games and play. This latter aspect will be further discussed under the section on quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. Just like I had done for classrooms, furniture and toilets, I asked the T.I.C. to
comment on availability of grade zero/e.c.e. teaching-learning resources at Westridge School. She made the following comments:

This is our biggest worry because we do not have teaching/learning materials to talk about. We need indoor materials like picture reading books, charts, newsprint, crayons, hoops and drawing books. We need an early childhood education kit…other schools already have it but we don't. We need outdoor teaching/learning materials like the play centre. Without a play centre you can't be said to be teaching grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. At the moment this school does not have a play centre.  
(Interview, September 2010).

From the T.I.C.'s comments, Westridge Primary School does not seem to have any meaningful teaching/learning resources. My own observations, using a checklist on available resources, showed that both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning materials were very thin on the ground. What was more telling was the absence of a play centre with swings, slides, ladders and seesaws. As the T.I.C. observed, Westridge school cannot be said to be effectively teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners without a play centre. Consequently, the school cannot be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources.

The T.I.C. was however full of praise for grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Westridge. According to her the two teachers were highly qualified and knowledgeable. As stated earlier, one teacher holds a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and the other holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The T.I.C. characterised these teachers in the following manner:

• are good role models for learners
• work cooperatively with other members of staff as well as parents
• are patient and encourage children to accomplish tasks independently
• are hard working and resourceful, and
• have a sound subject mastery.
It would appear that, given the above attributes, Westridge School was ready for the introduction of this innovation with respect to state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers.

In response to the question, “What forms of support are provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Westridge?” the T.I.C. said:

As you are aware, I did not train as a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher so most of the time grade zero/e.c.e. teachers try to support me to understand how they operate. On my part, I supervise twice a term and inspect pupils' work fortnightly. After supervision I discuss my observations with each grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. This is the time I make observations on general teaching procedures. Furthermore, I ask the teachers to justify their teaching approaches for my benefit. As a member of the school Finance Committee I table requests for grade zero/e.c.e. teaching/learning materials and other needs. I may not be succeeding but I try my best.

(Interview; September 2010).

The T.I.C. acknowledges that she is not sufficiently grounded in the theory and practice of early childhood education hence every time she supervises teachers she looks for ways in which she can benefit. Discussing lesson observations is a useful form of support for grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Hord (1995) asserts that, support on its own cannot bring about significant change in teachers' practice, hence the need for pressure. In the context of this study supervision is thus the pressure used by the T.I.C. In support of this approach Hyson (2004) argues that effective supervisors visit classrooms often to lend support, and provide pressure as they are discovering what is happening in the classrooms. In addition to this, the T.I.C. also raises the issue of tabling requests for early childhood education material resources in the Finance Committee meetings. While it is, in theory, a useful form of support, it has not started to bear fruits at Westridge Primary School.

One other aspect this study sought to investigate was the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. Before interrogating this issue I asked the T.I.C. to focus on broad issues. The T.I.C.’s response covered the following:

• teaching is based on a syllabus
• grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is time tabled
• grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught through play, and
• we assess learners and keep records after teaching.

Asked on whether the school has enough syllabus copies the T.I.C. indicated that only one 1999 Early Childhood Education and Care (E.C.E.C) syllabus copy was available at Westridge School. As a result grade zero/e.c.e. teachers scheme and plan together. With respect to time tabling arrangements, a copy of the grade zero/e.c.e. time table I was shown by the T.I.C. is hereby reproduced with the school's permission.

**Table 4: Westridge School Early Childhood Education Time table – Term 3, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Table</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival Time</td>
<td>07.00 - 08.00a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle Time</td>
<td>08.00 - 08.30a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First teacher directed activity</td>
<td>08.30 - 08.45a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet routine</td>
<td>08.45 - 09.00a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second teacher directed activity</td>
<td>09.00 - 09.15a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>09.15 - 09.45a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>09.45 - 11.30a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet routine</td>
<td>11.30 - 11.45a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing and Cleaning</td>
<td>11.45 - 11.55a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer and dismissal</td>
<td>11.55 - 12.00 noon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: School records 2010).

Clearly, time tabling early childhood education lessons/activities makes for order at this level of the primary school. According to the T.I.C., the above time table was produced at a workshop for all primary schools to use. She added that “This is the time table you will see as you visit each primary school.” As I continued with field work, I indeed observed that this is the time table schools were using for their grade zero/e.c.e. programmes.
On assessment and record keeping the T.I.C. openly professed that she still requires to learn (from grade zero/e.c.e. teachers) how these are done. For now the T.I.C. has not yet looked at grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's records. According to her, “This is one area that we need to be workshopped on.” The T.I.C., however, pointed out the important role of play in the teaching/learning process. In her view while grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are currently using play in their lessons, this could further be enhanced by a healthy supply of appropriate teaching/learning resources.

From the T.I.C.’s views/perceptions on Westridge school's state of readiness, it would appear that apart from availability of qualified teachers and appropriate teacher support, there is need for the school to address a range of challenges before it can be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. In the next section I explore the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's views/perceptions on Westridge's state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation.

4.2.3 Grade zero/ece teacher's perceptions on school's state of readiness

My third interview at Westridge School was with the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. I had two qualified teachers to choose from. I could have interviewed both but that could have meant a class of seventy eight pupils going for about an hour without a teacher. Consistent with avoiding disrupting school activities I settled for the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education holder. Before exploring the teacher's perceptions on Westridge School's state of readiness I begin this section by providing information on who this grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is. Biographical data from the questionnaire depict the teacher as a twenty five year old female whose home language is Shona. Her first teaching post after completing from university was Westridge School. She has taught grade zero/e.c.e. since January 2009.

To set the interview into motion I asked the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher the following question: “In the light of what you are currently experiencing in the classroom, do you think that your university training enables you to handle teaching and learning at this level of the primary school?” The teacher responded by indicating that, while she had been adequately exposed to principles of child development, theories of
learning, theories of motivation and how to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners, there are some issues of a practical and ethical nature whose answers she currently does not have. For example, she cited cases where parents who belong to the Apostolic religious sect, on two occasions, decided to withdraw their grade zero/e.c.e. pupils from school on Thursdays and Fridays because of a national church conference they had to attend. At the time of conducting this study the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher had not yet come up with ways of dealing with this challenge.

She did not, however, display the same level of confidence and enthusiasm (as was the case when responding to the preparation she got from her university education) when it came to availability of appropriate resources. Asked to comment on the adequacy of resources for teaching grade zero/e.c.e., this is what she had to say:

> While at university our lecturers used to tell us that the schools we will be deployed to after completing the degree, will have no resources for teaching grade zero/e.c.e. We were therefore asked to make lots of and a variety of teaching/learning resources. When I was posted to this school I brought three cardboard boxes full of teaching/learning resources. What do I find ...that there is no classroom for the e.c.e. class, that there are ten benches and two chairs in the Music classroom where we are squatting. I do have a lot of indoor teaching/learning resources but there is no space to display them. (Interview, September 2010).

University education had mentally prepared the teacher for schools with little or no teaching/learning resources. From the teacher's response she expected, at least, a classroom to be set aside for the grade zero/e.c.e. class. She expected to display all the teaching/learning resources she had prepared while at university for the benefit of her learners. The above observation points to a situation where the teacher is ready for early childhood education but the school is not. The school does not have early childhood education classrooms, and does not have not only adequate but also appropriate furniture for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Practical observations by the researcher, using a checklist on resources available for grade zero/e.c.e. learners, confirmed the teacher's observations on the inadequacy of the identified resources.
The next resource that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher focussed on is the play centre. Westridge School does not have a play centre. All activities that should be taught at such a centre have been put on hold. Davin and Van Staden (2004) argue that children need equipment for crawling through, climbing up, balancing on, jumping, swinging and sliding. Westridge Primary School does not have a play centre with such equipment. According to the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher the situation was so desperate that she had asked the T.I.C. to place the issue of a play centre as an item of the agenda at the next parents-teacher association meeting. The teacher has also asked to be given an opportunity to address parents during the planned meeting, on how they can assist in putting up a play centre at Westridge School. The teacher indicated that most, if not all, the teaching at grade zero/e.c.e. is done through play hence the unavailability of such a centre is a great handicap to implementing the grade zero/e.c.e. programme successfully.

Turning to adequacy and usefulness of support the teacher observed that given the low financial resources raised by the school she very much appreciated the sponsorship she received from the school administration whenever she attended a workshop. On the one occasion that she had attended a workshop, the school administration had provided her with money for transport and refreshments. In acknowledgement of this support she said:

> Some school heads will ask a teacher to pay from his/her pocket for attending such workshops. I am really grateful for this support because during the workshop we discussed such key issues like role of play in grade zero/e.c.e., discipline in early childhood education, teaching resources for grade zero/e.c.e. and how to motivate grade zero/e.c.e. learners.  
> (Interview, September 2010).

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher also identified supervision as a form of support she receives from the T.I.C. She indicated that even though she holds a degree in early childhood education, she has just recently joined the teaching profession. According to the teacher, the T.I.C.’s long experience in teaching enabled her to guide grade zero/e.c.e. teachers on issues that a novice would find difficult to unravel. While acknowledging that the T.I.C. discusses lesson observations with her, the teacher
claims that by explaining some procedures to the T.I.C. she clarifies some issues that were originally unclear to her. This indeed enhances the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's understanding of teaching procedures at this level of the primary school.

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher also raised the issue of possible support from Non-governmental organisations (N.G.O.s). In this regard she recounted how she contacted two N.G.O.s. She developed a project proposal requesting financial and material assistance for the grade zero/e.c.e. programme at Westridge school. She was however asked to submit the applications through the school head. These are the applications referred to by the head in the section under the school head's perceptions on the school's state of readiness. At the time of conducting this study results of the two applications had not yet been received by the school.

One key issue this study sought to investigate was the quality of teaching and learning at the e.c.e. level. In her response the teacher outlined the following:

- grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught through play
- grade zero/e.c.e. teaching depends on availability of resources
- grade zero/e.c.e. teachers use a syllabus as a basis for teaching
- grade zero/e.c.e. should be individualised, and
- there is need to monitor pupils' performance regularly as part of teaching.

The teacher then described each of the identified aspects in the context of teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners at Westridge School. According to her all lessons prepared for Westridge grade zero/e.c.e. learners include, as much as possible, teaching, listening, looking, smelling and moving. As Catron and Allan (2003) observed, discovery of how things work, of how to manage feelings and relationships, and developing concepts about the world around them, are all part of the active process of learning. Learning through play depends largely on the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources. With respect to this school the teacher said, “While I have sufficient indoor teaching and learning resources, the same cannot be said about outdoor resources. Teaching grade zero/e.c.e. at this school is negatively affected by lack of outdoor resources.”
On syllabus expectations the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher pointed out that her scheming and lesson planning is based on the E.C.E.C. syllabus produced by the Ministry of Education. According to the teacher although the syllabus is old, steps have been taken to produce a new document which takes into account new early childhood education expectations. She indicated that there were some teachers (at Westridge School) who were surprised to discover that early childhood education teachers produced schemes and lesson plans. These teachers, in the view of the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher, thought that teaching at that level of the primary school merely involved 'baby sitting'. To correct such perceptions the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher highlighted that she invited some upper grade teachers to come and observe lessons at the early childhood education level. It is during such lessons that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher demonstrated how to individualise teaching. The teacher however remarked that a class of not more than twenty pupils enables proper individualisation of teaching. These remarks were made as a way of indicating that the class of seventy eight pupils she had taught was not the ideal if individualisation should be fully realised.

Teachers from upper grades were also shown records of pupils' performance for each grade zero/e.c.e. pupil. Practical verification by me revealed that a folder is opened for each grade zero/ece pupil. In this folder, which they label a portfolio, there are indications of what the child was able to do and what the child was not able to do - when - as well as the suggested remedial action. The quality of teaching and learning at this school is thus enhanced through such meticulous record keeping and assessment procedures.

Going by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's perceptions/views, Westridge School has well trained teachers who, under the current circumstances, can be said to be teaching fairly effectively. Westridge early childhood education teachers also seem to be sufficiently supported by the school administration with respect to workshop attendance. Parents, who pay fees and levies, seem not to be fully supporting teachers, particularly with respect to putting up a play centre. Lack of classrooms and furniture as well as inadequate teaching/learning resources do not portray Westridge School as an institution ready to introduce and effectively implement grade zero/early childhood education.
4.3 ST. COLUMBUS SCHOOL

Established in 1966, this church run primary school is situated in the western high density area of Gweru. The school is church run in the sense that its responsible authority is the Catholic Diocese of Gweru. Decisions about the affairs of the school fall under a secretary of education appointed by the church. The church can veto the appointment of teachers (by the government district education office) who belong to other denominations other than theirs. In addition to church rules, teachers in this school are also governed by Public Service regulations. Teachers operating in this school are paid by the Ministry of Education.

St Columbus (pseudonym) is located in a township inhabited by low income workers. It has an administration block which houses the head's office, the deputy head's office, a staffroom and a reception office which doubles up as a bursar's office. The receptionist collects and receipts all fees and levies paid by all school children, including grade zero/e.c.e. learners. The T.I.C. occupies a storeroom cum office attached to the infant section of the school.

The school enrols three classes for each grade level from grades 1 to 7. It has twenty one classrooms for grades 1 to 7, one classroom for Home Economics, one classroom for Music and one chapel. The current school enrolment stands at one thousand five hundred including grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. On their own, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils number 100 and are divided into four classes. They are taught by four teachers whose composition is as follows: three qualified teachers and one paraprofessional. Each class has twenty five pupils. The four e.c.e. classes take turns to use the one Home Economics classroom that has been made available for this group of learners. St Columbus’ staff establishment stands at 26. It is against this background and other contextual factors that I explore the perceptions of key participants on the school's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.
4.3.1 School head's perceptions on state of readiness

I begin this section by providing information on who the school head is. Biographical data from the questionnaire depict the head as a fifty eight year old male whose home language is Shona. He holds a Bachelor of Education in Policy Studies. He has taught for over thirty years in the primary school rising to the position of substantive school head in 1995. The head did not specialise in early childhood education.

To gather the school head's perceptions, I relied principally on a semi-structured interviews complemented by observations, document analysis and information from diaries. The interview was conducted in the head's office. Particularly pleasing and refreshing is that the head instructed the receptionist not to allow any visitors to disturb the interview. All visitors were to be directed to the deputy head's office. The school head also asked the receptionist to direct all telephone calls to the deputy head. As a result of these arrangements, the interview was hassle free. In addition to this, the head proposed that he would use English throughout the interview.

Responding to the question: “How would you describe the state of grade zero/e.c.e. at this school?” the head pointed out that early childhood education was a new programme introduced by the Ministry of Education in all primary schools. According to him, the programme was introduced at St Columbus in 2006 in line with the Ministry of Education directive. According to him:

The D.E.O. invited all school heads to a meeting where a circular on the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. was read out. I think that was in 2004, I am not quite sure now of the exact year and date. What I can say about this programme is that we have made a start. In 2006 we started off with two classes. The Ministry of Education asked the School Development Association to hire its own teachers. We hired two 'O' level holders to teach grade zero/e.c.e. We were also asked to pay these paraprofessionals through fees and levies. We now have four grade zero/e.c.e. classes whose total enrolment is getting slightly above 100 ...112 to be exact. We have three qualified teachers paid by the Ministry of Education and one paraprofessional paid by the School Development Association. The four classes use the Home Economics room as their classroom. (Interview, October 2010).
The above picture portrays steps taken by St Columbus School to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. The school started off with hiring their own ‘teachers’ paid by the School Development Association through fees and levies and developed to the current position where three of their four teachers are paid by the Ministry of Education. From this initial presentation by the head, St Columbus School has no classrooms for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. This point will be discussed later under availability of appropriate resources. Probed on how school heads were prepared for the introduction of this innovation, the head indicated that other than the announcement made in the meeting with the D.E.O., there were no other ways through which school heads were prepared for grade zero/e.c.e. In his own words, “we wonder how we are expected to supervise the additional classes when we, ourselves, do not know how to handle these additional classes.” The school head, however, acknowledged that the T.I.C. and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers had workshops arranged for them by the District Education Office between 2008 and 2010. He however queried the timing of the workshops. In his view such workshops should have been held well before the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. in schools.

Asked to comment on the availability of appropriate resources for teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners, the school head had this to say:

Originally this had been and in many respects continues to be our greatest worry at this school. Firstly, our financial resources are limited because not all parents pay fees and levies on time. Secondly, we do not have classrooms for e.c.e …umm they are a resource. We have not put up a play centre but we do have state of the art toilets for e.c.e pupils. As for other teaching/learning resources or materials, the responsible authority has bought enough picture reading books for English and Mathematics, four learning kits produced by Longmans, enough manila, magic markers, crayons and newsprint for grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. I am sure the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teachers will show you the indoor teaching/learning resources we have. As for classrooms we have been promised all roofing materials (by the responsible authority) if only we can put up the classroom block. To date the builders have dug out the foundation. (Interview, October 2010).
The extract above makes it clear that the school is working hard to ensure that the institutionalisation of grade zero/e.c.e. can be realised in the short to medium term. To encourage parents to pay fees and levies St Columbus School sends home pupils who have not paid so that they miss lessons. This is done towards the end of the month. According to the school head, parents do pay part of the fees and levies so that their children can be admitted back to school. Although currently grade zero/e.c.e. pupils do not have classrooms of their own the school has taken tangible steps to ensure that classrooms will soon be available. Site observations I made confirmed that indeed a foundation had been dug out, and indeed a state of the art grade zero/e.c.e. toilet, that is kept neatly, is in place. Responding to what steps the school is taking with respect to putting up a play centre, the school head showed me a plan that has been developed for such a centre. He further gave me access to minutes of a School Development Association meeting held in April 2010 detailing a time line by which such a centre will have been put up. In those minutes the parents agreed to pay, though in instalments, towards the installation of a play centre. In addition, that the responsible authority has secured indoor teaching/learning materials is indeed a sign that, with respect to this type of resource, St Columbus School is ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

Besides resources Beaty (2000) observes that the teacher is one of the most important single factors in determining what school experience will be like for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Thus an examination of the early childhood education teacher’s state of preparedness will shed light on the school’s state of readiness with respect to this dimension. Asked to comment on teacher qualifications, teaching experience and other characteristics displayed by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at St Columbus school, the head said:

The three qualified lady teachers are holders of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education acquired in 2008. They joined this school in January 2009. The one paraprofessional teacher, who is also a lady, has been at this school since 2006. In fact, I call her the pioneer of the programme. She has four “O” level subjects and has recently commenced on a bridging programme at one teacher’s college. A bridging programme is an arrangement where students who do not have five 'O' level subjects, including Mathematics, supplement this deficiency at a teachers' college during the school holidays. College lecturers teach these students so that after passing the required
number of subjects the student is enrolled for a diploma in education course. Our paraprofessional just requires one additional subject. Turning to other characteristics displayed by these teachers I want to say that they are hard working, understanding and patient. You know grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are difficult to work with but these teachers find joy in working with them. (Interview, October 2010).

The characterisation of St Columbus grade zero/e.c.e. teachers by the school head is consistent with Read, Gardner, and Mahler’s (2003) observation that a teacher of young children must enjoy being with them. Such teachers, according to Meier and Marais (2007:73) should:

- be nurturing towards children
- be patient and encourage children to accomplish tasks independently, and
- allow children to learn through play at their own individual pace.

While the three qualified teachers do not have extensive teaching experience it would appear, from the school head’s comment, that they enjoy teaching grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. The paraprofessional has been at St Columbus since the inception of early childhood education. Asked to describe her performance the head avoided answering the question and instead remarked that the School Development Association (S.D.A.) is pleased with her work. Characterising the paraprofessional in the same manner as the qualified teachers may perhaps have been an attempt by the school head to justify the teacher’s prolonged engagement by the S.D.A. What is, however, evident is that although the paraprofessional had no formal early childhood education qualifications, she had five years of teaching experience.

Responding to one aspect on availability of appropriate resources in an earlier section of this study, reference was made to the steps parents at St Columbus School are taking to construct a play centre. By agreeing to pay fees and levies in instalments towards the construction of a play centre, parents are financially supporting grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at this school. The availability of adequate and clear support systems, in a school, is one clear indication that the school is ready to
implement both existing and new programmes. Asked to describe forms of support provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers, the head had this to say:

Grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at this school are supported in a number of ways. The responsible authority provides them with teaching/learning resources. The T.I.C. works closely with them on items that require coordination with agencies outside the school. Right now I am told that UNICEF was approached by the T.I.C. with a request for more grade zero/e.c.e. teaching/learning materials. In addition to this whenever workshops are arranged by the district education office we encourage at least three of our teachers to attend at a time. Besides, the T.I.C. supports grade zero/e.c.e. teachers by supervising them. As a school we have facilitated grade zero/e.c.e. teachers' visits to other schools. We wanted them to see what other schools are doing with respect to early childhood education. After their visits we got feedback and identified areas and items for immediate implementation. Those items we cannot implement now have been placed on the school's diary of projects to be completed by 2012. You can come forward and look at this project diary displayed on the notice board. (Interview, October 2010).

From the head's comments one can deduce that provision of teaching/learning resources by the responsible authority, linkages with N.G.O.s like UNICEF, parental involvement in the early childhood programmes, encouraging early childhood education teachers to attend workshops, supervision of early childhood education teachers by the T.I.C. and arranging visits by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers to other primary schools are, from the head's point of view, the forms of support predominantly employed at St Columbus School. The last identified form of support (facilitating visits to other primary schools) shows that St Columbus School has ventured, though in a small way, into the area of teacher collaboration. Fullan (2010) observes that, in general, teachers work in isolation and so do not have time to share ideas with colleagues from other classes, let alone from other schools. That St Columbus has implemented this teacher support strategy is a sign of a high degree of commitment by both the school administration and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers with respect to the implementation of this innovation. If this practice continues to be implemented, it could form a basis for the development of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers professional communities in Gweru district.
One research question this study sought to investigate focussed on the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. In this regard I asked the school head to describe what happens in grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms at St Columbus School. The head reminded me that he had not been trained as a grade zero/e.c.e. specialist, consequently he was going to provide me with a response of a general nature. His response was:

At this school grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught using a syllabus developed in 1999. In fact, it is an Early Childhood Education and Care (E.C.E.C) syllabus. As we all know the syllabus was developed for pre-schools as independent units and not for use with the new programme. Secondly, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught through games and play. Yes, we do not have a play centre but as I have said before, that is why we convinced parents to provide the school with a documented fees and levies payment plan. Like all other classes, lessons at early childhood education are time tabled. In addition, teaching progress is constantly monitored. I am also told that early childhood education teachers have comprehensive records on pupils' performance. I have however not seen the records as teacher supervision at that level is the responsibility of the T.I.C.

(Interview, October 2010).

Comments by the head are consistent with his earlier remarks that he did not specialise in early childhood education. According to him, teacher supervision at that level is done by the T.I.C. Notwithstanding the above, it is important to observe that the school head is aware that the syllabus in use was developed for a programme different from the current grade zero/e.c.e. In addition, grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is regulated through time tabling and is also monitored. The head is satisfied that grade zero/e.c.e. learners are being taught effectively in the current circumstances. On the whole the school head's comments portray a school consciously seized with ensuring that grade zero/e.c.e. can become fully integrated in the school system.

4.3.2 Teacher-in-charge’s perceptions on state of readiness

Biographical data from the questionnaire depict the T.I.C. as a forty-four year old female whose home language is Shona. She is a Roman Catholic nun. She holds a Diploma in Infant Education hence she specialised in teaching grades 1 and 2. She
has taught at the infant level for over twenty years. She was appointed T.I.C. in 2001. She has been at St Columbus since 2003.

After determining the language we were going to use (in this case English), I asked the T.I.C. to comment on how the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. was communicated to her as well as how she was prepared for this innovation. She responded thus:

Sometime in 2005 the head invited me to his office. When I got there he gave me a document from the Ministry of Education to read. The document spelt out that grade zero/e.c.e. was to be introduced in all primary schools with effect from 2006 and that the T.I.C. will be in charge of the new programme. I asked the head how the programme was to be implemented but he only gave me a copy of the Ministry of Education circular and asked me to go and study it while thinking about how the programme will be introduced at this school. The following week I visited the Dominican Convent Nursery School to find out how they were running their programmes. As for preparing me for the introduction of the programme, two workshops were mounted between 2008 and 2010. I was able to attend only one of them. (Interview, October 2010).

The T.I.C. came to know about the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. through a circular she got from the school head. The implications of this circular, according to her, were however not explained by the school head. In the section on the school head's perceptions, I pointed out that no explanation was given to the head by the D.E.O. One is left with no option but to surmise that both the D.E.O. and the school head were not clear of how this innovation would be rolled out at school level. Interested to know how grade zero/e.c.e. might be introduced the T.I.C. decided to find out how another sister church institution was running its programme. Asked about what she learnt from her visit to the Dominican Convent Nursery School, the T.I.C. recounted that she collected information on the organogram of the nursery school, how children were taught, materials used to teach nursery school pupils and the set-up of indoor and outdoor play areas. She indicated that she made arrangements allowing her to visit the nursery school regularly for more information. Such proactive behaviour by the T.I.C. shows that she was eager to ensure that grade zero/e.c.e. is introduced with minimum hitches at St Columbus School.
Turning to how she was prepared for the introduction of this innovation, the T.I.C. cited two workshops that were held. She attended one of these workshops. Responding to a question on how useful the workshop she attended was in preparing her for grade zero/e.c.e., she was of the view that the workshop focused on useful topics such as:

- administration of grade zero/e.c.e. classes
- discipline in e.c.e. classes
- use of play, and
- resources used in e.c.e. classes.

Notwithstanding the above observation, she complained about the quality of the presentations made during the workshop. In her view some presenters seemed not to know what they were doing; as a result they just rushed through their topics so much that a full day workshop was completed in half the time. She also complained about the lack of practical activities in the workshop. According to her a hands-on approach could have better clarified the topics and concepts dealt with in the workshop.

Another issue that this study sought to investigate was the availability of appropriate resources for teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data on availability of resources and I followed up the interview with site visits that were meant to verify information gathered through interviews. This verification was done by physically going to classrooms and the play centre area and noting available teaching/learning resources on a checklist. At St Columbus School the T.I.C. and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers kept an inventory of teaching/learning resources with the following sub-headings: item, available quantity, state of item and source of item. A scrutiny of these documents also provided further validation of what appropriate teaching/learning resources were available.

Asked to comment on the availability of classrooms, furniture and toilets for grade zero/e.c.e. learners, the T.I.C. had this to say:
While we do not have classrooms and a play centre at the moment, the school is taking visible steps to address this challenge. According to our project planning diary, the play centre should be in place by November 2010 and the classrooms by May 2011. On furniture, the Music room we are currently using has new children-sized furniture for forty pupils. This is part of what the responsible authority provided. More have been promised once classrooms have been constructed. As for toilets you need to go and see how beautiful they are. (Interview, October 2010).

The T.I.C. acknowledges that currently there are no classrooms for early childhood education learners and that the school has no play centre. The T.I.C. is, however, confident that these structures will be put in place soon. As a member of the school Finance Committee, she acknowledges that, while parents find it challenging to raise money, they have committed themselves to regular monthly payments which should see them raising the required amount by the expected dates. According to the T.I.C. for the last couple of months that the scheme has operated no parent has defaulted on these payments. The existence of a project planning diary gives her further confidence and conviction that the target dates will be met. The T.I.C. is satisfied with the children-sized furniture provided by the responsible authority and appears to boast about the state-of-the-art toilets built for grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. A site observation visit I made confirmed the existence of new furniture and an immaculate toilet facility. With respect to the latter, wash basins provided are in the ratio of one to every twenty pupils. The visit also confirmed that early childhood education learners at St Columbus do not have a play centre.

Responding to a question on the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources the T.I.C. pointed out that she was grateful to be in a school whose responsible authority cared a lot about the welfare of grade zero/e.c.e. learners. According to her tabulation:

- there are enough picture reading books for Mathematics and English
- there are four e.c.e. kits for the four grade zero/e.c.e. classes at St Columbus School, and
- there are enough teaching/learning materials for all indoor activities.
Site observation visits confirmed that abundant grade zero/e.c.e. indoor teaching/learning resources were available at this school. From the above observations and indeed from the T.I.C.s perception St Columbus Primary School can be said to be ready for grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to availability of appropriate indoor teaching/learning resources.

Shifting attention from resources the interview focused on the state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Data from St Columbus School's staff records indicate that three grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are holders of a diploma in early childhood education. The three completed their diploma studies at the end of 2008 and were deployed to this school at the beginning of 2009. The three teachers cannot be said to be experienced. If anything, they are still learning the job and adjusting to the workplace. The T.I.C. was, nonetheless, satisfied by their level of training and teaching ability. According to her the three teachers display a solid knowledge of principles of child development, how to interact with grade zero/e.c.e. learners and how to manage play in teaching/learning situations. In appreciation and admiration she said "These girls remind me of the days I was trained as an infant teacher... they display a capacity for warm relationships with learners in all their lessons."

The other grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is a paraprofessional. She has four subjects at ordinary level and has been at St Columbus since the inception of grade zero/e.c.e. in 2006. She does not have a formal teaching qualification but has five years of teaching experience. According to the T.I.C. the paraprofessional is beginning to benefit from her interaction with the three qualified teachers. Observations of this nature indicate that before the arrival of these qualified grade zero/e.c.e. teachers the paraprofessional may not have been teaching as expected. According to the T.I.C. the paraprofessional has enrolled to do a bridging course in a teachers' college and is said to be highly excited as she sees the prospect of becoming a qualified grade zero/e.c.e. teacher being within reach. The T.I.C.'s characterisation of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at this school indicates that St Columbus Primary School may be said to be ready for the introduction of this innovation with respect to the state of teacher preparedness.
In the section on the availability of appropriate resources it was observed that parents at this school have put in place a time line by which they will have raised enough money for constructing classrooms and a play centre. This is evidence that parents do support grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Commenting on the forms of support grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are provided with, the T.I.C. outlined the following:

- financial support from parents through fees and levies
- parental support through attending meetings
- responsible authority provision of teaching/learning resources
- facilitating visits to other primary schools
- attending workshops, and
- possible support from N.G.O.s.

According to the T.I.C. the school has not been able to call for meetings which exclusively discuss grade zero/e.c.e. matters. Meetings that have been attended by parents tended to cover the broad spectrum of all school activities. In these meetings, however, the agenda was constructed in such a way that grade zero/e.c.e. issues also featured. While I would have liked to attend some of these meetings no such meetings were held during my field work at St Columbus School. I was, however, able to confirm the T.I.C.'s claims when she provided me with a copy of the agenda and minutes of the last general meeting held on 22/07/2010. The minutes reflected that deliberations were made on the provision of early childhood education classrooms and a play centre.

On attending workshops as a form of teacher support the T.I.C. confirmed observations that had been made by the school head, that grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are encouraged to attend such workshops. While the T.I.C. applauded this move, she was worried that there were no follow up school based staff development sessions on grade zero/e.c.e. issues. In her view such sessions would be beneficial to the school administration, infant education teachers (grades 1 and 2 teachers) and any other teacher who might be interested in understanding what happens at the grade zero/e.c.e. level of the primary school. The T.I.C. further explained what she called possible support from N.G.O.s. She detailed how she has applied for donations of teaching/learning materials from UNICEF. The written response from
UNICEF (which I had sight of) was positive and so she was looking forward to receiving more teaching/learning resources for early childhood education learners.

Asked whether teacher supervision could be regarded as a form of teacher support, this is how the T.I.C. responded:

Yes, yes, yes it is. Sometimes when you are being interviewed you tend to forget about what you do on a daily basis. I supervise grade zero/e.c.e. teachers three times per term. I look at quality of teaching, range of teaching techniques used, assessment of pupils, the learning environment, etc. I then discuss my supervision reports with the teachers. This is one important form of support I personally provide to these teachers. (Interview, October 2010).

It would appear, from the preceding comments, that the T.I.C. supports grade zero/e.c.e. teachers through regular supervision. The method adopted for providing feedback to teachers, allows for a sharing of ideas between the supervisor and the supervisees. Such discussion sessions, as observed by the T.I.C., enable participants to seek clarifications on issues raised.

This study also sought to investigate, in a broad and general sense, the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. In trying to fulfil this obligation I asked the T.I.C. the question: “How are grade zero/e.c.e. learners taught at your school?” She responded:

Before anyone teaches grade zero/e.c.e. learners, that individual should study syllabus expectations. Likewise, we base our teaching on an E.C.E.C. syllabus. In particular we ensure that syllabus aims and objectives are translated into scheme and lesson objectives. We teach these pupils through play... in fact all teaching here revolves around play. Pupil involvement is also key to teaching grade zero /e.c.e. learners. In order to facilitate pupil involvement there is need for small grade zero/e.c.e. classes. A lot of teaching/learning resources are also required to enhance pupil involvement. There are many things involved but we do not forget to continually assess grade zero/e.c.e. learners as part of teaching. (Interview, October 2010).
The T.I.C.'s account of the teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. learners, particularly her focus on the need to translate syllabus aims and objectives into scheme and lesson plan objectives, is consistent with how good teaching is conceptualized in Zimbabwean primary schools. From the above, it is clear that grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are doing what they are expected by ensuring that there is a link between what they teach and what the syllabus stipulates. This enhances the quality of teaching and learning at this level of the primary school.

The T.I.C. also points out that grade zero/e.c.e. learners are taught through play. As Read, Gardner and Mahler (2003) argue, play is an important avenue for learning hence ample opportunities must be provided for a variety of play experiences. Probed on the importance of play, the T.I.C. aptly described it as a way grade zero/e.c.e. learners use to discover more about themselves and the world. Pupil involvement, through play and other activities, availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources and small class sizes were also identified by the T.I.C. as important considerations in the teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. The T.I.C. also avowed that assessment is another important consideration in teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners. In this respect she described how early childhood education teachers at her school use folders (each pupil has a folder) to record and track grade zero/e.c.e. pupils’ performance in most activities ranging from hand-to-eye coordination, development of gross and fine motor skills, development of social skills, development of communicative competency, movement from egocentricity to socio-centricity and the like. I had an opportunity to go through a number of these folders and observed that meticulous records for each learner are kept by teachers. It is therefore evident that teachers and the T.I.C. at St Columbus Primary School closely monitor the overall performance of grade zero/e.c.e. learners.

On the whole, the T.I.C.'s perceptions/views on the school's state of readiness are a clear testimony that, despite the few challenges that are currently being experienced, St Columbus Primary School is ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.
4.3.3 Grade zero/ece teacher’s perceptions on state of readiness

The third interview that I conducted at St Columbus Primary School was with the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. The school had three qualified teachers and one paraprofessional. The T.I.C. had earlier on shown great confidence in the three qualified teachers and so I decided to interview the first qualified teacher I came in contact with. In my view any of the three teachers would be information rich and therefore an appropriate source of data on the extent to which the school was ready for the introduction of this innovation.

Before presenting the teacher’s views on St Columbus’s state of readiness I begin this section by describing who the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is. She is a twenty six year old female whose home language is Shona and holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. St Columbus is her first school since leaving teachers’ college in December 2008.

To get the interview in motion I asked her the question: “Do you think the college prepared you adequately to be able to handle teaching and learning at grade zero/e.c.e. level?” This is how she responded:

My answer to that question is yes and no. Yes in that at college I studied theories of early childhood development, how to motivate learners and how to teach learners at this level. The coverage of these theoretical aspects was extensive. During teaching practice we were expected to put the theories into practice. No, in the sense that I am now experiencing new situations that we did not address while at college. For instance, I was asked by the district education office to present a paper on record keeping at grade zero/e.c.e. level. I know what must be done but I do not have the confidence to face many people … you see. I eventually did it but I don’t know whether it was OK or not.
(Interview, October 2010).

From the response it is evident that the teacher has been adequately prepared theoretically and practically to handle grade zero/e.c.e. learners. What the teacher lacks is the confidence to present papers to a big audience. While the teacher seems
ready for grade zero/e.c.e. at school level, she needs to be given more time in the classroom before being used as a resource person at workshops.

Responding to a question on availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources at St Columbus, the teacher indicated that as far as indoor resources were concerned the school had more than enough for the four grade zero/e.c.e. classes. She pointed out that the responsible authority had donated plenty teaching/learning materials to the school. I was shown new grade zero/e.c.e. learning kits, new furniture, stacks of picture reading books and newsprint, heaps of drawing books, bundles of jingles, numerous boxes of crayons, boxes of all sizes, hoops, strings and drums. According to the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher each category of teaching/learning materials represents different activities which can be planned and implemented for learners. The teacher demonstrated to me how hoops, drums, jingles and balls are used by grade zero/e.c.e. learners during teaching and learning.

All the teaching/learning resources are recorded in a class inventory note book. Asked why it was necessary to keep such a record when the school head had one such record, the teacher indicated that on Sundays the Music room (which is used as a grade zero/e.c.e classroom) is used by the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe as a church venue. It was therefore necessary to take stock of available teaching/learning resources every Monday morning. In addition, the teacher pointed out that such records are also kept for accountability purposes. The teacher is thus portraying a picture where indoor teaching/learning resources are jealously guarded for the benefit of the learner. The teacher confessed, however, that outdoor resources were in short supply. She invited me to an old play centre that was originally used by grade one pupils. While there is virtually no play centre to talk about and no classrooms for the new programme, the teacher assured me that parents were paying fees and levies towards the construction of these facilities. Whilst at the disused grade one play centre, the teacher described the plan that the school developed for the envisaged play centre. I later had an opportunity to look at the plan in the T.I.C.'s office. In the same vein the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher talked about the plans the school has with respect to putting up classrooms. Presently, as she pointed out, grade zero/e.c.e. learners have no classrooms of their own.
The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is generally satisfied with available indoor teaching and learning resources. She is also hopeful that in the not too distant future challenges of having no classrooms and a play centre will be a thing of the past. Perhaps it is this kind of conviction that contributes to making a school ready for the introduction of an innovation like grade zero/e.c.e.

As indicated in chapter 2, availability of adequate and clear support systems in a school is one indication that the school is ready to implement new and existing programmes. Responding to a question on what forms of support grade zero/e.c.e. teachers get to enable them to effectively discharge their duties the teacher responded thus:

> It will be difficult for me to spell out all the forms of support we get because we might not have the time to do so now. In short, what I can say is that the school administration sent us to schools in this circuit to go and study how they are implementing their programmes. When we came back we presented our findings and most of our suggestions have been implemented. The T.I.C. supervises us as another form of support. In addition, we are also supported through workshop attendance. And, as I said earlier on our responsible authority has provided us with a lot of teaching/learning resources and parents do their part by paying fees and levies. We will be getting support from UNICEF in the near future. So you can see, we are really supported at this school. In fact, I wouldn't want to transfer from a school where you get such support.

(Interview, October 2010).

Probed on what grade zero/e.c.e. teachers were focusing on in their visits to other primary schools, the teacher identified the following:

- checking on how grade zero/e.c.e. classes have been housed
- ascertaining what teaching/learning resources and other Ministry of Education documents other schools have
- discussing strategies other schools had adopted on the implementation of the new programme
- establishing the relationship between grade zero/e.c.e. and the rest of the school, and
• discussing how other schools were raising money to support the new programme.

From the above list it is clear that teachers at St Columbus School were tapping best practices from primary schools around them so as to develop an unassailable grade zero/e.c.e. programme at their school. Besides the above form of support, the grade zero/e.c.e. teachers also identified supervision by the T.I.C. as a form of support.

Asked to shed light on what the T.I.C. focuses on during supervision, the teacher said:

As soon as the T.I.C. enters the classroom to supervise you she checks whether your schemes and lesson plans are consistent with syllabus stipulations, whether pupils are ‘swimming’ in media, appropriateness of methods and teaching techniques used particularly the use of play, how you control the class, how teaching and learning resources are integrated in your lesson, how you vary stimulus and how you assess learners. She looks at many things including deportment... but after all this she discusses with you openly suggesting how you could have improved. She even allows us to justify the approaches we use in lessons. It really is a great experience... a learning experience.
(Interview, October 2010).

From the excerpt above, the T.I.C. attempts to balance pressure and support. Focusing on what the teacher is expected to do is the pressure applied by the T.I.C. and suggesting how teachers can improve in future teaching performance is the support such teachers require. In this regard Miles and Huberman (1994:14) are of the view that “…too much pressure is bullying and too much support suggests that teachers will need crutches for years on end.” There must therefore be an intelligent combination of the two as is reflected by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s comments on how she is supervised by the T.I.C. The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher aptly summarises the degree of support she gets from the school by saying; “I wouldn't want to transfer from a school where you get such support.” It is thus evident that grade zero/e.c.e. teachers are highly supported and consequently it could be claimed that St Columbus School is ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to teacher support.
One area that we explored in the interview was the quality of teaching and learning at the e.c.e. level. In pursuit of this goal I asked the teacher to describe teaching at this level of the primary school. The teacher pointed out that because of the abundance of teaching/learning resources at the school, grade zero/e.c.e. learners use all their senses during lessons. According to the teacher learners are taught through play. Illustrating this point using newly acquired teaching/learning kits the teacher was able to show me how twenty pupils divided into five groups can use the various shapes, pictures, balls and other gadgets in different play activities at the same time. Through document analysis I was also able to ascertain that play is used in all subjects taught to grade zero/e.c.e. learners at this school.

One other point the teacher raised was that teaching grade zero/e.c.e. at St Columbus meant implementing the syllabus. After having said this, the teacher placed a copy of the syllabus on the table. A scheme of work was placed side by side with the syllabus. Using the English syllabus and scheme of work, the teacher demonstrated to me how syllabus aims and objectives were given meaning in the teacher's scheme of work. A verification of other schemes of work revealed the same links/connections. Asked why this was so the teacher informed me that teaching grade zero/e.c.e. at their school entailed making sure that the body of knowledge represented in the syllabus is accurately passed on to learners. Such an approach raises the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. at this school.

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher also highlighted that teaching is individualised at their school. According to the teacher, her class size of 1:25 enables her to attend to individual needs of the learners. While she acknowledged that the recommended teacher-pupil ratio at grade zero/e.c.e. level should be 1:20 (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999) she also observed that considering the challenges schools experienced with the introduction of this programme, her situation does allow her to individualise teaching within the limits set by the school time table.

On assessment and record keeping, the teacher pointed out that a folder has been opened for each grade zero/e.c.e. learner. Pupils' performance is recorded against a skill performed. Whenever a pupil is able to perform a designated skill, the teacher
allows the pupil to proceed to the next skill but when the pupil is unable to perform
the skill, she/he repeats it until she/he can display the skill. Rodger (2003) observes
that assessment and record keeping are essential skills in monitoring learners' continuity and progression in the school system. In the context of St Columbus Primary School skills such as hand and eye coordination, left to right orientation, development of gross and fine motor skills, and development of social skills, among others, are monitored and assessed. The record is what finds its way into the folder, which is also called a portfolio, at this school. Looked at this way assessment and record keeping are important instruments used in the teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. learners at this school.

An overview of the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's perceptions/views on St Columbus School's state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation portrays a teacher who is adequately prepared to handle early childhood education, working in an environment with abundant indoor teaching/learning resources, with full support from the school administration and effectively teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Such views point to a school ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

4.4 CHARLIE PRIDE SCHOOL

Established in 1944, this school is situated in the heart of Gweru rural district. While the rural district council has nominal jurisdiction over the school, parents in the local community are responsible for all school development activities. These parents depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. The school uses two store rooms as offices for the head and the deputy head. The T.I.C. does not have an office.

The school enrolls two classes for each grade from grade one to seven. It has fourteen classrooms and one additional storeroom which grade zero/e.c.e. learners use when it is either raining or it is very cold. Under normal weather conditions grade zero/e.c.e. pupils permanently learn under trees in the school play ground. The staff complement stands at eighteen including the head, deputy head and the T.I.C. The T.I.C. teaches grade two. Included in the staff compliment are two specialist teachers, namely, one for Music and the other for Art Education. The
school enrolment currently stands at eight hundred and fifteen pupils. Of these sixty five are grade zero/e.c.e. pupils taught by two paraprofessionals.

4.4.1 School head's perceptions on state of readiness

I begin this section by describing the school head. The head is a forty eight year old male whose home language is Shona. He holds a Master of Education degree in Sociology. He has taught in various primary schools for twenty two years, rising to the position of substantive head of Charlie Pride (a pseudonym) school in 2007. Before 2007 he was a substantive deputy head of a school which is not Charlie Pride. For all the years that he has been in the teaching profession, he has taught in rural schools.

Before commencing the interview the head asked me to wait for a while outside his 'office' as he wanted to attend to two members of the school development association who had just arrived. I took this opportunity to go round the school yard making observations. After a while the head came looking for me and we got into the 'office'. As soon as we settled down I introduced the subject of the interview. Immediately the school head indicated that he was only going to be able to respond to grade zero/e.c.e. issues as they occurred from 2007 onwards. I understood the head's concerns since before 2007 he was not at Charlie Pride School. Thereafter we agreed to use English as a medium of communication in the interview.

The first question I posed to the school head was “How would you describe the state of grade zero/e.c.e. at your school?” His response was:

At this school we have sixty five grade zero/e.c.e. learners who have been divided into two classes taught by two paraprofessionals. To be honest, I am not sure whether I will be able to justify the existence of the two classes to an external person. We do not have classrooms, and teaching/learning materials for these learners. Parents depend on subsistence farming for their survival. Currently parents cannot even feed themselves. They have relied on food provisions from N.G.O.s for the last three years. We do not expect them to be able to raise fees and levies. In short, the state of grade zero/e.c.e. is not encouraging.

(Interview, October 2010).
The school head’s comments portray that very little is happening with respect to the implementation of grade zero/e.c.e. at Charlie Pride School. Probed on what he meant by “I will not be able to justify the existence of the two classes to an external person,” the head pointed out that if the district education officer were to pay a visit to Charlie Pride he would have no option but to ask the school to suspend the programme. The school head attributes the deplorable state of e.c.e. at his school to parents’ inability to raise fees and levies. According to the school head, families which constitute Charlie Pride’s catchment area currently depend on N.G.O.s for food handouts. Hence instead of focusing on improving e.c.e. their focus is on basic survival needs. Asked how the state of grade zero/e.c.e. at his school had gone so low when the Ministry of Education had organised capacity building workshops for school heads, T.I.C. and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers, the head responded by saying that to his knowledge no such workshops had been arranged for school heads. He further remarked that the only time school heads talked about grade zero/e.c.e. was, as his former head had reported in a meeting, when the D.E.O. distributed copies of a circular on the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. to school heads. I quote him verbatim: “We cannot say that school heads were ever prepared for the introduction of this innovation. They were just expected to deal with this group of learners in the same way they deal with other primary school classes.” Asked how school heads should have been prepared for this innovation, he suggested that when introducing a programme that is implemented across the country it may be necessary to begin by holding a national conference of school heads. This would be followed by provincial, district and cluster-based workshops. Such an approach, in the school head’s view, could have laid a solid foundation for the introduction of this innovation.

Shifting attention from how school heads were prepared for grade zero/e.c.e., I asked the head to comment on the availability of appropriate resources for use by early childhood learners at this school and this is what he had to say:

The school is one of the oldest, if not the oldest in this area. It looks like many people do not like to invest in an old school... (laughs). Seriously, the school does not have classrooms and furniture for e.c.e. pupils. We used to have a few picture reading books but now we do not have any. Children are supposed to draw everyday but
stocks of newsprint can only allow them to draw twice per week. Grade zero/e.c.e. teachers would like the school to buy a teaching kit produced by Longmans but we do not have the money. We do not have swings, seesaws, slides and all other equipment which is found at a play centre. So you can see...our grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and pupils operate in an environment devoid of essential teaching/learning resources. (Interview, October 2010).

Getting to Charlie Pride every visitor cannot miss the beautiful sign post erected at the school entrance. At the bottom of the sign post is inscribed “Established 1944.” It is indeed an old school and the classroom blocks tell the full story. Most of them have cracks and the roof on one block of classrooms needs attention if it is to avoid being a danger to pupils. The head's response, on availability of appropriate resources, points to lack of classrooms for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Asked what plans the school has with respect to constructing classrooms for grade zero/e.c.e. learners the school head said:

As a school administration we are failing to repair the classrooms we currently have. That in itself shows that, unless we get a donor, we might not be able to put up structures for e.c.e. We have discussed the issue with parents but considering that parents are failing to pay current fees and levies it would be pointless to ask them to contribute towards the construction of additional e.c.e. classrooms. (Interview, October 2010).

From the foregoing there are no chances, at least in the short term, that grade zero/e.c.e. learners at Charlie Pride will get classrooms of their own. Pressed on the issue of donors which he alluded to in his response, the school head indicated that the school administration had approached the daughter of a local chief, based in the United Kingdom, to source funds to put up grade zero/e.c.e. structures. In turn the chief's daughter, who had been invited to Charlie Pride, took photos of grade zero/e.c.e. pupils sitting under a tree so that she could use the photos to appeal to donors to fund the construction of grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms at Charlie Pride School. There were, however, no signed agreements or time lines set for this possible funding. Notwithstanding the preceding comment the school head seemed to believe strongly that the proposed funding will materialise. For now, the reality is
that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride learn under trees in the open school playground.

Responding to a question on whether grade zero/e.c.e. pupils have toilets exclusively set aside for them, the school head highlighted that while no such arrangement was currently in place he hoped that by the end of the year (2010) grade zero/e.c.e. pupils would have their own toilets. Asked how this is possible when parents are not able to pay fees and levies the school head indicated that parents who could not pay fees were given two options, namely, some were asked to dig the toilet pit and others were asked to mould bricks. At the time of my field work at Charlie Pride I established that a deep toilet pit had been dug and about ten thousand bricks had been moulded. For roofing the school was planning to use gum poles from the school plantation and asbestos sheets which had not been severely damaged when a hailstorm destroyed the roof of one classroom block at Charlie Pride School. It can thus be assumed that, all things being normal, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride may be able to use toilets exclusively set aside for them in the not too distant future.

Indoor teaching/learning resources are an important ingredient in the education of grade zero/e.c.e. learners. These include, but are not restricted to, picture reading books, hoops, balls, learning kits, manila, magic markers, pencils, crayons, newsprint and drawing books. The availability of such resources enhances teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. Responding to a question on what indoor teaching/learning materials are available for use by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and pupils at this school, the school head stated that only plastic balls and ropes were available. According to the school head each grade zero pupil was asked to bring a ball and a rope from home. One other resource that is available is newsprint. The school buys newsprint for use by the administration. It is from this allocation that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils get a share. Grade zero/e.c.e. classes at Charlie Pride do not have picture reading books, teaching/learning kits, drawing books, manila and hoops which are essential to facilitate learning through play.

On outdoor teaching/learning materials, except for the football and netball pitches, where grade zero/e.c.e. pupils can run and do exercises there are no other
teaching/learning materials which these learners can use. The school does not have a play centre. I had established this point when the school head asked me to remain outside the 'office' when he attended to two, staff development association members. From the preceding description it appears that Charlie Pride is not yet ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to availability of resources.

Besides resources, effective implementation of a programme, like grade zero/e.c.e. is also dependent on the quality, amount and level of support provided to implementers. In any curriculum innovation, teachers, who are the foot soldiers in educational practice, need to be supported. Responding to the question, “What forms of support are provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride?” this is what the school head said:

Since arriving at this school one workshop has been mounted for the T.I.C. and e.c.e. teachers. Permission has been granted for these to attend the workshops. I consider this as one way of supporting them. As noted earlier the two teachers we have are paraprofessionals and so we encourage them to register for 'O' level so that they can eventually end up in teacher training colleges to become qualified e.c.e. teachers. In fact, one of them has registered to write English and I am teaching her. I mark her English exercises without charging her. In addition the T.I.C. supervises these teachers as one way of providing support but its not as frequent as we would want. (Interview, October 2010).

One form of support identified by the head is granting the T.I.C. and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers permission to attend workshops organised by the district education office. Pressed on how this is a form of support, the school head pointed out that since these teachers are paraprofessionals, workshops would shed light on how teachers are supposed to operate when interacting with learners at that level. The school head acknowledges, however, that no follow up school-based workshops or staff development has ever been arranged.

Another form of support from the school head's point of view is encouragement of paraprofessionals to complete 'O' level with a view to later training as grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. According to the school head, ever since this encouragement, the T.I.C. reports that paraprofessionals have developed in confidence when
handling teaching and learning at grade zero/e.c.e. level. They have suddenly realised that they are valued by the school administration hence whenever they are in doubt they find out from the T.I.C. According to the school head this change of attitude and disposition is a direct result of the support rendered to the paraprofessionals who teach grade zero/e.c.e. at Charlie Pride School.

Teacher supervision has been identified as another form of support provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. From the school head's point of view supervision assists, among other things, in the identification of an individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses. At Charlie Pride the T.I.C. usually discusses her observations with grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Such an approach to teacher supervision enables the supervisor and the supervisee to exchange ideas. It also enables the supervisee to seek clarification on issues raised in the supervision report. Looked at this way, as the school head pointed out, supervision becomes a useful way of supporting grade zero/e.c.e. teachers.

Rivkin et al. (1998) observe that pupils learn more from experienced teachers than they do from less experienced ones. It is thus pertinent that the state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride be explored so as to establish the school's state of readiness in this respect. To investigate this issue I asked the school head to comment on when the paraprofessionals were engaged, their educational qualifications and teaching experience. The school head pulled out a school log book and turned to the section on staff lists. He then showed me that the paraprofessionals had been engaged at different times. One of them was engaged in 2007 when the programme was introduced and the other was appointed in January 2009. At the time of conducting this study one paraprofessional was in her fourth year of teaching while the other was in her second year. Turning to the section in the log book indicating staff qualifications I was able to establish that the two paraprofessionals have an academic education of 'O' level. One had passed three subjects and the other had passed four subjects.

Evident from the above description is that none of the two paraprofessionals had studied how pupils at grade zero/e.c.e. are taught and/or how teaching, in general, is conducted. Asked to comment on why Charlie Pride was not attracting qualified early
childhood education teachers when the school is only thirty kilometres out of town and is serviced by a regular transport system the school head indicated that the first graduates from early childhood teacher education programmes were deployed into schools at the beginning of 2009. According to the school head, teacher training colleges are not producing many such teachers hence urban schools tend to attract these teachers more than rural schools. Given the above state of readiness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers, it is evident that Charlie Pride School is not yet ready for the introduction of this innovation.

Besides teacher state of preparedness, it is also important to establish the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride are subjected to as an indicator of the school’s state of readiness. Describing grade zero/e.c.e. teaching and learning the school head highlighted the following:

- grade zero/e.c.e. lessons are time tabled
- e.c.e. pupils have most of their lessons under trees in the play ground
- grade zero/e.c.e. teachers draw up schemes of work and lesson plans from the E.C.E.C. syllabus and a textbook entitled “Learning through play,” and
- the T.I.C. assists paraprofessionals to scheme, plan and teach.

Probed on what arrangements grade zero/e.c.e. teachers make to enable them to handle indoor activities under trees, the school head pointed out that while these teachers have a time table they do not strictly adhere to it given conditions at their school. According to the head, it is expected by the district education office that there be time tables for this group of learners hence the school has one. The school head directed me to the T.I.C.’s grade two class if I wanted to have a look at the grade zero/early childhood education time table. Grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at this school, who are paraprofessionals, mostly engage pupils in playing games and story telling. Further probing on whether the e.c.e. syllabus content is ever fully covered, the school head was quick to point out that while some content was covered conditions in his school militated against full implementation of the grade zero/e.c.e. curriculum. He went further to indicate that even the assistance rendered to paraprofessionals by the T.I.C. was minimal because the T.I.C. has a full teaching load.
From the foregoing it may be discerned that the school head is acknowledging that the quality of teaching and learning at grade zero/e.c.e. level leaves a lot to be desired. The school head, however, justifies this lack of effective teaching on, among other factors, lack of classrooms, lack of qualified grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and a teaching T.I.C. From the school head’s perceptions, Charlie Pride School cannot be said to be ready for the introduction of this innovation with respect to the quality of teaching and learning.

This section has explored the school head’s perceptions/views on Charlie Pride’s state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. What seems to emerge from this exploration is that, four years after introducing grade zero/e.c.e. the school still has a lot that is required for it to be ready for this innovation. In the next section I explore the teacher-in-charge’s perceptions/views on Charlie Pride’s state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

### 4.4.2 Teacher-in-charge’s perceptions on state of readiness

My second interview at Charlie Pride was held with the teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.). She is a thirty eight year old female whose home language is Shona and she holds a Diploma in Education. She specialised in teaching grades 3 to 7 and she has been teaching infant grades (grades 1 to 2) for the past twelve years. She was appointed T.I.C. in 2005 and has been at Charlie Pride since 1995. Prior to teaching infant grades she was a grade 5 teacher. Currently the T.I.C. is a full time grade 2 teacher and so the interview was conducted in the classroom.

I introduced the subject of the interview by asking the T.I.C. how she was made aware of the introduction of the grade zero/e.c.e programme and her response was:

> At the time I was appointed substantive T.I.C. the school had no deputy head so I acted in that capacity while teaching my grade 2 class. During the third term of 2005, the school head went on leave and so I found myself as acting school head. It is during this time that I attended a meeting of school heads and the D.E.O. At that meeting we were informed that grade zero/e.c.e was to be introduced at the beginning of 2006. (Interview, October 2010).
I followed up the T.I.C.’s response by asking her whether she appointed someone to act as T.I.C., at the time she was acting head, and if so, how that acting T.I.C. was introduced to grade zero/e.c.e. In her response the T.I.C. indicated that indeed she had appointed not only an acting T.I.C. but also an acting deputy head. Further inquiries on how the appointed T.I.C was capacitated to enable him to perform his new duties effectively were evaded by the T.I.C. This kind of behaviour might imply that the then acting T.I.C. was left to find his feet on his own. Available evidence, point to a situation where even the current substantive T.I.C. was inadequately prepared for the new innovation. As substantive T.I.C. she was to oversee the grade zero/e.c.e. programme on the ground but as she puts it “there was no one to guide me. I wanted to find out how the programme was to be rolled out but because I was acting school head, I was afraid that if I asked, the D.E.O. would ask me about how I am managing Charlie Pride School. So I decided not to ask.”

Turning to the issue of resources I asked the T.I.C. to comment on availability of classrooms, furniture and toilets and she responded thus:

As you can see our grade zero/e.c.e. pupils do not have classrooms. We have two classes, one with thirty and another with thirty five pupils. I don’t see us building classrooms soon because parents do not have money. Our parents are subsistence farmers whose land is no longer productive. In fact they live on food handouts from N.G.O.s. They can hardly raise resources for grade zero/e.c.e. You people from town know it... very few people have access to the American dollar... even in towns. The same can be said for furniture. Perhaps we need to approach donors like UNICEF and UNESCO... we may get something. As for toilets I think grade zero/e.c.e. pupils should be able to use their own toilets before the end of the year. (Interview, October 2010).

Comments from the T.I.C. suggest that it will take a long time before grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at this school can learn under the roof of a classroom. She points out that it is difficult for the rural parents to raise American dollars (the currency that has been adopted in Zimbabwe), so that classrooms can be erected and furniture bought. Evident from the interview is that the school does not have classrooms and
furniture. The T.I.C. was, however, hopeful that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils would have new toilets built for them soon. This confidence comes from the fact that the toilet pit has been dug and that ten thousand bricks have been moulded. It also comes from the fact that the two School Development Association (S.D.A.) members who visited the school that morning had finalised plans to procure cement for the toilet. According to the T.I.C. when the S.D.A. members left Charlie Pride School that morning they were going to buy cement from the nearby town.

With respect to availability of teaching/learning materials the T.I.C. indicated that except for the occasional newsprint provided to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and pupils the school does not have both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning materials. In following up the issue of outdoor teaching resources, I raised the issue of a play centre for early childhood education learners. In this respect I wanted to know why the school cannot enlist the services of parents to use poles from the nearby school plantation to put up a modest play centre with seesaws, climbing ladders and swings. In response the T.I.C. pointed out that generally everyone enlisted to do a job at school expects to be paid. Charlie Pride does not have money to put up a play centre. She acknowledged, however, that they would try to implement this approach in future with parents who fail to raise levies.

Availability of financial resources is key to ensuring that new programmes take off. Responding to a question of whether there is a budget specifically set aside for grade zero/e.c.e. the T.I.C. said:

In a situation like ours, it will be difficult to imagine that one day the school can have a budget strictly for this programme. As I said earlier on parents are failing to raise fees and levies and so it is difficult to split the little that is raised between the rest of the school and grade zero/e.c.e. Doing so will mean that e.c.e. is not part of the school. When you look at the minutes of the SDA you will see that they budget for the whole school. (Interview, October 2010).

Such comments by the T.I.C. portray a school with very limited financial resources yet grade zero/e.c.e. requires a big enough financial outlay to be able to acquire both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. Besides, paraprofessional teachers
are paid by parents through the S.D.A. To do all this, the school requires a healthy budget. The T.I.C. justifies the need for one school budget on the premise that doing so contributes to the institutionalization of the new programme. While an analysis of the minutes of the two S.D.A. meetings did reflect one school budget, the T.I.C. could not explain why it was not possible to have columns dedicated to grade zero/e.c.e. in the same budget. What is, however, evident is that it may be reasonable to suggest that Charlie Pride School is not yet ready for grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to availability of financial resources.

The successful installation of a programme, like grade zero/e.c.e. is dependent on the support rendered to the implementers. To explore this dimension I asked the T.I.C. to identify forms of support that early childhood education teachers at Charlie Pride are provided with. In response this is what she had to say:

I really don't know whether I should say we support these teachers at this school or not. Perhaps I do not know what support means but let me say that besides allowing them to attend workshops we have invited parents well known in the community for their ability to tell stories. Children enjoy listening to them. I have also suggested to them how to scheme and plan. You know, when the paraprofessionals were appointed I had to teach them how to scheme and plan.

(Interview, October 2010).

The T.I.C. identifies inviting parents as resource persons as one way of supporting grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. Van Wyk (2006) views such parental involvement and support as a dynamic process whereby educators and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the learner. The case cited by the T.I.C. demonstrates collaboration between parents and the school. The invited parents are likely to develop a positive attitude towards grade zero/e.c.e programmes.

The second form of support identified by the T.I.C. is whereby she works collaboratively with grade zero/e.c.e. teachers assisting them to draw up schemes of work and lesson plans. Asked to elaborate on this form of support the T.I.C. noted that she initially taught these teachers the structure of a scheme of work. This was illustrated on the chalkboard. Thereafter each component that goes into a scheme
of work would be discussed, explained and justified. Grade zero/e.c.e. teachers would then be asked to draw up three week schemes of work in a particular subject. The T.I.C. would then discuss the produced schemes of work with the teachers. The same procedure was adopted for lesson plans. Providing this form of support is an acknowledgement that paraprofessionals have not previously been taught how to teach hence they need skills to be able to survive in the classroom. By rendering such support the T.I.C. demonstrates a high degree of commitment to the implementation of the grade zero/e.c.e. programme.

Asked whether she supervises grade zero/e.c.e. teachers the T.I.C. acknowledged performing this role. She, however, bemoaned the fact that she is a full time grade 2 teacher. According to her, she has to balance supervising grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and teaching her grade 2 class. In her view she tends to be attracted to teaching her class so as to lay a sound foundation for their future education. The T.I.C. does recognize supervision as a form of support but emphasizes that grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride School are not getting enough of it.

Qualified and experienced teaching personnel enhance programme implementation. Charlie Pride School has two paraprofessionals who handle grade zero/e.c.e. classes. Asked to comment on the ability of these teachers to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners, the T.I.C. observed that:

At this school we used untrained teachers to handle grade zero/e.c.e. classes from 2007. From 2008 to date we have been using paraprofessionals. These are ‘O’ level school leavers who attend short holiday courses on the teaching of e.c.e. We would prefer a situation where we make use of qualified e.c.e. teachers but I do not think that we will get them in the near future. We do not have staff accommodation and grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms. The current paraprofessionals can be said to be doing the best that they can in the given circumstances. (Interview, October 2010).

The T.I.C.’s response details the type of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride School. Instead of providing information on the ability of the current teachers in handling grade zero/e.c.e. classes, the T.I.C. suggests that the school would prefer
qualified teachers to the present arrangement. She acknowledges, however, that it will be long before the school gets such qualified teachers because of the lack of accommodation and other factors. Such a response suggests that the T.I.C. is not pleased with the paraprofessional's ability to teach grade zero/e.c.e. classes. The T.I.C.'s last comment that “…paraprofessionals can be said to be doing the best they can in the given circumstances” clearly illustrates that Charlie Pride School cannot be said to be ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to the state of teacher preparedness.

Another issue this study sought to investigate was the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. learners received at Charlie Pride School. Responding to a question directed at the above issue, the T.I.C.’s response covered the following aspects:

- grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is based on a syllabus
- grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is time tabled, and
- lack of resources hinders effective teaching at this level.

Using a checklist on available resources, I discovered that the school uses a 1999 E.C.E.C. syllabus. There is only one copy for the two grade zero/e.c.e. classes. An analysis of teachers’ schemes of work and lesson plans revealed that syllabus objectives were being operationalized. Follow up interviews with the paraprofessionals revealed that the schemes of work and lesson plans were developed by the T.I.C. for use by paraprofessionals. The schemes and plans were, however, not adhered to since grade zero/e.c.e. learners almost always learnt under trees in the school play grounds. As a result of the preceding arrangement, the time table was also not adhered to. According to the T.I.C., it is a requirement that every teacher should have schemes of work and lesson plans. It is also a requirement that every class has a time table. What might be inferred from such comments is that instead of schemes of work and lesson plans aiding effective teaching, they may be produced to satisfy supervisors in the school and external to the school.

The T.I.C. also revealed that lack of appropriate resources hindered effective grade zero/e.c.e. teaching. Such an acknowledgement particularly in a school like Charlie
Pride, suggests that without trained teachers, without classrooms set aside for e.c.e. and without indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources, it may be difficult to say that the school is ready for the introduction of this innovation with respect to quality of teaching and learning.

This section has explored the T.I.C.’s perceptions/views on Charlie Pride School’s state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. In the main the T.I.C.’s perceptions on availability of appropriate resources, quality and adequacy of teacher support, teacher preparedness and quality of teaching and learning are that the school needs to address a variety of challenges before it can be said to be ready for the introduction of this innovation. In the next section, I explore the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s perceptions/views on Charlie Pride's state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation.

4.4.3 Grade zero/ece teacher’s perceptions on state of readiness

My third semi-structured interview at this school was with a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. I had two paraprofessionals to choose from. I settled for the one employed in 2007. In my view this paraprofessional has been around since the inception of grade zero/e.c.e. at Charlie Pride and would therefore be able to provide me with rich data on the innovation.

Before presenting the paraprofessional's views on Charlie Pride's state of readiness I begin this section by providing information on who this teacher is. The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is a twenty three year old female whose home language is Shona. She has four 'O' level subjects and is currently studying English at 'O' level. Acknowledging that the paraprofessional is not a qualified teacher I asked her to describe her initial experiences with grade zero/e.c.e. learners.

She responded thus:

After being identified by the chairman of the School Development Association I reported to the school head’s office towards the end of January 2007. I submitted my ‘O’ level certificate, birth certificate and
national identity to the office. Then I was told that I would teach grade zero/e.c.e. and that I would be paid by the S.D.A. The school head asked the T.I.C. to help me settle down. The first days were hell. I did not know how to control pupils and how to teach. In fact, I was afraid of the pupils. After being taught a number of rhymes by the T.I.C., I used these to control the class of 58 pupils but I still needed assistance with conducting lessons. Such help was provided through short holiday courses arranged by the district education office. (Interview, October 2010).

The above description portrays an 'O' level school leaver, with no professional training being appointed to teach grade zero/e.c.e. Through her own admission she had not taught before hence she did not know how to teach. Short holiday courses by the district education office seem to have provided the paraprofessional with an additional life line in the teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. at Charlie Pride School.

Responding to a question on the availability of teaching/learning resources for use by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride, the paraprofessional indicated that currently there was no classroom for these learners. She indicated that lessons are conducted under trees in the play ground. I had the opportunity to visit the 'tree classroom' and established that pupils sit on the ground during lessons. There is thus no furniture for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Asked to comment on the availability of both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources, the teacher declared:

While in some schools it is possible to distinguish between indoor and outdoor resources at this school that distinction does not seem to hold because we are almost always outside except when it is raining when we cram the 65 pupils into a storeroom where only thirty pupils would normally fit. With respect to teaching/learning resources we have pencils, crayons and very limited newsprint. We do not have picture reading books. We do not have a play centre. In short, we do not have the necessary grade zero/e.c.e teaching/learning resources at this school. (Interview, October 2010).

From the paraprofessional's response, Charlie Pride does not seem to have teaching/learning resources. Site observation visits I made confirmed a lack of grade zero/e.c.e. teaching/learning resources at this school. At the time of my field
work two grade seven classes were about to complete writing their examinations hence grade zero/e.c.e. learners were going to use these two classrooms. This arrangement was, however, going to be temporary since in January 2011 grade zero/e.c.e. learners were expected to revert to their 'classroom under trees'. It is indeed difficult to paint Charlie Pride as being ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to the availability of teaching/learning resources.

A school that has clear systems of teacher support can be said to be ready to implement both new and existing programmes. Responding to the question, “What forms of support do grade zero/e.c.e. teachers have to enable them to discharge their duties?” the paraprofessional observed that:

The school has been very supportive. It has allowed me and my other colleague permission to attend workshops and short holiday courses. At times the school has invited parents to assist us with storytelling. The T.I.C. in particular has supported us by not only teaching us how to scheme and plan but also producing schemes and lesson plans for us to use. The school head, on the other hand, encourages us to supplement the subjects we did not pass at "O" level. If I pass I will go and train as a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. The T.I.C. supervises us once a term and when that happens we discuss lesson observations. I really feel that I belong to the school because of the support I get. If only the school can provide us with sufficient resources I can be happy.

(Interview, October 2010).

The paraprofessional acknowledges that there are useful teacher support mechanisms at Charlie Pride School. She identifies permission to attend workshops, and holiday courses, use of parents as resource persons, assistance with drawing up schemes and lesson plans and teacher supervision as well as encouragement to supplement failed 'O' level subjects as the support mechanisms available to grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. While the teacher expresses appreciation for these forms of support she bemoans, however, the lack of teaching/learning resources. From the above description, while Charlie Pride School falls short with respect to the availability of appropriate resources, it seems to have put in place useful teacher support mechanisms.
The next aspect we explored in this interview was the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Charlie Pride School. In her response the following aspects were raised:

- grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught under trees
- storytelling and rhymes dominate teaching
- teaching is negatively affected by unavailability of resources
- schemes and lesson plans are drawn up in preparation for teaching
- although we have a time table we do not strictly follow it
- teaching is affected by class size, and
- we need to be trained so that we can teach pupils effectively.

The issues raised by the teacher portray a situation where grade zero/e.c.e. pupils seem not to be benefiting from teaching due to a number of constraints. That teaching is affected by the unavailability of appropriate resources stands out as a critical factor. With no classrooms grade zero/e.c.e. pupils are taught under trees; with no teaching/learning resources storytelling and rhymes dominate teaching. In addition, schemes and lesson plans cannot be fully implemented in such a set-up. Probed on what other teaching methods could be adopted if resources were available, the teacher indicated that play, demonstration, and project methods could be used if teaching/learning materials were available. Such a comment from a paraprofessional suggests that the short holiday courses attended have opened paraprofessionals to a variety of methods that can be used to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Asked why they do not adhere to time table specifications the teacher stated that strictly following the time table can only be achieved if most teaching/learning resources, including classrooms, are made available. As observed by the teacher, “For now we combine the two groups and teach them stories and rhymes. This is the best we can do in our present circumstances.”

The teacher raises class size as a factor negatively affecting teaching grade zero/e.c.e. learners. Asked how this factor affects her class she pointed out that with a class of thirty it was difficult to individualise teaching. In the teacher’s view monitoring pupils’ progress at this level of the primary school is an individual activity. It is thus difficult to monitor and assess skills development because of the size of her
Following up on this issue I asked the teacher how these pupils are assessed. According to her:

From the holiday courses we are taught that we should keep pupils' individual records. These records show a pupil's physical development, social development, cognitive development and skills development. We have however not been able to do this at our school because we are not clear of how this should be done. Even our T.I.C. does not seem to know how this should be done. In addition, the school cannot afford buying 65 folders for all grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. So we do not keep any records for these pupils. (Interview, October 2010).

The above response shows the challenges that lack of clarity of an innovation or procedure can create to implementers. At Charlie Pride School no grade zero/e.c.e. records were available at the time of conducting this study. It is thus difficult to establish what 'progress' grade zero/e.c.e. learners are making at this school.

The paraprofessional also suggested that she needs to be trained so that she can teach pupils effectively. Such a remark is an acknowledgement that she does not have the requisite skills, techniques and approaches to handle grade zero/e.c.e. classes effectively. She is thus saying that she is not ready to operate and practise as a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. In the view of Darling-Hammond and Ball (1998) nothing can compensate for a poorly trained or untrained teacher who lacks the necessary knowledge and skills to help children master a given curriculum and the ability to accurately assess pupils' progress. In their view when any learners receive instruction from unqualified teachers or sub-standard qualified teachers, that is a clear sign that the school is not yet ready to implement an educational programme.

This section has explored the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's perceptions/views on Charlie Pride's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The teacher raises very few positives with respect to the school's state of readiness. Given the numerous constraints raised by the teacher, it may be difficult to classify Charlie Pride as ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.
4.5 EASTVALE SCHOOL

Founded in 1957 this government former group A school is situated in the plush low density suburb of Kopje. Before independence low density areas were exclusively for affluent whites but after independence some rich blacks also settled in these areas. Eastvale School's catchment area is thus one of children whose parents are well-to-do and can thus offer substantial financial support to the school. Notwithstanding this observation there are relatively well-to-do families who live in medium and high density areas who also send their children to Eastvale School. Such parents can afford the high fees and regular levies demanded by school authorities. They are also able to contribute to the regular fund-raising activities of the school.

The school has a state of the art two storey administration block which houses the head's office, the deputy head's office, the reception office and a very big staffroom. Next to the administration block is a hall that has a carrying capacity of 2000. At this school classrooms have been divided into two sections. One section, which is called the infant section, has four well furnished grade 1 classrooms, four well furnished grade 2 classrooms, the teacher-in-charge's (T.I.C.) office, and a staff room as well as toilets for teachers and pupils. In 2007 an additional classroom was constructed for the grade zero/e.c.e. class. In this classroom each pupil has a locker to store bags and provisions. The other section, which is called the junior section, has two storey classrooms for grades 3 to 7. Each grade has four well furnished classrooms set aside for it. In addition, each classroom has a storeroom where textbooks and exercise books are kept. The junior section of the school has four computer laboratories and four well trained computer teachers. There are also four classrooms set aside for specialist subjects. These specialist subjects are Home Economics, Music, Ndebele and Art Education. In addition to this, the school has the biggest swimming pool in the city of Gweru. It is built to world class standards with all the necessary outbuildings and offices for trainers. The swimming pool is chlorinated once per week and the school has two qualified swimming trainers.

The school has a staff complement of forty two whose composition is: twenty eight grade 1 to 7 teachers, one early childhood education teacher, four computer
teachers, four subject specialist teachers, two swimming trainers, one school head, one deputy school head and one T.I.C. The current school enrolment stands at one thousand one hundred and forty. Twenty of these pupils are grade zero/e.c.e. learners. After this description of Eastvale School I now turn to the head's perceptions or views on the school's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

4.5.1 School head's perceptions on state of readiness

The head is a fifty eight year old female whose home language is Shona. She is a holder of a Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education in Policy Studies and a Master of Education. She has a total teaching experience of thirty eight years and has been school head for the last eighteen years. For all the years she has been in the teaching profession, she has taught at two urban primary schools, namely Westridge in the high density area and Eastvale in the low density area. The head is very fluent in English (all teachers and pupils are not allowed to use vernacular but only English when on the school premises) and so we used English in the interview. The interview was conducted in the school head's office.

I introduced the subject of the interview and then asked how the Eastvale School head, the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teachers were made aware of the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The head recounted how in 2005 the District Education Officer (D.E.O.) had invited school heads to a meeting where a Ministry of Education circular on grade zero/e.c.e. was circulated. In her own words:

In that meeting the first item on the agenda was the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. in primary schools. The D.E.O. read out the circular and later distributed copies to all school heads and their representatives. All heads were instructed to ensure that the programme was implemented with effect from January 2006. I raised my hand to seek clarification on the implementation modalities but the D.E.O. said it is government policy which we have no authority to question except to go and implement in our respective schools. In fact, no questions were entertained on this issue. As for the T.I.C. she got to know about this development in a staff meeting held soon after my return from the D.E.O.'s meeting. At the time all this was happening we did not have grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. The one
teacher we engaged in 2008 got to know about the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. from the School Development Association (S.D.A.) which engaged her. (Interview, November 2010).

The Eastvale School head's vivid description of how she was made aware of the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. portrays how the Ministry of Education, utilizing the technical-rational perspective, relied on mandates and circulars to disseminate information on the introduction of this innovation to primary schools. As she testifies “School heads were instructed to ensure that the programme was introduced with effect from January 2006 and no one had authority to question the policy decision but to implement it.” While it is true that school heads and teachers implement ministry circulars every time these are circulated to schools, this does not prevent school heads from seeking clarification on certain aspects of circulars that may not be clear to them. That the D.E.O. chose not to entertain any discussion of the circular meant that school heads left the meeting without being clear of what exactly was to be done to ensure that the programme was effectively implemented in schools. This has the likelihood of having a negative effect on the school's state of readiness for this innovation.

Probed on why the school did not adhere to the Ministry of Education directive that grade zero/e.c.e. be introduced in 2006, the school head had this to say:

In November 2005 the school held a regular S.D.A. meeting to discuss fees and levies for 2006. In that meeting I informed parents of the Ministry of Education's decision to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. at Eastvale school at the beginning of 2006. I also informed them that the programme was to be funded by the S.D.A. After lengthy deliberations on this issue parents agreed to introduce the programme in 2008. In the mean time the school administration was tasked with contacting other ministries that have a say in the construction of new buildings at schools. In addition, parents suggested that I accompany the S.D.A. committee to the provincial education office to convey the decision to defer the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. We conveyed the decision the following day and we were allowed to proceed with the preparation for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. This is how we deferred the introduction of this programme. (Interview, November 2010).
The Eastvale S.D.A. committee comprises prominent lawyers, doctors, business people and high ranking government officials. After the S.D.A. meeting that recommended to defer the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. the committee produced minutes of the meeting which were to be forwarded to the Provincial Education Director. The school head made available a copy of these minutes for my perusal. The minutes detailed what the S.D.A. would like to put in place before the introduction of this innovation. Time lines were also suggested in these minutes. One statement from the last paragraph of the minutes read “We recommend this deferrement so that the structures we will put up and the requisite teaching/learning resources we will procure will be consistent with the high standards Eastvale has always maintained.” Asked to elaborate on this statement the school head indicated that in the meeting the parents expressed the need to engage a reputable construction company which will build one classroom for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. The classroom was to be of the same quality as the existing school buildings. The school head further asserted that the classroom would have cupboards and some water basins. According to her, while the D.E.O. had not allowed her to ask questions when he distributed a circular on the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. she found the Provincial Education Director more understanding on this matter. Observations of this nature show that there is need to give schools time to prepare for new programmes. Eastvale School asked for time to be ready from the Provincial Education Director and got it despite policy circular 14 of 2004 which stipulated that early childhood education was to be introduced with effect from 2006 in all primary schools.

Probed on what training was organised for school heads, T.I.C.s and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers to prepare them for rolling out this new programme at Eastvale the school head said:

Let me say that for school heads there was no training at all organised by the Ministry of Education. The T.I.C. and e.c.e. teachers attended capacity building workshops arranged by the district education office. The workshops were held in 2008 and 2010. I did allow them to attend and from the report back the T.I.C. and the e.c.e. teacher seem to have benefited substantially. According to these officers such topics as the use of play, disciplining early childhood learners, etc were covered. (Interview, November 2010).
From the foregoing the Ministry of Education organised workshops for T.I.C.s and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. No such training was provided for school heads. Asked on whether this was, in her view, the best arrangement the ministry could adopt, the school head indicated that it was absolutely necessary to arrange seminars on early childhood education for school heads. In her view, such seminars could have addressed school heads' concerns on the introduction of this innovation. One of the concerns urban primary schools face is that to be able to put up a new building the Ministry of Public Construction and National Housing has to give the go ahead. For some urban schools, so the head noted, there is no space to build any additional classroom block. Issues of teaching/learning resources and how the programme can be funded could have been addressed at such seminars well before grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced in schools. The school head, however, reports that the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher seem to have benefited from the two workshops they attended.

Availability of resources enhances programme implementation. In order to establish what resources were available at Eastvale School, I asked the school head to comment on grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms, furniture and toilets. In response she noted the following:

- there is one state-of-the-art early childhood education classroom
- the classroom is furnished with new children-sized furniture, and
- grade zero/e.c.e. pupils use the same toilets with grades 1 and 2 learners.

Follow up discussion on the issues raised above revealed that the new classroom was built as per S.D.A. specification. Each pupil uses a new child-sized chair sitting around a child-sized table. The school head assured me that when I finally get to the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom I will experience an early childhood education environment different from any other in the Gweru district. On toilets the school head indicated that while there is an age difference between grade zero/e.c.e. pupils and grade 1 learners it would not be difficult for the former to use the same toilets used by grade 1 pupils. In her view, the toilet training offered by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher should enable learners to find comfort in using these facilities.
One category of resource that we explored in the interview is indoor teaching/learning resources. Responding to a question on what indoor teaching/learning resources are available for use by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher and pupils at Eastvale School, the school head responded thus:

At this school we are fortunate in that we did not rush into introducing grade zero/e.c.e. as was the case with other schools. Before we introduced this programme we organised a trip to St Gabriel nursery school in Bulawayo. The school head, the T.I.C. and one grade 1 teacher went to St Gabriel. We discussed among other things, programme structure and what teaching/learning resources a school would require in order to teach grade zero/e.c.e. pupils effectively. In order to shed light on what we needed the nursery training school principal directed us to lecturers in charge of materials production. We took a tour of the model pre-school classrooms jotting down all the indoor teaching/learning resources we saw. We then toured the outdoor play centre area and were satisfied that we now had some idea of what to do at Eastvale. As a result of this visit and other locally generated ideas we have two learning kits, twenty balls, hoops etc. In fact, anything that you can think of we have. When you get to the e.c.e. classroom let us know any teaching/learning resources we can add to what is currently available.

(Interview, November 2010).

The school head is proud that Eastvale Primary School did not rush into introducing grade zero/e.c.e. Consequently the school administration had enough time to consult and reflect on what the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher and pupils would require. The visit to a nursery training school in Bulawayo, some 164km from Gweru, is clear testimony that Eastvale was not taking any short cuts on its preparation to introduce the new programme. As highlighted by the school head “We took a tour of a model pre-school classroom jotting down all indoor teaching/learning resources we saw.” A site observation visit I made revealed an exquisite early childhood education classroom equipped with a variety of indoor teaching/learning resources. This issue of indoor resources will be discussed further, later on in the section on early childhood education teacher's perceptions on Eastvale's state of readiness for this innovation. It is however interesting to observe that the school head declares that should there be suggestions I would like to make on additional indoor teaching/learning resources that the school can procure she would gladly accept the suggestion.
Asked on how the school is able to buy such great quantities of indoor teaching/learning material for grade zero/e.c.e. pupils, the school head indicated that parents pay very high levies. In her view some boarding secondary school pupils did not pay as high levies as Eastvale School pupils pay. The head reminded me that the school is in a low density area and that parents are prepared to pay any amount as long as they are assured of quality education for their children. She also provided me with a copy of the school budget. In this budget statement the grade zero/e.c.e. programme had a separate column which was very healthy. This, once more, is a demonstration that Eastvale School is financially ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

From indoor teaching/learning resources I inquired about outdoor resources, particularly the play centre. While acknowledging that urban primary schools were originally planned for grades 1 to 7, and so have challenges when it comes to availability of space, the school head informed me that part of the infants’ section lawn had been turned into a play area at Eastvale School. According to the head, seesaws, climbers, slides, swings, a mini soccer pitch and a mini netball pitch, amongst other outdoor teaching/learning resources, were available. Asked to comment on whether grade zero/e.c.e. pupils do not scramble for these resources the head indicated that they enrolled only twenty grade zero/e.c.e. pupils consequently some of the outdoor resources might actually not find any users. I shall return to this type of resource in the sections on the T.I.C. and the teacher's perceptions.

Turning to the issue of teacher support, I inquired from the school head on the forms of support available to the grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. She went on to say:

Support comes in various forms for the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. To begin with our visit to St Gabriel Nursery Training School was meant to eventually benefit the teacher. All the ideas and suggestions we got from Bulawayo were eventually passed on to the teacher in 2008. As a school we have supported the T.I.C. and the e.c.e. teacher by facilitating workshop attendance. The district education office has held two such workshops to date. Parents have also supported the teacher through donations in cash or kind. As you
might be aware, at this school grade zero/e.c.e. pupils hold an end of
term get-together with parents and the school administration.
Provisions for such events are donated by parents. At the beginning
of every term, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils visit one tourist resort centre
in the country. This again, is sponsored by parents. In addition, the
T.I.C. supervises the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher as one way of
supporting her.
(Interview, November 2010).

The school head identified various forms of support the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher
and pupils get at Eastvale School. One form of support identified is the visit to a
nursery training school. While the visit was conducted before the school had
engaged, a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher the notes taken down by the visiting team were
useful in the conceptualization of what the Eastvale early childhood classroom would
look like. Using these ideas, amongst others, the school was able to build a state of
the art classroom which is more than adequately furnished with the requisite
teaching/learning resources. This is the environment into which the appointed grade
zero/e.c.e. teacher found herself.

On facilitating workshop attendance by the T.I.C. and the teacher, I inquired as to the
nature of the topics covered at such meetings. The school head pulled out a file
entitled “Record of proceedings from conferences, seminars and workshops 2008 -
2010.” She then pulled out reports on proceedings of the workshops, compiled by
the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. I was given access to these reports by
the school head. In my scrutiny of the records I was able to establish that the
following topics were covered at the two workshops: characteristics of the e.c.e.
learner, using play in early childhood education, methods of teaching early childhood
education classes, disciplining the e.c.e. learner, drawing up an e.c.e. time table,
improvising teaching/learning resources and how to manage outdoor learning
activities. Probed on how all this information was disseminated to other teachers in
the school, the head informed me that follow up staff development sessions were
held at the school. All teachers were invited to attend these sessions. According to
the school head, this was done to enable other teachers not only to appreciate but
also understand what happens at the early childhood education level. In the school
head's view such sessions were also meant to help other teachers accept grade zero/e.c.e. as part of Eastvale school.

The grade zero/e.c.e. programme at Eastvale is financially supported through, among other means, donations from parents. Some of these donations are used for end of term get-together sessions. Referring to a question on the benefit of hosting such get-together sessions, the school head pointed out that invited business people, parents, the S.D.A. committee, the school administration and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher have an opportunity to discuss pupils' performance. The school administration also makes use of these occasions to solicit new ideas parents may have on the early childhood education programme. According to the school head, such occasions have been partly responsible for the advances that Eastvale School has made in the introduction and subsequent implementation of the grade zero/e.c.e. programme.

Teacher supervision is one form of support identified by the school head. Responding to a question on teacher supervision arrangements at Eastvale, the school head indicated that she supervises the deputy head, the T.I.C. and all ancillary staff. The deputy head supervises grades 4 to 7 teachers while the T.I.C. supervises grade zero/e.c.e. as well as grade 1 to 3 teachers. The school head recommended that I discuss supervision expectations at the early childhood education level with the TIC. She, however, expressed confidence in the T.I.C.'s ability to provide guidance to the teacher. From the foregoing it would appear that the head is satisfied with the adequacy and usefulness of teacher support mechanisms operating at Eastvale School.

Besides teacher support, new and old programmes can be effectively implemented if teachers are adequately prepared for them. In trying to establish the state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers I asked the school head to comment on qualifications, experience and any other personal characteristics of early childhood education teachers who have taught at Eastvale from the time grade zero/e.c.e. was introduced. In response she said:
As noted earlier on, we introduced grade zero/e.c.e. at this school in 2008. At that time the S.D.A. appointed a nursery trained teacher. Unlike other schools which appointed 'O' level school leavers we wanted someone who had trained in handling learners at this level. The S.D.A. paid this teacher. In May 2009 a qualified Diploma in Early Childhood Education teacher was appointed by the Ministry of Education. She has been teaching since 2009... she is one year and a couple of months old in the profession. I am told that she has settled well and is teaching effectively. In fact, some parents have expressed appreciation to me for the services rendered by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher.
(Interview, November 2010).

From the inception of grade zero/e.c.e. Eastvale has had qualified teachers for that level of the primary school. The first teacher appointed had a nursery school training qualification. This is acknowledgement by the school administration that the visit to St Gabriel had impressed them to such an extent that engaging a nursery trained teacher was the best the school could do in a situation where no early childhood education teachers had been produced by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. The next teacher appointed by the Ministry of Education held a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. According to the school head, the teacher’s services are being acknowledged and appreciated by parents. Despite lack of teaching experience the Eastvale School head seems to be portraying a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher who is doing a splendid job for the school.

One key issue which this study sought to investigate was the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Eastvale School. Responding to a question on this issue the following observations were made by the school head:

- appropriate methods are used to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners
- lessons are time tabled and teaching is individualised
- while the 1999 E.C.E.C. syllabus is currently being used, a new document will soon be produced by the Ministry of Education, and
- provision of teaching/learning materials enhances teaching at this level of the primary school.
Some of the above comments from the school head portray a generalised description which is not early childhood education specific. Responding to a follow up question on what methods of teaching are appropriate for grade zero/e.c.e. classes, the school head suggested discovery and discussion methods. Pressed to suggest more methods the head could not. It is therefore not surprising that the school head recommended that I discuss grade zero/e.c.e. supervision arrangements with the T.I.C. The head was also not able to elaborate on how teaching at this level is individualised. Evident from the school head's account is that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is using appropriate methods in combination with appropriate teaching/learning resources. Considering the general nature of some of the issues raised, it may be surmised that lack of a qualification in early childhood education and lack of direct involvement in the supervision of grade zero/e.c.e. activities portrays the school head as having hazy ideas on the quality of teaching and learning at this level of the primary school.

This section has explored the school head's perceptions/views on Eastvale's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. As a school, Eastvale decided to defer the introduction of this innovation in order to ensure that a classroom block and sufficient teaching/learning resources were available. According to the head there was no adequate preparation of school heads by the Ministry of Education. On its own initiative Eastvale School, with the assistance of the S.D.A. procured sufficient and appropriate indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources for use by the teacher and pupils at this level of the primary school. The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is fully supported and teaches effectively. From the school head's perception Eastvale Primary School is more than ready for the introduction of this innovation in almost all respects.

4.5.2 Teacher-in-charge's perceptions on state of readiness

The T.I.C. is a sixty two year old female whose home language is Shona and she is a holder of a T4 certificate. She did 'O' level by private studies. She has taught at the infant level for over thirty six years and was appointed T.I.C. at Eastvale in 1997.
After establishing the language we were to use in the interview, which was English, I asked the T.I.C. how she was made aware of the introduction of this innovation as well as how she was prepared for performing her new role as supervisor at this level of the primary school. In response she said:

As you know the Ministry of Education just announces when a new programme is to be introduced. In the same way our school head was given a directive contained in a circular. The circular, a copy of which I have, instructs schools to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. with effect from 2006. The school head gave me a copy of this circular and this is how I came to be aware of the introduction of this innovation. As for what was done to prepare me for my new role, let me say that the school requested for permission to defer the introduction of this innovation. When permission was granted the S.D.A. decided to send the school head, myself and an infant teacher to a nursery school in Bulawayo. We learnt a lot about how pre-school classrooms are organised, what teaching/learning materials are used, the way pre-scholars are taught and how pupils' performance records are kept. To me this was a good preparation for my new role.

(Interview, November 2010).

The T.I.C. views the school's decision to request for a deferment of the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. as creating time to prepare stakeholders for their new roles in the new programme. According to the T.I.C. the school used that time to arrange an educational visit for the head, one infant teacher and the T.I.C. These three visited a nursery training school where they gathered practical information on the implementation of pre-school programmes. The age range for grade zero/e.c.e pupils is similar to nursery pupils preparing to enter formal primary school. Consequently, learning how pre-school classrooms are organised, what resources are used at this level, the way pre-school pupils are taught and how assessment and record keeping are done was very useful in preparing the T.I.C. for her new role.

Responding to a question on whether the Ministry of Education ever mounted workshops for T.I.C.s as a way of building their capacity to supervise grade zero/e.c.e. classes, the T.I.C. acknowledged that she attended two workshops, one in 2008 and another in 2010. She indicated that during the workshops topics such as developing a grade zero/e.c.e. time table, use of play in teaching, characteristics of
the early childhood education learner, disciplining the grade zero/e.c.e learner and managing indoor and outdoor activities were covered. Responding to a filter question on how she rated these workshops as a way of preparing her for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e., she had this to say:

It is a good idea to mount workshops but as a participant I felt that I should have been given hands-on experience on some topics we covered. For instance, topics such as developing a time table and improvising teaching/learning resources could have been followed up by practical activities. Instead the presenters just rushed through these topics. I did get some idea of how grade zero/e.c.e. learners are taught but I could have benefited more if the workshops had also covered topics such as supervision of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. On the whole I would rate the workshops as satisfactory.

(Interview, November 2010).

Learning at this level of the primary school is largely practical. It is no wonder the T.I.C. expected to be practically involved in some activities during workshops. The T.I.C. also makes a useful suggestion in that a topic on what to look for when supervising grade zero/e.c.e. classes should have been covered during the workshops. Doing so would have enhanced the T.I.C.’s confidence levels during class supervision. The T.I.C., however, opines that the workshops she attended were a satisfactory preparation for her role as an early childhood education supervisor.

Shifting the interview focus to the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources, I asked the T.I.C. to comment on classrooms, furniture and toilets for grade zero/e.c.e. learners. The T.I.C. asked me to accompany her to the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom. When we arrived at the classroom the teacher was asked to give her pupils a short break to allow us to talk about the classroom. The classroom was a solid structure big enough to accommodate thirty pupils. There was new children-sized furniture for each of the twenty pupils who constitute Eastvale’s grade zero/e.c.e. class. The classroom had lockers for each pupil and was spotlessly clean. From the classroom I was taken to the toilets. The T.I.C. informed me that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils and grades 1 and 2 pupils use the same toilets. Inside the toilets were child-sized chambers and wash basins. According to the T.I.C. the
school has plans to construct more toilets to cater for the increased population. She, however, observed that the current toilet facilities were fairly adequate.

One category of resources we addressed in the interview was indoor teaching/learning resources. In exploring availability of these resources I asked the T.I.C. to comment on indoor resources used by the teacher and pupils at Eastvale School. She responded thus:

As you noticed when you got to the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom there was plenty of media displayed on the walls, hanging from the rafters and in various learning corners. All that together with learning kits bought from Longmans, hoops, balls, jingles, rattles, etc. were bought by the S.D.A. Each e.c.e. learner has enough picture reading books, enough crayons, paint, brushes and enough newsprint for use every day of the school term. We are very proud of the indoor resources we have. Many e.c.e. teachers from other schools have come to see the resources we have and how an e.c.e. classroom should be furnished. When you interview the e.c.e. teacher, ask her to show you the teaching/learning materials that are stored in a room next to her classroom. She is still to use that material. We owe all this to the S.D.A. which organises fund-raising activities. (Interview, November 2010).

The T.I.C. is happy about the quantity and the quality of indoor learning resources that have been procured by the S.D.A. Indeed, when we visited the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom, I observed that there was a variety of media displayed. As Davin and Van Staden (2004) would say, such a classroom allows pupils to “swim” in media. The fact that teachers from other schools come to learn how an early childhood education classroom should be furnished is ample testimony that Eastvale School is more than ready for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. with respect to the provision of indoor teaching/learning resources.

Turning to outdoor resources, I was taken on a guided tour of the school play centre. At the centre there were swings, slides, seesaws, climbing ladders and a sand play area. Next to the slides were a netball pitch, a football pitch, a hockey pitch and a baseball pitch all made to match the age and size of grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. The play centre was fenced to protect it from being vandalised by pupils from the upper grades of the primary school. Asked to describe how learners use each of the
equipment at the play centre, the T.I.C. advised me to get an explanation from the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. As Atmore (2003) had observed, in an ideal environment for early childhood education learners, Eastvale Primary School had outdoor teaching/learning materials that provided learners with opportunities for rhythmic activities such as balancing, jumping and swinging.

From the availability of appropriate resources the interview shifted to focusing on support. To explore this issue I asked the T.I.C. to comment on the forms of support the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is accorded at Eastvale and this was her response:

It is true that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher needs support but don't forget that I also need to be supported. As you know e.c.e. is a new programme and so I also need to be constantly supported. Anyway, turning to the teacher let me begin by saying that I have personally supported her by encouraging her to attend a workshop organised by the district education office. That workshop was held in April 2010. In fact, I also attended the workshop. I supervise the teacher and discuss my observations with her. She is a trained e.c.e. teacher so in the main I learn from her. As a member of the School Finance Committee I support the acquisition of teaching/learning resources for the grade zero/e.c.e class. Parents too fund end of term get-together occasions and visits to tourist resort centres. (Interview, November 2010).

The T.I.C.’s comments suggest that for her to be able to effectively support the early childhood education teacher in this new programme, it is imperative that she too be supported. From her biographical data the T.I.C. is a holder of a T4 certificate yet she supervises a holder of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She has taught grades 1 and 2 for a long time and has also supervised teachers at these levels for a considerable length of time. Grade zero/e.c.e. is a new programme that has just been introduced in primary schools and she is in charge of it. The T.I.C.’s ability to realise that she requires support is in itself a sign that she yearns to grow professionally so that she can improve in the discharge of her responsibilities. Asked on how she could be supported the T.I.C. indicated that seminars on the role of an early childhood education supervisor, a step by step guide to grade zero/e.c.e. teacher supervision, record keeping and managing an early childhood learning environment could greatly benefit her. In addition, according to the T.I.C., staff
development at universities could also be mounted for those whose age permits them to keep on studying.

One form of support identified by the T.I.C. is teacher supervision. The T.I.C. acknowledges that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is academically and professionally qualified. As a result the T.I.C. claims that she learns from her interaction with the teacher. Asked to clarify what she meant, the T.I.C. highlighted that when it comes to procedural matters in teaching children between 0 and 8 years, she is confident in guiding the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. She observes, however, that with respect to theories of child development, theories of learning and other educational justifications for practice she has to rely on the trained early childhood education teacher.

As a member of the School Finance committee the T.I.C. has lobbied for the acquisition of teaching/learning resources used by the teacher and pupils. In the T.I.C.’s views parents have always supported suggestions she has made in S.D.A. meetings. In addition, parents have donated towards end of term get-together sessions as well as paying for visits to resort centres. Asked on how pupils benefit from visiting resort centres, the T.I.C. stated that children at this stage learn by exploring the environment and so visiting resort centres widens their horizons.

From the foregoing it would appear that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher at Eastvale Primary School is well supported. Workshop attendance, supervision by the T.I.C., provision of adequate and appropriate teaching/learning resources, and parental support with respect to end of term get-together sessions and visits to resort centres are some of the support mechanisms at the disposal of the early childhood education teacher at this school.

One key ingredient in programme implementation is teacher state of preparedness. In exploring this phenomenon, I asked the T.I.C. to comment on teaching experience, qualifications and any other characteristics of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers who have been engaged by the school since 2008. Responding to this question the T.I.C. recounted how in 2008 the SDA appointed a nursery trained teacher to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners. According to the T.I.C., in 2009 the school recruited a
holder of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The T.I.C. describes the nursery school teacher as having been competent in handling early childhood learners. If the T.I.C. had had her way she would have recommended that the nursery school teacher be retained so as to work together with the Diploma in Early Childhood Education teacher. The latter, according to the T.I.C., is very competent and confident in the manner she teaches and manages grade zero/e.c.e learners. She allows pupils to explore the environment and guides every learning activity with ease. Eastvale School, so the T.I.C. observes, has a grade zero/e.c.e. teacher who studied the theoretical foundations of teaching and learning. The teacher has a high subject mastery which contributes to the confidence she displays during teaching/learning situations. Although not very experienced her level of training and the teaching/learning environment she operates under further contribute to making her an effective grade zero/e.c.e. teacher.

In her portrayal of the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s state of preparedness, the T.I.C. alludes to teacher character traits that manifest themselves during teaching and learning. As a follow-up to the T.I.C.’s observation that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is competent in teaching and managing learners, I asked the TIC to comment on the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Eastvale. Her response contained the following observations:

• play and other activity-based methods dominate teaching
• teaching at this level is time tabled
• an E.C.E.C. syllabus is used as a basis for teaching
• teaching is individualised, and
• assessment and record keeping constitute part of grade zero/e.c.e. teaching at this school.

The T.I.C. avers that teaching at this level is dominated by play and activity methods. According to her, in all the lessons that she has observed being taught by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher, pupils worked either as individuals, in pairs or in groups. In these settings pupils were using counters, balls, hoops or some other accompanying teaching/learning resources. The T.I.C. also opines that the E.C.E.C. syllabus is used as a basis for teaching learners. Asked to elaborate on this observation the
T.I.C. indicated that the syllabus in question was produced in 1999 well before the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. Schools are currently using this syllabus in conjunction with a book entitled 'Learning Through Play' while they await the production of a new syllabus. According to the T.I.C., not all aims and objectives of this E.C.E.C. syllabus are translated into teachers' schemes and lesson plans. This is done because those elements of the syllabus that are deemed obsolete are not covered. I was shown a copy of the E.C.E.C. syllabus and the sections that are no longer being used at Eastvale school.

The T.I.C. raises two other key issues with respect to teaching at this level of the primary school. Firstly, lessons are time tabled. I was shown a copy of the time table by the T.I.C. According to her pupils' activities are varied in duration. Some activities last only fifteen minutes while others extend to thirty minutes. This is meant to cater for the short attention span of learners at this level of the primary school. According to the T.I.C. where an activity lasts thirty minutes it is normally punctuated by rhymes and/or other short attention arresting activity to break monotony. Secondly, the T.I.C. avers that grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is individualised. The teacher-pupil ratio of 1:20, as it stands at Eastvale School, enables the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher to individualise teaching. The T.I.C. applauded the S.D.A. decision not to enrol more than twenty grade zero/e.c.e. pupils in line with the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission (1999).

The T.I.C. further boldly declared that assessment and record keeping are considered to be part of teaching at Eastvale School. Elaborating on this claim, she observed that after teaching a concept or skill pupils are assessed to determine whether they have grasped it or not. If the assessment shows that pupils did not perform well, remedial lessons are taught until pupils are able to demonstrate competence in the concept or skill. The T.I.C. indicated that the competence levels displayed by pupils are rated and recorded. Each pupil has a folder where records of achievement or lack of it are kept. This is done for each subject taught. The T.I.C. informed me that I would be provided with these records when I get to the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. Looked at in this way, assessment and record keeping indeed become part of teaching at this level of the primary school.
This section has explored the T.I.C.’s perceptions on Eastvale’s state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. From the outlined views, while the T.I.C. would have preferred more with respect to preparing her for the new role she, nonetheless, is pleased with the amount, appropriateness and quality of resources set aside for use by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher, forms and adequacy of support provided to the early childhood education teacher, and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s state of preparedness as well as the quality of teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. It may, therefore, not be misplaced to classify Eastvale Primary School as ready for the introduction and implementation of early childhood education. The next section explores the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s perceptions/views on Eastvale’s state of readiness.

4.5.3 Grade zero/ece teacher’s perceptions on state of readiness

Eastvale School has one grade zero/e.c.e. teacher and so the interview was conducted with this teacher. The teacher is a twenty four year old female whose home language is Shona. She holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and was deployed to Eastvale in May 2009 straight from teachers’ college.

When I arrived at her class at around 10.30 a.m. I found the teacher busy conducting lessons. I introduced my subject and the teacher indicated that we could begin the interview immediately. Noticing that there were a couple of lessons still to be taught, I asked whether I could be allowed to observe the teacher teaching the remaining lessons as well as the displayed media so that the interview could then be conducted after 12 noon when early childhood education learners will have ended their lessons for the day. The teacher consented to this request and went on confidently teaching grade zero/e.c.e. pupils.

At 12.30 we started the interview in English. I inquired whether the training she received at college adequately prepared her for the situation she is now facing. She testified that to a large degree college had adequately prepared her for handling early childhood education classes. She indicated, however, that she had not been trained to handle mentally challenged learners. There are two such learners in her
class. Initially she did not know how to handle these learners but later sought the assistance of a special education teacher. She is now fairly comfortable with handling these learners. In the teacher's view she can handle grade zero/e.c.e. learners in any situation.

Commenting on the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources, the teacher said:

When I was deployed to this school I counted myself lucky because while at college I had heard about the generous provision of grade zero/e.c.e. teaching/learning resources. I had also heard of the tight records on provided resources. I came prepared to work under these conditions. As soon as I got to this school the head and the T.I.C. accompanied me to an exquisite classroom. The nursery school teacher I was to replace advised me to look after the available teaching/learning resources because, in some schools, it may take a very long time before they acquire even a quarter of the teaching/learning resources available at Eastvale. I really cannot complain because I have more than enough indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. (Interview, November 2010).

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher was full of praise for the school administration and the S.D.A. for having provided abundant and appropriate resources. She then took me on a tour of the classroom explaining the various types of resources displayed. She also showed me a storeroom with teaching/learning resources that cannot be displayed in the classroom, because of lack of space. From the classroom we toured the play centre. At the play centre the teacher demonstrated how each piece of equipment was used by pupils. She was also able to identify skills that were developed through the use of each form of equipment. Through such site observation and indeed through the e.c.e. teacher's bodily language and comments, it was evident that Eastvale Primary School was ready for the early childhood education innovation with respect to the availability of teaching and learning resources.

Turning to teacher support I inquired whether she was satisfied with the nature of the support she received and her response was:
Earlier on I noted that I counted myself lucky to be deployed to Eastvale School. To date I have attended one workshop organised by the district education office. Before I left for the workshop the school head called me to her office and instructed me to capture as much information as I could because an opportunity would be arranged for me to address the whole staff on workshop proceedings. She then gave me money for transport and meals. The TIC supervises me regularly and we discuss her findings in an open and frank manner. She asks me to justify all the methods, activities and the media used in lessons. One other form of support I get particularly from parents is funding end of term get-together sessions and excursions to resort centres. In addition, I am able to do my job well because I am provided with more than enough teaching/learning resources. (Interview, November 2010).

The teacher identifies one form of support as being granted permission to attend a workshop on early childhood education. Specifically, she points out that the school head was so interested in the workshop proceedings that the teacher was instructed to take down as much information as possible. Evident from the preceding is the interplay between pressure and support. Being instructed to prepare a paper to present to the whole staff is the pressure while being allowed to attend the workshop as well as being provided with money for transport and meals is the support given to the teacher.

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher also identifies supervision by the T.I.C. as another form of support. That the teacher highlights that lesson supervisions are followed by open and frank discussions reflects that the teacher is happy about the approach adopted by the T.I.C. Such an approach also suggests that the T.I.C. is open to suggestions from the teacher. This is probably why the teacher is required to justify her choice of approaches and media used during lessons. Supervision arrangements of this nature create opportunities for growth for both the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher.

Parents support the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher with funding and donations for end of term get-together sessions as well as for excursions to resort centres. Responding to a question on how such funding and donations are organised, the teacher
indicated that a committee comprising the deputy school head, the T.I.C., one infant teacher and three S.D.A. members collects the donated food items and beverages. The food items are prepared by the Home Economics teacher and served to all parents/guardians of grade zero/e.c.e. pupils, invited guests and members of the school administration. On such days reports on successes and challenges experienced by the grade zero/e.c.e. learners are presented by the T.I.C. and the chairperson of the S.D.A. The teacher also outlines what pupils are able to do, what challenges they experience and how she hopes to address the challenges. According to the teacher, such sessions have assisted her to, not only grow in confidence but also to get parental interest and involvement as resource persons in selected subject topics.

The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher also testifies that, she is supported through the funding of visits to tourist resort centres and the provision of adequate teaching/learning materials. With respect to the former, grade zero/e.c.e. pupils learn by exploring the environment. While this exploration begins at school the early childhood education teacher observes that after visiting the resort centres her pupils’ concept development with respect to animals, plants, flora and fauna has greatly improved. Provision of adequate teaching/learning resources, on the other hand, has assisted her to illustrate and concretize concepts. According to the teacher, as a result of this form of support “She is able to do her job well.” From the foregoing it does appear that Eastvale School has put in place adequate and useful support mechanisms for the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher.

Asked to comment on the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils receive at Eastvale, the teacher had this to say:

It is not easy to describe the quality of teaching and learning in such a short time. What I can say is that I hope you observed what was happening when I taught the last three lessons today. I also want to think that you were able to notice the nature of pupil involvement at this level. Generally, I use play and activity methods. I am guided by the E.C.E.C. syllabus (handing me the syllabus copy) together with the textbook entitled ‘Learning Through Play’. The syllabus is being revised and so sections that are considered obsolete are not used.
All lessons are time tabled. At this school assessment and record keeping are emphasised as part of teaching these pupils. (Interview, November 2010).

The teacher's response is an acknowledgement that teaching is a broad concept hence it was difficult for her to describe, in a short space of time, everything that depicts quality of teaching and learning. In her comments she observes that she largely uses play and activity methods when teaching pupils. In my observation of the last three lessons she taught, pupils did rhymes, shared and classified objects, drew pictures and did simulations. The last lesson was conducted at the play centre. Pupils were divided into five groups of four. Each group was assigned to doing an activity using specified equipment for a specified period. At the end of the specified period, the teacher blew a whistle and groups changed activities.

The teacher points out that her teaching is guided by the E.C.E.C. syllabus and a text book entitled "Learning Through Play." Responding to a question on why some sections of the syllabus can be regarded as obsolete the teacher indicated that the syllabus in question was produced in 1999, well before early childhood education had been introduced. A document analysis revealed that those objectives and content in the E.C.E.C. syllabus that were considered obsolete were not captured in the teacher's schemes of work.

One of the things that I did when I was waiting to conduct an interview with the teacher was to observe displayed media. One of the documents displayed was a time table. On this document grade zero/e.c.e. lessons are scheduled to begin at 8.00a.m. and end at 12.00 noon from Monday to Friday. When the teacher indicated that all lessons are time tabled I realised that she was referring to the subject arrangement on the document I had observed. The teacher also indicated that assessment and record keeping were an integral part of teaching. To this end I was provided with folders which contained pupils' performance records. In each of these folders pupils' achievement levels in different concepts and skills are recorded. For those whose achievement levels are low remedial action is suggested and for those whose achievement levels are high extension exercises are also suggested. Recordings of this nature are done once per week. From the foregoing, it is evident
that assessment and record keeping are key ingredients of grade zero/e.c.e. teaching at Eastvale Primary School.

This section has explored the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher’s perceptions/views on Eastvale’s state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation. What is clear from the teacher’s views is that she is sufficiently prepared to handle grade zero/e.c.e. classes, more than enough appropriate teaching/learning resources are available for use by pupils, there is tremendous teacher support, and the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level is very high. From the foregoing, Eastvale Primary School appears to be ready for the introduction of early childhood education.

4.6 REVELATION SCHOOL

Established in 1985, this council school is located in a high density area. This particular high density area was created for domestic workers who would service the nearby low density area. Families in this area live in small two-roomed houses. In addition to this, most families are low income earners.

The school, constructed by the city council, has an administration block which houses the school head’s office, the deputy head’s office, a bursar’s office, a T.I.C.’s office, a reception office and a large staffroom. There are twenty six classrooms at Revelation School. Of these twenty one are used by grades 1 to 7 classes and five are set aside for specialist subjects. Home Economics, Music, Art and Craft, Physical Education and Information Communication Technology (I.C.T.) are the specialist subjects offered at this school. The current school enrolment stands at nine hundred and eighty three pupils. Of these, thirty eight are grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. The school has a staff complement of thirty whose composition is twenty one grades 1 to 7 teachers, five subject specialist teachers, one grade zero/e.c.e. teacher, one school head, one deputy head and one teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.).

Revelation is a council-run school. The council oversees the school and is, therefore, its responsible authority. The council collects an educational levy from all residents of the city of Gweru. This levy is collected on a monthly basis. The city council
maintains school buildings and also attends to water reticulation at the school. The
council provides textbooks and exercise books for all pupils and its policy is that
each class has its own exclusive classroom. Thus, while most government primary
schools have double sessioning this does not happen at Revelation School. After
this description of the school, I now turn to the head's perceptions on the school's
state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

4.6.1 School head's perceptions on state of readiness

I begin this section by describing the school head. The head is a fifty five year old
male whose home language is Ndebele. He holds a Certificate in Education and a
Bachelor of Education in Policy Studies. He is not trained as an early childhood
education teacher. He has taught in the primary school for thirty years and has been
school head for the last twelve years. He has been at Revelation since 2000. After
introductions we agreed to use English in the interview. Introducing the subject of
the interview, I asked the school head to comment on how the school’s staff was
made aware of the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The school head responded thus:

Like in all other schools, e.c.e. came as an announcement to school
heads by the D.E.O. At one regular school heads' meeting in 2005,
the D.E.O. read out a circular that directed all primary schools to
begin implementing grade zero/e.c.e. with effect from January 2006.
Each school head was then given a copy of this circular. At school I
called for a short meeting, during one tea break, where I also read
out the circular to all teachers. After informing the responsible
authority about this Ministry of Education decision the town clerk
indicated that we wait for a resolution from a council meeting to be
held in two months time on this matter. I could see that the town
clerk was not amused about the introduction of this innovation in
council schools. Here are the minutes of the council meeting held on
this subject. As you can see the council decided to postpone the
introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. to 2009. According to the minutes
the council has cash flow problems and cannot attend to this issue
right away. In the meantime I asked the T.I.C. to find out from a
nearby teachers' college how this innovation could be
accommodated in the current school arrangement. In short, we came
to know about this innovation through a circular from the Ministry of
Education.
(Interview, November 2010).
The school head reaffirmed, like all other heads in this study, that the Ministry of Education used a mandate to announce the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. Responding to a follow up question on the appropriateness of this approach in the context of this particular innovation, the school head indicated that, while such an approach is useful as a tool for enforcing compliance, it was absolutely necessary to allow debate on how schools were expected to accommodate this new development. In the head's view the D.E.O. should have scheduled a separate meeting to discuss, not only the meaning but also the wider implications of introducing grade zero/e.c.e. classes in primary schools. To quote him verbatim, “While the facilities that we have are adequate for the current school population, any addition to this population requires further planning by the city council and the school S.D.A. committee.” At school level the head announced the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education at tea break. Zimbabwean primary school time tables allocate only thirty minutes for the tea break. This is, nonetheless, the time that the school head felt was adequate to convey the introduction of such an important programme to teachers at Revelation School.

The school head further describes how he conveyed the Ministry of Education decision to introduce grade zero/e.c.e. to all primary schools with effect from 2006 to the town clerk. According to the head a council meeting held two months from the time the Ministry of Education had decreed the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. agreed to suspend the introduction of this innovation citing cash flow problems. Further probing on whether Revelation School was not charged for violating a Ministry of Education directive (as is characteristic of technical-rational systems) revealed that the council wrote a letter to the education ministry explaining their position. The school head gave me access to this letter as well as the response by the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education. While the response authorized the city council to waive the introduction of early childhood education, it also encouraged the city council to try and implement the programme as soon as conditions in council revenues permitted.
The next aspect that we focused on in the interview, was the nature of preparation the school head, T.I.C. and grade zero/e.c.e. teacher received for their new roles in the early childhood education programme. Responding to a question on this issue, the school head said:

I am not quite sure whether other school heads were prepared for this innovation. As for me, other than the announcement made by the DEO nothing more was done. I am thankful that the council decided not to introduce it in 2006. Between 2006 and 2008 my colleagues, in other schools, were complaining for groping in the dark. What I am sure of is that in 2010 a workshop was mounted for the teacher-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e teacher. From reports compiled by the T.I.C. and the teacher they seem to have benefited, you can read the reports for yourself to gain insight into what was covered at these workshops. Our grade zero/e.c.e. teacher holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and so the college prepared her for her role at this level of the primary school.

(Interview, November 2010)

The school head presents an account which unambiguously paints a picture of someone who was never prepared for his role in the early childhood education programme. That the head is thankful for the council decision to defer the introduction of this innovation is suggestive of the fact that if it were not for this decision he would have found it difficult to discharge his duties at this level of the primary school. According to the school head, those schools which introduced grade zero/e.c.e. in 2006, as suggested by the Ministry of Education, were groping in the dark, a clear indication of lack of preparation for operating at this level. The school head acknowledges that a workshop organised for the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher benefited them. Going through the workshop proceedings reports provided by the school head I noticed that use of play, managing early childhood education classes and improvising teaching/learning materials were, inter alia, some of the topics covered at the workshop. I shall return to this issue in the T.I.C. and teacher’s sections on support systems available at Revelation School.

Aggarwal (2004) points out that schools that are ready to implement educational programmes are shown by, among other things, the provision of adequate and appropriate resources. Responding to a question on availability of classrooms,
furniture and toilets, the school head avowed that since the school introduced early childhood education in 2009, the city council has not been able to construct a classroom for early childhood education learners. A Physical Education (PE) room has been converted for use by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils and this, according to the school head, has not gone down well with the Physical Education specialist teacher.

On availability of furniture, the school head reported that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils use a few benches and chairs borrowed from grade one classes. Responding to a follow up question on what the council uses the education levy for if grade zero/e.c.e. pupils, in a council school, do not have furniture, the school head who sits in council meetings that deliberate on how levies are allocated for use, had this to say:

Council has many priorities. At the moment council workers are on strike, in fact they were even on strike last year. In 2009 these workers were promised a wage rise but this did not happen. The water reticulation system is not functioning properly and the council is afraid that there might be an outbreak of cholera. So instead of using the education levy to improve the state of grade zero/e.c.e., the council is forced to divert this money to other more pressing needs. In one of the meetings we held this year, I raised the issue (classroom and furniture for grade zero/e.c.e.) but it was shot down. I am sure we will have to make do with what we currently have for a considerable long time... until the economy improves. (Interview, November 2010).

The fact that the school head's suggestion regarding classrooms and furniture was rejected is a clear demonstration that providing a sound educational foundation for learners at this formative stage is not highly regarded. It is true, though, from the school head's account that the council is experiencing a variety of challenges. On toilets the school head indicated that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils use toilets that are used by grades 1 and 2 pupils. These do have children-sized chambers. From the foregoing, Revelation School seems to have teething challenges with respect to the provision of classrooms, toilets and furniture. According to the school head solutions to these challenges are not in sight.

The above depressing state did not prohibit me from inquiring what indoor teaching/learning resources were available for use by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and
pupils. Surprisingly the bleak picture painted by the school head with respect to availability of classrooms, furniture and toilets is not replicated in the area of indoor teaching/learning resources. According to the school head, between 2006 and 2008 the city council school procured twenty picture reading books in Mathematics and English, twenty hoops, twenty balls, ten ropes, one Longman learning kit, ten reams of newsprint and several boxes of pencils and crayons. Considering that the grade zero/e.c.e. class had thirty eight pupils, the above indoor resources, according to the school head, were reasonably adequate. On outdoor teaching/learning resources the school head referred me to the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher for information on plans that are still being discussed on how to source for these resources.

Acknowledging that the school head was not a trained early childhood education teacher, I did not explore the issue of how teaching/learning resources were used at Revelation School. Instead, I shifted attention to support mechanisms the school has put in place to enable the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher to discharge her duties. The school head opined:

As a school we have not adequately supported the e.c.e. teacher. Right now she does not feel to be part of the school as we have failed to address the acrimony between her and the Physical Education teacher. I have even asked the T.I.C. to attend to this matter but no solution has yet been found. Our T.I.C. supervises the teacher regularly but is not an e.c.e. specialist. She trained to teach grades 3 to 7 but because she has taught grades 1 and 2 for a long time I recommended that she be appointed substantive T.I.C. In my discussion with the T.I.C. there are some e.c.e. areas she is not familiar with and so I am beginning to wonder whether the e.c.e. teacher is benefiting from the T.I.C.’s supervision. I have organised that the T.I.C. visits a local primary teachers’ college and local nursery schools to acquaint herself with supervision expectations. I don’t think we are doing enough in terms of supporting the e.c.e. teacher.

(Interview, November 2010).

It is clear from the above observations that inadequate support is provided to the early childhood education teacher. As long as the teacher is not adequately
supported and does not feel accepted in the school it is difficult for her to discharge her duties diligently.

The school head also raised teacher supervision as one form of support provided by the T.I.C. to the teacher. The head, however, highlights that the T.I.C. admits that there are some grade zero/e.c.e areas she is not comfortable with. While the school head claims that he has organised that the T.I.C. visits a local teachers' college and nearby nursery schools this had not taken place at the time this study was conducted.

Exploring the aspect of teacher state of preparedness I asked the school head to comment on the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's qualifications, experience and any other personal characteristics she displays.

He responded thus:

Revelation school is lucky in that unlike other schools which made use of unqualified teachers at the time they introduced e.c.e. we started off with a qualified e.c.e. teacher. She holds a three year Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The teacher has been at this school since January 2009 when we introduced grade zero/e.c.e. The various suggestions made by this teacher in January about how to set up grade zero/e.c.e. classrooms, organization of the various learning corners in the classroom, etc. clearly demonstrate a high degree of mastery by the teacher. She has been here for over a year now and I am told she is patient with and nurturing towards pupils. In addition, she is a skilful communicator. (Interview, November 2010).

The school head’s account portrays a teacher who is aware of the kind of learning environment appropriate for grade zero/e.c.e. learners and also her role in that environment. According to the school head a committee comprising two SDA members, the T.I.C., the early childhood education teacher and the head met in early January of 2009 to discuss, inter alia, how grade zero/e.c.e. was to be introduced, the classroom that would be set aside and teaching/learning resources to be deployed to the room. It is in this meeting that everyone witnessed the teacher’s high degree of mastery on issues relating to the management of grade zero/e.c.e. environments. The teacher has taught for nearly two years and the school head
lauds her as patient with and nurturing towards pupils. The teacher is further described as a skilful communicator. From such a description we can deduce that the school head is more than satisfied with the state of preparedness of the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher at Revelation School.

After teacher preparedness the next area we explored in the interview was the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Revelation School. Responding to a question on this issue, the school head raised the following points:

• I have not personally observed any lesson taught by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher
• their lessons are time tabled, and
• the school has provided the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher with a lot of teaching/learning resources.

Probed on why he has not taken interest in establishing the quality of teaching and learning at grade zero/e.c.e. level, the head remarked that his training did not prepare him as a supervisor of what goes on at that level of the school. In addition, the school head cites lack of capacity building by the district education office. In his view, he lacks the capacity to supervise the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher hence he delegates this to the T.I.C. Asked whether he was involved in the construction of the time table used at grade zero/e.c.e. level, he affirmed that the time table was developed at a workshop attended by the T.I.C. and the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. What the head is sure of is the provision of appropriate teaching/learning resources for use by the teacher. The above picture portrays a school head who seems not to be interested in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning at the grade zero/e.c.e. level.

This section has explored the school head's perceptions/views on Revelation's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. While grade zero/e.c.e. was only introduced in 2009 the city council which runs the school, seems to be experiencing teething challenges that have prevented it from giving due attention to the introduction of this innovation at Revelation School. The school head asserts
that currently there is no classroom and furniture for use by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils, the school has not adequately supported the teacher and that the T.I.C. needs capacity building from a nearby teachers' college and surrounding nursery schools. The school has a qualified early childhood education teacher who is provided with adequate and appropriate resources. From the school head's perceptions/views, it would appear that Revelation School has to address some key fundamentals before it can be said to be ready for the introduction and implementation of grade zero/e.c.e. In the next section I explore the teacher-in-charge's perceptions/views on Revelation's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

4.6.2 Teacher-in-charge's perceptions on state of readiness

My second interview at Revelation was held with the teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.). I begin this section by answering the question: ‘Who is the T.I.C.?’ The T.I.C. is a forty nine year old female whose home language is Shona. She is a holder of a three year Diploma in Education and specialised in teaching the junior grades of the primary school (grades 3 to 7). She has taught for ten years in the junior grades and fifteen years in the infant grades (grades 1 to 2). She was appointed T.I.C. at Revelation School in 2005.

After agreeing to use English in the interview I asked the T.I.C. to comment on how she was made aware of and subsequently prepared for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. Her response was:

Let me begin by telling you that I am neither an infant specialist nor an e.c.e. trained teacher. I happened to have been deployed to the infants’ section because I was one of the two female teachers at this school. And so all that I know about infant school work is what I got on the job. I got to know about the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. through a circular that was read to us at a tea break meeting by the school head. The head did not explain the contents of the circular but asked me to find out how this innovation could be introduced at this school. As for my preparation, let me say that not much was done. I did attend a workshop this year. I greatly benefited from it because we focused on managing e.c.e. classes, the use of play and generating teaching/learning materials for grade zero/e.c.e. classes. I wish we had more of these workshops particularly for people like
The T.I.C.’s comments paint a picture of someone who happened to have been promoted to her position by virtue of having taught at the infant school level for a relatively long period of time. Her acknowledgement suggests that she is not an early childhood education trained teacher, is aware of her knowledge gap and would have preferred thorough grounding in child development theories, management of early childhood classes, methods of teaching and what to look for when supervising teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. This is evident from her comment on the workshop she attended. In her own words, “I wish we had more of these workshops particularly for people like me who have no background in either infant or early childhood education.” From the foregoing the T.I.C. seems to be saying that she did not get enough preparation for her new role in the early childhood education programme.

For any programme to take off effectively there must be adequate and appropriate resources. In a bid to explore the issue of resources, I asked the T.I.C. to comment on infrastructural resources available for use by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. The T.I.C. indicated that grade zero/e.c.e. pupils ‘invaded’ a Physical Education classroom and converted it to their own use. Asked to clarify this ‘invasion’, the T.I.C. pointed out that the school administration directed, without the Physical Education teacher’s knowledge, that the Physical Education classroom be used by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. Responding to a follow up question on whether there is enough furniture in that classroom, the T.I.C. revealed that the few chairs and benches in that room were borrowed from grade 1 classes. According to the T.I.C., grade zero/e.c.e. pupils take turns to sit on benches when writing or drawing. The T.I.C. blames the responsible authority (city council) for failing to appreciate the importance of the early childhood education programme.

On indoor teaching/learning resources, the T.I.C. expressed satisfaction with what Revelation school currently has. According to the T.I.C., there are adequate:
• ropes, balls and hoops
• reams of newsprint and stikistuff
• pencils and crayons
• seesaws, slides and climbing ladders
• sand play areas, and
• football and netball pitches.

Responding to how these indoor and outdoor resources are used at Revelation School, the T.I.C. referred me to the early childhood education teacher. It seems that while the T.I.C. is happy to talk about availability of appropriate indoor teaching/learning resources, she is not confident enough to describe how each resource is used. This is, once again, a reminder of the point the T.I.C. raised, earlier on, that she is neither an infant nor an early childhood education specialist trained teacher.

Realising that I was not getting any useful information on how indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources are used by the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher, I turned attention to the issue of support. To explore this dimension I asked the T.I.C. to list the forms of support available to the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher at Revelation school. She responded as follows:

What you need to know is that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is a specialist, while I am not. In performing my key result areas I am expected to supervise the e.c.e. teacher, which thing I have done ever since the teacher was appointed to this school. To be honest, I find it difficult to produce supervision reports because there are many e.c.e. areas I am not familiar with. What I have done is to merely discuss my observations with the teacher but I don't know whether this has benefited her or not. I have also allowed this teacher to attend a workshop organised by the district education office this year. I also attended that workshop. She was very active during the workshop making significant contributions and sometimes assisting the presenter to explain certain concepts. Besides this there is no other significant support I have offered the teacher. (Interview, November 2010).

The T.I.C. is aware that supervision is a form of support that can be provided to a teacher. She acknowledges that she has supervised the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher
many a time but has not been able to produce supervision reports. In my view, it may not be a question of failing to structure a report but more of uncertainty as to what to include in the supervision reports. The T.I.C. seems to be afraid that her reports may be challenged by the more knowledgeable early childhood education teacher. This seems to be substantiated when the T.I.C. says “What you need to know is that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is a specialist while I am not.”

Besides supervision, the T.I.C. allowed the teacher to attend a workshop on early childhood education organised by the district education office. Probed on what topics were covered during the workshop, the T.I.C. identified managing grade zero/e.c.e. classes and the use of play in teaching. She advised me to get copies of reports on workshop proceedings from the school head's office for more details. On the whole, the T.I.C. was full of praise for the early childhood education teacher's contributions during the workshop. From the foregoing the T.I.C. acknowledges that not much support is being provided to the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher at Revelation School.

The next aspect that we focused attention on in the interview was teacher state of preparedness for e.c.e. Exploring this dimension, I asked the T.I.C. to comment on the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's qualifications, experience and other personality traits she exhibits.

In response the T.I.C. said:

Our grade zero/e.c.e. teacher holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She is the right teacher for this class. She was appointed to this school (straight from college) at the beginning of 2009 when we introduced grade zero/e.c.e. Her late father, who used to work for the city council, pleaded with the district education staffing office to have her deployed to this school. While I am not an e.c.e. specialist I would like you to know that the teacher we have is hardworking, resourceful and enjoys working with children. The children listen to her and she listens to them. Revelation School is lucky to have such a teacher for its grade zero/e.c.e. class. (Interview, November 2010).

According to the T.I.C., 'She is the right teacher for the class.' Implied from this comment is that the Diploma in Early Childhood Education has equipped the grade
zero/e.c.e. teacher with the knowledge and skills to handle learners at this level of the primary school. While the early childhood education teacher has taught for only one year and eleven months, she is hardworking, resourceful and enjoys working with children. Read, Gardner, and Mahler (2003) maintain that a teacher of young children must enjoy working with them. This is important because, besides the teacher’s skills, her attitudes and feelings also influence what she does for and with children. From the foregoing it would appear that the T.I.C. is convinced that Revelation School has a well qualified grade zero/e.c.e. teacher.

Another issue that this study sought to explore was the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Revelation School. Responding to a question on this dimension the T.I.C. maintained that from her lesson observations she has noted the following:

- a 1999 E.C.E.C. syllabus is used as a basis for teaching
- play dominates learning at this level
- lessons are time tabled
- council has provided fairly adequate teaching/learning resources for use by the teacher and pupils, and
- the teacher motivates pupils and so they enjoy their lessons.

Probed on why the school still uses a syllabus that was produced before early childhood education was introduced, the T.I.C. indicated that a new syllabus was being finalised to replace the E.C.E.C. one. Asked to comment on how each of the raised issues contributes to the quality of teaching and learning at this school the T.I.C. stated that the syllabus provides aims/objectives and content to be learnt by grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. According to the T.I.C., the syllabus thus guides teaching at this level of the primary school. The time table, according to the T.I.C. provides for order, taking into account the attention span of learners at this level. For the role of play, the use of teaching/learning resources in lessons, and the motivation of learners, the T.I.C. referred me to the grade zero/e.c.e teacher. To quote her verbatim, “I want you to get this from the horse’s mouth. I have no doubt that she will provide practical demonstrations on how these are used.”
This section has explored the T.I.C.’s perceptions/ views on Revelation’s state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The T.I.C. was not sufficiently prepared for her new role in the early childhood education programme. Revelation School needs to build a grade zero/e.c.e. classroom and provide adequate furniture. While Revelation School has adequate and appropriate indoor teaching/learning resources and a well qualified early childhood education teacher, not much has been provided by the T.I.C. in terms of teacher support. In spite of the foregoing from the T.I.C.’s account of the quality of teaching and learning and her account of the state of e.c.e. teacher preparedness grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Revelation School seem to be benefitting from the programme. From the T.I.C.’s views, if the above challenges are addressed Revelation school could move towards being fully ready for the introduction of this innovation. In the next section I explore the grade zero/early childhood education teacher’s perceptions/ views on Revelation’s state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation.

4.6.3 Grade zero/ece teacher’s perceptions on state of readiness

My third semi-structured interview at Revelation School was held with the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher. Before presenting the teacher’s views, I begin this section by a portrayal of who the teacher is. The grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is a twenty five year old female whose home language is Shona. She holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and was deployed to Revelation School at the beginning of 2009.

After introducing myself and the subject of the interview, I asked the teacher to comment on how she has settled in at Revelation School.

Her response was:

Generally I have settled well at this school. When I arrived I was introduced to all teachers and they all appeared happy about my presence. This seemingly good relationship ended when I was allocated a Physical Education room as my classroom. The Physical Education teacher and her friends ganged against me. On the one hand there were those who argued that P.E. did not need a classroom and on the other there were those who felt that I should not displace the P.E. teacher. This issue has not been settled yet.
Otherwise I am teaching my grade zero/e.c.e. class in the best manner that I can in these circumstances. (Interview, November 2010).

The teacher's comments portray general satisfaction with the reception she got on arrival at Revelation School. Probed on whether her training, at teachers' college, adequately prepared her for the realities she is currently facing, she observed that by and large her knowledge of child development theories, theories of learning, motivation theories and methods of teaching have assisted her to handle grade zero/e.c.e. learners effectively.

Shifting the focus to the availability of appropriate resources, I asked the teacher to comment on the grade zero/e.c.e. classroom, furniture and toilets. In response she said:

As indicated earlier on, I am using a room that had originally been allocated to P.E. In fact, the classroom is not built to e.c.e. specifications because there are no cupboards/lockers and the windows are too high. At least I have a classroom to use. Some of my colleagues teach under trees and in the school playground. The classroom has no furniture of its own. A few benches and chairs borrowed from grade 1 classes are being used by the pupils. Some of my pupils sit on the floor. When it comes to time for writing or drawing pupils take turns to use the benches and chairs. I did not expect this in a council school. As for toilets, grade zero/e.c.e., grade 1 and grade 2 pupils use the same toilets. (Interview, November 2010).

The teacher has a classroom to use, although it was not constructed with grade zero/e.c.e. pupils in mind. Since we conducted the interview in the classroom, I was able to observe that there were only ten benches and eight chairs to be used by thirty eight grade zero/e.c.e. pupils. The benches and chairs were not the right size for e.c.e. learners. That some pupils sat on the floor during lessons is not a sign that Revelation School is ready for the introduction of the innovation with respect to availability of appropriate furniture. As the teacher puts it, "When it comes to writing or drawing, pupils take turns to use benches and chairs. I did not expect this in a
council school.” The teacher also asserts that no new toilets were constructed as grade zero/e.c.e. pupils use toilets meant for grade 1 and 2 pupils.

On availability of appropriate indoor teaching/learning resources, the teacher took me around the classroom showing me the variety of media displayed. In one corner of the classroom were twenty copies of picture reading books for English and Mathematics. Acknowledging that for a class of thirty eight the books were inadequate, the teacher explained how these books were shared amongst groups so that all pupils have access to them. In another corner were disused typewriters and radios. I was shown hoops, ropes, balls and charts displayed on walls as well as on mobiles. I was also taken to a storeroom with a reasonable amount of newsprint, pencils and crayons. I could see that the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher was happy about the amount and quality of indoor teaching/learning resources she had. As she puts it, “I am able to organise my teaching with ease because of all these indoor teaching resources.” From indoor teaching resources we focussed attention on outdoor teaching/learning resources. The teacher took me on a tour of the proposed grade zero/e.c.e. play centre location. Currently except for the bare ground Revelation does not have a play centre.

Shifting attention from resources I asked the teacher to comment on forms of support mechanisms at her disposal at Revelation School. She recounted that her greatest form of support was the provision of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning resources. According to her, this is made possible through the fees and levies paid by parents. The teacher also indicated that she is supervised by the T.I.C. While she acknowledges that supervision is meant to support her, she bemoans lack of written feedback from the T.I.C. According to the teacher, after every lesson supervision the TIC calls her to the office to discuss observations made. During these observations the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher is asked to take the lead while the TIC jots down some notes. The teacher has yet to get any written comments from the T.I.C.

The teacher also identified attending a workshop on early childhood education as a form of support. According to her being granted permission to attend the workshop was acknowledgement, by the school administration, that she could benefit from it. On topics covered at the workshop, she identified the use of play, improvising
teaching/learning materials and managing early childhood education classes. According to the teacher some of the presenters were not very knowledgeable about the topics they were handling. In her view the workshop was more beneficial to participants who had no background in early childhood education. As she observes, “For people like me it was time to reinforce what I learnt both at college and during teaching practice.”

Besides teacher support this study also sought to establish the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils received at Revelation School. In our exploration of this dimension, in the interview, the teacher raised the following points:

- grade zero/e.c.e. teaching is based on the E.C.E.C. syllabus and a text book entitled ‘Learning Through Play’
- play methods dominate teaching at this level
- teaching is affected by class size and availability of resources
- teaching is time tabled, and
- assessment and record keeping are an integral part of teaching at this level.

Commenting on the use of the E.C.E.C. syllabus, the teacher emphasized that relevant sections of this document were used in developing schemes of work and lesson plans. According to her, some sections of the syllabus have become inconsistent with early childhood education expectations. These are the sections that are no longer used. The teacher also pointed out that a text book entitled ‘Learning Through Play’ was being used to augment the 1999 E.C.E.C. syllabus. According to the teacher this is only a stop-gap measure as a new syllabus was being developed. Drawing my attention to the time table the teacher indicated that the document makes teaching systematic and orderly. In addition to this the teacher showed me records of grade zero/e.c.e. pupils' performance. In these records the teacher indicates what each pupil was able to do and what each pupil was not able to do. For the former suggested extension work is provided while for the latter, remedial action is also suggested. According to the teacher a pupil can proceed to the next concept or skill only after demonstrating ability in the previously failed concept or skill. Looked at this way the availability of syllabus guidelines, the use of appropriate
teaching methods, and time tabling lessons as well as assessment and record keeping enhance the quality of e.c.e. teaching and learning at Revelation School.

One element raised by the teacher is that class size and resource availability affect the quality of teaching and learning. Asked to elaborate on this aspect the teacher revealed that while the recommended grade zero/e.c.e. class size is twenty pupils, her class has thirty eight pupils. According to her this number of pupils makes it difficult to individualise teaching as is expected at this level. What she has been able to do, in a majority of lessons, is to attend to individual groups and not individual pupils. This disadvantages those pupils who require regular individual attention. The use of play-way methods in combination with a variety of teaching/learning resources has, in the teacher's view, assisted grade zero/e.c.e. pupils to benefit from lessons taught. Despite the few challenges raised by the teacher, it would appear that the quality of teaching and learning grade zero/e.c.e. pupils at Revelation Primary School receive is reasonably satisfactory.

This section has explored the grade zero/e.c.e. teacher's perceptions/views on Revelation's state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. The teacher was adequately prepared by the college for her role in the early childhood education programme and the school seems to have adequate and appropriate indoor teaching/learning resources. While the teacher complains of lack of written feedback (from the T.I.C.) it would appear that, in the main, grade zero/e.c.e. has taken off and is being very satisfactorily implemented at Revelation Primary School.
4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has explored five different contexts in which early childhood education was introduced and implemented. Key participants in each context, namely, the school head, the teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.) and the grade zero/early childhood education teacher have described the extent to which their respective cases/schools are ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. The next chapter analyses and discusses these descriptions with a view to answering the research questions as well as providing the broader policy and practice implications of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 4 school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers provided extensive descriptions of their views on their respective contexts with respect to the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. In the context of this study the above three categories of participants are treated as teachers. In chapter 3, qualitative research was described as a process of inquiry undertaken in order to gain insight into social situations through examining meanings which participants attribute to them. A study of teacher perceptions thus, in essence, calls for greater attention to teachers’ personal experiences and subjective realities. In the words of Louis, Toole and Hargreaves (1999:269) “It is time to bring the individual back into the picture and it is time to recognize that the most profound and lasting educational change involves changes in the teacher.” The present study analyses and discusses subjective teacher perceptions of primary schools' state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. In an attempt to answer this study’s research questions as well as providing broad implications for early childhood education policy and practice the current chapter analyses and discusses these perceptions under the following headings:

- Nature of teacher preparation
- Appropriateness of resources
- Adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems
- Preparedness of grade zero/early childhood education teachers
- Quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level
5.2 NATURE OF TEACHER PREPARATION

This section of the study analyses and discusses how the key participants across the five cases, namely, school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers view and have experienced the nature of their preparation for the introduction of this innovation. As intimated earlier on for the purpose of this study the three categories of participants identified above are all treated as teachers. In fact, the initial training of all these participants is that of teacher. Notwithstanding the foregoing teachers in schools perform different tasks and occupy different positions consequently this section of the discussion treats school heads, teachers-in-charge and class teachers separately so that perceptions of each teacher category can be captured. This approach was adopted for all research questions.

5.2.1 Preparation of school heads

From the descriptions provided in chapter 4 it is evident that all the five school heads in the study were made aware of the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education through a circular distributed to them by the District Education Officer (D.E.O). It is not uncommon that in centralized education systems, like in Zimbabwe, Ministry of Education policies are disseminated as directives or circulars that must be implemented without fail, in the schools. While such an approach to curriculum policy dissemination may ensure compliance, Ministry of Education officials should take into account the extent to which policy implementers have been prepared to operationalize the policy.

The technical-rational/fidelity perspective was adopted to implement early childhood education in Zimbabwean primary schools. Tending to be top-down oriented the perspective focuses on administrative and procedural aspects while down playing the influence of context. Early childhood education was to be implemented in schools and school heads are key players in this context. They, therefore, needed to be adequately prepared for the introduction of this innovation. Other than the announcement made by the D.E.O. the five school heads received no other preparation or training for executing their new roles. The school heads were expected to supervise new grade zero/early childhood education classes but as one
of them aptly described their situation “We wonder how we are expected to supervise additional classes when we ourselves do not know how to handle these classes.” While the Ministry of Education expected school heads to introduce, manage and supervise these classes without preparation all the school heads suggested, in interviews, that they required conferences, workshops and seminars on early childhood education well before the innovation was introduced in schools. As one of the school heads poignantly puts it “We cannot say that school heads were ever prepared for the introduction of this innovation. They were just expected to deal with this group of learners in the same way they deal with other primary school classes.”

The above perceptions by school heads confirm the observation that in the fidelity perspective policy makers need to consider and plan for the implementation stage if reforms are to be successful. Indeed policy makers need to view implementation as a critical stage and understand all stages of the reform process as interdependent rather than as distinct from each other. Such an approach could have ensured that the policy on early childhood education was fully explained to school heads before it was implemented in schools. In the context of this study, to borrow Rogan’s (2007) terminology, the attention and energies of policy makers focussed more on the “what” of the desired curriculum change (introduction of e.c.e.) and neglected the “how” as shall be further shown in the next section of this discussion.

According to Fullan (2007) the principal (school head) is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas. The school head thus ensures that external plans, like the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. are implemented in the schools. If the school heads are not prepared for innovation introduction they will not be able to facilitate and manage its implementation. In this study it would appear that school heads were expected to implement early childhood education without having been prepared for it. If indeed policy has to be put into practice and implemented fully, the Ministry of Education should have taken into account that policies are not transmitted in a vacuum by ensuring that school heads, were given a clear idea of the new behaviours required of them. Evident from the study is the fact that school heads were not clear about what they were expected to do differently – what the change meant for them in practice. At least in the initial implementation of the early
childhood education programme school heads should have been provided with concrete and tangible plans of how they were expected to operate as a way of providing clarity on the innovation. This need for clarity by school heads can be interpreted as an expression of a feeling of role ambiguity in a situation of uncertainty produced by new challenges of the innovation (e.c.e.) on the one hand and by their lack of competencies on the other.

Fullan (2007) adds to this key imperative of innovation clarity when he posits that the principal, (school head) should be a leader and facilitator in the implementation of curriculum guidelines. Within the school organisation, institutional leadership is critical in creating a cultural context that fosters innovation and helps in establishing organisational strategy, structure, and systems that facilitate innovation implementation. In fact, there is a growing acceptance that innovations in an organisation require a special kind of supportive leadership (Roberts, 2004). Other researchers contend that different stages of the innovation would require different types of leadership, for example the initiating phase would require a nurturing type of leadership while the implementation phase would require a championing type. An amplification of the above point by Donaldson (2001), which I fully subscribe to, is that effective school leadership mobilizes for moral support by fostering open, trusting, affirmative relationships, a commitment to mutual purposes and moral benefit and a shared belief in action-in-common. School heads, as observed by Leithwood (1992), thus support and push development, create and facilitate structures and monitor teacher commitment. School heads who are able to demonstrate the preceding qualities and capabilities clearly understand their roles in new innovation implementation. In this multiple case study, because they were not given any preparation for the introduction of e.c.e., school heads were not able to provide leadership to T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers.

Put differently, the long term direction of a school is firmly the responsibility of its leader (school head) who should be able to interpret and visualize policies, and create a future for other teachers to follow – a clear indication that policies are transmitted through school heads. Vision building and sharing by the school heads has the effect of focusing students and teachers towards meeting the requirements of a new program like early childhood education. This means that the school heads
are expected to spell out the common goals of the envisioned future towards which early childhood education implementation should be directed. Vision building and sharing in the context of this study would be difficult to achieve considering that the school heads were not given any preparation and support for implementing the early childhood education programme. The innovation was, however, likely to have been better assimilated into the primary school structure had its meaning and implications been clearly understood and shared by all key participants in the education system, including school heads.

To shed some light on why some key stakeholders in the school system seem to be treated peripherally in centralized education systems, Karwoski (2011) asserts that curriculum planning, development and analysis are usually removed from the hands of practitioners (school heads, teachers-in-charge and ordinary teachers) on the basis of technical rationality. In this rationality thinking is removed from implementation and the implementer is taken as a mere technician. Such an approach is consistent with the fidelity perspective of innovation implementation where authority and responsibility flow in an unbroken line from the highest executive (policy makers and planners) to the lowest operative (teachers) (Smits, Kuhlmann and Shapira, 2010). As pointed out elsewhere in this study, the perspective relies heavily on forward mapping. It is, therefore, not sensitive to the culture of schools or the daily lives of teachers. One observation that can be made about taking such a stance in the context of this study is that sidelined school heads who are not only key actors but also gatekeepers in the school situation did not lead to the effective implementation of early childhood education in most schools in this multiple case study. As this study clearly demonstrates, this is one illustration of a focus on the “what” of the desired curriculum change and a neglect of the “how.” Thus the distinction between the object of change and the process of change was not taken into account.

An examination of school heads’ biographical data indicates that most of them are holders of Masters’ degrees in education. The Ministry of Education continues to treat such highly educated school heads as mere technicians. I am of the view that if properly engaged, involved and utilised such school heads might actually assist those in provincial and district education offices to clarify ministry circulars like the
one distributed to school heads without explanation by the D.E.O. (see chapter 4). Indeed successful programme implementation requires the personal engagement of participants. Thus, adopting a mutual adaptation perspective where implementation depended on how individuals within the local context interpreted and enacted curriculum policy was likely to have produced better results with respect to the involvement of school heads and their understanding of how early childhood education was to be implemented. Rather than a top-down hierarchical view of e.c.e. implementation mutual adaptation underscores the importance of bottom-up interpretations and responses to policy intentions.

In chapter one a distinction was made between first order and second order educational changes. Whereas first order changes are meant to improve an existing system without substantially altering the way children and adults perform their roles, second order changes are fundamental in that they are system changing (Morrison, 2008). Second order changes are multidimensional in that they embrace changes in curricular aims and objectives, functions, structures, skills, beliefs and roles (Morrison, 2008). Second order changes require investments in institutions and school personnel. Such changes require the involvement of people like school heads. Early childhood education was categorized as a second order change. It required the creation of new structures, setting new goals as well as the learning of new skills and roles by school heads. Karwoski (2011) points out that the level of complexity of an innovation determines the amount and depth of preparation required for implementers. For school heads the introduction of early childhood education meant learning new roles, knowledge and new skills. It also meant the creation of new structures and the adoption of new goals in the primary school. School heads in this multiple case study received no capacity building in preparation for the installation of early childhood education in their schools. Their own perceptions are clear on the causes of their shortcomings with respect to their state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation. Early childhood education was indeed a complex change which required school heads to have been adequately prepared for it. This lack of preparation of school heads for their new roles implies that the e.c.e. change was going to be shallow. In this study, because school heads were not sure of what new behaviours were expected of them it was difficult for them to be effective change agents with respect to the introduction of e.c.e.
5.2.2 Preparation of teachers-in-charge

One group of the participants, in the five cases studied, that needed to be prepared for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. are teachers-in-charge. In primary schools T.I.C.s supervise the activities of teachers and learners from grade zero/e.c.e. up to grade 2 level. Operating in a technical-rational/fidelity mode of implementation, T.I.C.s are expected to be highly knowledgeable about the school sub-systems they are in charge of. At a minimum they are expected to hold qualifications that enable them to function at the various levels they supervise. On the ground, however, none of the five teachers-in-charge had trained as early childhood education teachers yet they were expected to supervise the day to day implementation of this programme. Thus the capacity of schools to support innovations, such as grade zero/e.c.e., was taken for granted by policy planners.

The nearest to this qualification teachers-in-charge had was a Diploma in Infant Education (held by one T.I.C) and T4 (held by two T.I.C.s). Instructive is the observation made in chapter 4 that such qualifications enabled holders to operate at grades 1 and 2 levels. Two other teachers-in-charge held a general Diploma in Education that prepared them to teach grades 3 to 7. In Loucks and Hall’s (1978) classification T.I.C.s were operating at the mechanical use level where, because of lack of specialist e.c.e. training, their involvement in e.c.e. activities was uncoordinated. T.I.C.s’ focus was thus on the day to day use of the innovation with little or no time for reflection. In other words, they were more concerned about their own survival needs and not the needs of the teachers they were to supervise. Informative is this observation by one T.I.C. “…most of the time I learn from the e.c.e. teacher since she is the specialist." Such unpreparedness implies that the T.I.C.s could not be expected to be conversant with the goals of the e.c.e. curriculum innovation yet policy planners expected them to spearhead grade zero/e.c.e. implementation in schools. It it thus evident that policy planners did not take into account that policies are not transmitted in a vacuum. Additionally, T.I.C.s could also not be expected to effectively nurture e.c.e. implementation in their respective schools since they were largely concerned with their own survival. It is with reference to such situations that Pretorius (2004) points out that little substantive change can occur if local staff who are to make the desired innovation work in practice have no
idea or ownership of what is intended and if their role in its implementation is not clear. In the context of this exploration what is evident is that teachers-in-charge held different qualifications which did not prepare them for early childhood education. Such a variegated qualification base calls for a more consistent and focussed preparation of teachers-in-charge to enable them to execute their new duties.

Relatedly, all the five teachers-in-charge were made aware of the introduction of this innovation through circulars distributed to them by their respective school heads. The contents of the circular were not explained but the teachers-in-charge were expected to provide concrete plans on how the innovation would be implemented in their respective schools. School heads did not explain the contents of the circular to T.I.C.s most probably because they too did not understand it. When the circular was distributed to them by the D.E.O. no explanation was also given. This seems to vindicate Gordon and Browne’s (2004) observation that officers who are assigned to explaining education policies are not always competent to do so. This contributes to the disjuncture between policy and practice. I would thus argue that based on the teachers-in-charge’s inappropriate professional qualifications (none of them had specialized in early childhood education) and indeed on their own admission of lack of specialist knowledge about e.c.e. more organised, consistent and persistent training programmes should have been put in place before and during the implementation of e.c.e.

Furthermore, besides the isolated individual school initiatives by St Columbus and Eastvale to prepare teachers-in-charge for their new role in the early childhood education programme (see chapter 4) it would appear that the workshops mounted in 2008 and 2010 were the only strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education to prepare teachers-in-charge for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. Notwithstanding the fact that these workshops were mounted well after the early childhood education innovation had been introduced, the Ministry of Education should be commended for realizing that teacher preparation for new programmes, including teachers-in-charge is an ongoing activity. Teachers-in-charge, however, suggested that they could have benefited more had the workshops covered topics on how to supervise
teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. I shall return to this issue of workshops under the section on adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems.

One of the roles of a T.I.C. is to supervise e.c.e. personnel and their activities. In addition, the T.I.C. suggests concrete plans on how e.c.e. should be rolled out at school and classroom level. This is a clear indication that the T.I.C. is heavily involved in the e.c.e. implementation process. Prior to the introduction of this innovation the T.I.C.s' roles were confined to grades 1 and 2. Early childhood education thus required restructuring and replacement, meaning that changes had to be made to the way things used to be, or used to work. The T.I.C. has to adjust personal habits, learn new skills and perform new roles. The introduction of e.c.e. thus required deep-rooted cultural change. Cultures (the ways T.I.C.s have been operating) do not change by mandates, fear or extrinsic rewards. According to Harris (2012), systems change by specific displacement and replacement of cultural norms, structures and processes. This process depends fundamentally on modelling new values and behaviours that need to displace the existing ones. It is in this respect that Morrison (2008) observed that change requires the involvement of people, bringing anxiety and uncertainty together with the need to develop new skills. Thus successful programme implementation requires the personal engagement of those involved in the innovation. The ease with which such changes can take place in the T.I.C. is dependent on the nature, intensity and quality of preparation the T.I.C. has had in preparation for the introduction of the e.c.e. innovation. Going by observations made earlier on, all T.I.C.s were not e.c.e. trained and all only attended sporadic workshops as preparation for their new roles. Perhaps it is in the light of the above that Morrison (2008) posits that educational change is a process and not an event. In addition change is a personal as well as an organisational matter. These factors do not seem to have been taken into account with respect to preparing T.I.C.s for their new roles.

Ornstein et al. (2011) avow that educational reforms fail because those in charge of the effort (policy makers and planners) have little understanding of the culture of schools. Often those tasked with curriculum development are outside the school. Their ignorance of how implementation takes place leads to failure to plan for it. A
curriculum programme, like e.c.e., may look very good on paper, but if the teachers-in-charge and the structures within which it has to be implemented are not ready for it, all the hard work becomes virtually nothing. My experience is that commitment to change only follows when those involved in the change, like T.I.C.s, feel competent that they can handle the change. Trying to seduce T.I.C.s into commitments before they are good at something is to set them up for disappointment, because trying out something new is always awkward and is often accompanied by anxiety. Focussed and consistent preparation programmes before and during e.c.e. implementation could have adequately prepared them for the introduction of this innovation. Generally, T.I.C.s’ perceptions of the nature of preparation they received for the introduction of e.c.e. point to inadequacies and skill deficiencies.

5.2.3 Preparation of early childhood education teachers

According to the Ministry of Education e.c.e. was to be introduced from the beginning of 2006. Data presented in chapter 4 however indicates that the first e.c.e. graduates from teachers’ colleges were deployed into primary schools in 2009. This means that during the initial years of the e.c.e. curriculum reform schools were compelled to take make-shift measures with respect to staffing e.c.e. classes. Where schools complied with M.O.E. specifications to introduce e.c.e. in 2006 “O” level school leavers were used as e.c.e. teachers. Schools which “bought time” from the provincial education office by asking for a postponement in the introduction of e.c.e. made use of preschool teachers when they later introduced the innovation. At the time this study was conducted early childhood education teachers in four schools had been adequately prepared for their roles by the teachers’ colleges and university. This proposition is supported by evidence in chapter 4 which indicates that teachers in these schools held either a Diploma in Early Childhood Education or a degree in e.c.e. These teachers were exposed to, among other e.c.e. requirements, early childhood theories, learning through play and other methods of teaching learners at this stage of development. In my view the M.O.E. could have taken advantage of such teachers and placed them at the forefront of the e.c.e. reform effort. Since these teachers were adequately prepared, policy planners could have used them as a nucleus for e.c.e. teacher development (thus adopting some elements of the enactment
perspective). As Carless (2005) points out teachers’ understanding of the principles of an innovation and their background training play a significant role in the degree of implementation of an innovation. Thus to implement an innovation successfully it is essential that teachers understand both the theoretical principles and practical applications of the proposed change. Carless (2005) argues that, the latter tends to prove most essential especially in contexts where teachers are not well trained and/or lack sound knowledge of the innovation. I shall return to this issue in the section on teacher preparedness for the introduction of e.c.e.

At the rural primary school, paraprofessionals were used to teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners. The only initial preparation this category of teacher received was short holiday courses organized by the district education office. In Loucks and Hall’s (1978) classification paraprofessionals are thus at the orientation stage where they are seeking information about e.c.e. so as to prepare themselves for operating at that level. Like teachers-in-charge, early childhood education teachers in the five cases attended workshops organized by the Ministry of Education in 2008 and 2010. From the teachers’ descriptions in chapter 4, these workshops seemed to have benefited paraprofessionals and teachers-in-charge more than qualified early childhood education teachers. For the latter, the workshops were more a reinforcement of what they had studied at teachers’ colleges and university. I shall return to this issue of workshops in the section on adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems.

5.2.4 Summary on teacher preparation

From the preceding discussion on the nature of teacher preparation for new programmes it can be observed that of the three teacher categories in this study only the school heads were not provided with any kind of preparation for executing their roles with respect to early childhood education. In Loucks and Hall’s (1978) classification school heads in the studied Zimbabwean primary schools cannot be expected to operate above the preparation level (see chapter 2). This might perhaps explain why every time I raised specific issues on the teaching, supervision and assessment of learners at this level, school heads almost always referred me to
either the teacher-in-charge or the early childhood education teacher for clarification. The introduction of early childhood education created challenges for school heads and T.I.C.s. The problem lay in the fact that they were confronted with having to cope with a new reality – managing the introduction and implementation of e.c.e. – even though they were not specifically trained for it. All school heads and T.I.C.s in this multiple case study had been trained to teach learners from grades 1 upwards. One can thus argue that the e.c.e. change was introduced with insufficient consideration of how school heads and T.I.C.s, as key players in curriculum implementation experience the process, and planners seemed to be unaware of the extent of the cultural shift they were requiring school heads and T.I.C.s to make. As indicated earlier on these teachers were expected to adjust personal habits, learn new skills and perform new roles. Thus, the proposed change seemed revolutionary rather than evolutionary for the majority of these school heads and T.I.C.s. Morrison’s (2008:15) adage “Drag them by the hair and their hearts and minds will follow” seems to have been adopted with respect to involving school heads and T.I.C.s in the implementation of early childhood education. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, however, early childhood education could have been better understood and assimilated into the primary school culture and structure had classroom teachers, teachers-in-charge and school heads been adequately prepared for the innovation.

5.3 APPROPRIATENESS OF RESOURCES

To implement e.c.e. effectively in primary schools it is necessary that appropriate resources are made available. Resources range from classrooms, toilets, chairs, desks, benches, textbooks, learning kits as well as manipulable projectiles. Schools also require financial resources, play centres, and indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. Descriptions by school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers (in chapter 4) portray the five cases on a continuum ranging from next to no resources to an over-supply of both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. Generally, urban primary schools are portrayed as having some resources for use by grade zero/e.c.e. teachers and learners.
5.3.1 Availability of appropriate resources at Eastvale school

Starting off with a seemingly over supply situation/case, Eastvale has more than adequate and appropriate tangible indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources for e.c.e. The physical environment of the e.c.e. setting at this school reflects knowledge of, and respect for the safety, physical well-being, intellectual stimulation, and social support of the very young child. Available teaching/learning resources are also closely connected to the desired outcomes of quality e.c.e. While the quality of space and materials for e.c.e. internationally will always be dictated by cultural, geographic, and economic realities in different nations, environments for young children should always reflect concern for all aspects of child development: physical, social, intellectual, and emotional. Space and materials for e.c.e. at this school seem to enhance socialness, support a sense of emotional safety, and reflect respect for the familial and cultural experiences of the child. While Rajeev (2005) avows that research on innovations and organisational resources does not always indicate a linear relationship, I would like to argue that a certain level of appropriate resource availability is an essential prerequisite for undertaking any innovation, including the implementation of e.c.e. Additionally, while abundance of resources in general does not necessarily accelerate innovation implementation, in the context of Eastvale however, the e.c.e. teacher was well qualified and her demonstration of how resources in the various corners of the classroom as well as the play centre are used by e.c.e. learners was ample testimony of how abundant resources can be used effectively. Instructive, in the context of this school, is Finn’s (2001) observation that where adequate resources are set aside, programme implementation is readily facilitated.

5.3.2 Availability of appropriate resources at the other three urban schools

The situation in the other urban primary schools is, however, not that rosy. In the other three urban primary schools there is a shortage of classrooms and furniture yet these schools also implemented grade zero/ec.e. – a clear sign that capacity of schools to support educational innovations was taken for granted. In these schools the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. meant displacing some subjects such as Home Economics, Music and Physical Education from classrooms that had originally been
set aside for them. A key observation about the other three urban schools is that they converted normal primary school classrooms for use by e.c.e. learners. This means that the windows were too high for these young learners. Many research findings have shown that the success of any educational endeavour/innovation rests on the availability of physical facilities, especially classrooms. Writing on the importance of this resource, Olutola (2006) asserts that availability of classrooms contributes to effective teaching and learning. The total environment within an e.c.e. classroom should be comfortable, pleasant and psychologically uplifting. It should provide a passive physical setting that is educationally stimulating; it should produce a feeling of well-being among its occupants, and it should support the educational process. Converting normal or regular primary school classrooms for use by e.c.e. learners, as was the case in three urban primary schools, did not meet the above conditions. It was a stop-gap measure which has, unfortunately, persisted six years after the e.c.e. innovation was introduced in primary schools. While availability of classrooms, on its own, does not guarantee programme implementation, creating discomfort for learners through lack of appropriate resources and use of inappropriate resources does not guarantee effective learning either.

The play centre was identified by all participants in this study as key to implementing e.c.e. in primary schools. This facility was, however, not available at three urban primary schools. Davin and Van Staden (2004) suggest that the play centre should have all kinds of raw materials on which the e.c.e. child can exercise his/her imagination and unlimited muscular activity. Early childhood education children’s cooperative, creative and constructive play is facilitated when equipment at the play centre is accessible to them, organised to promote independent use and periodically changed to provide variety. That there were no play centres at three urban primary schools implies that the benefits derived from making use of such centres were not enjoyed by e.c.e. learners at these schools. In addition, considering that teaching at e.c.e. level tends to revolve around the play centre, it may be argued that e.c.e. was not effectively implemented in these three schools – once more a reflection that capacity of schools to support educational innovations, like grade zero/e.c.e., was not taken into account at the innovation planning stage.
5.3.3 Availability of appropriate resources at the rural school

While acknowledging that innovations do not require huge resource inputs, still some sort of adequate and appropriate teaching/learning resources are needed to implement innovations effectively. Charlie Pride, a rural primary school, does not have any resources. Operating in a fidelity perspective the school was expected to introduce e.c.e. just like all other schools in Zimbabwe. Had context been taken into account this school could have benefited from a policy of positive discrimination where the introduction of e.c.e. was to be deferred until conditions on the ground were ripe enough for this innovation.

The school does not have classrooms and furniture for early childhood education learners. Lessons are conducted under trees in the play ground and so the bare ground represents the "chairs and desks" for early childhood education learners at this school. Charlie Pride does not have both indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. According to the school head “Grade zero/e.c.e. pupils and teachers operate in an environment devoid of appropriate and essential teaching/learning resources." In behaviourist terms learning is a connection between stimuli and response. A good environment reinforces the efforts of the teacher by providing a good stimulus for effective teaching and learning. Such a stimulus is not only provided by ensuring good physical facilities like classrooms but also through provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor teaching and learning resources. The total development of the e.c.e. learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning can only take place in an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. A good school environment where good working facilities exist is thus a catalyst for effective teaching and learning. Comfortable facilities will not only boost the morale of teachers and pupils but will also ensure the realization of e.c.e. objectives. Resource conditions at Charlie Pride demonstrate that all typical features that contribute to effective e.c.e. teaching and learning are conspicuous by their absence. Although e.c.e. was introduced in 2006 in all primary schools Charlie Pride is a clear illustration of programme non implementation. Notwithstanding this observation and in an attempt to satisfy the government directive (circular 14 of 2004), Charlie Pride had two early childhood education classes at the time this study was conducted. This once more is a clear sign that educational planners did not take
into account the constrained resource conditions in rural schools. They seemed to be more concerned with the object of change and not the process of change.

5.3.4 Availability of government financial resources

In chapter one it was pointed out that e.c.e. was made part of the formal education structure through circular 14 of 2004. The practice in Zimbabwe is that the Ministry of Education sets aside vote allocations for its various departments. It is, however, interesting to observe that in all the five cases discussed above there was no evidence, at the time of conducting this study, that the Ministry of Education set aside financial resources which primary schools could use to procure teaching/learning resources for use by early childhood education teachers and learners. The claim is sometimes made in developed countries that government provision of financial resources does not improve education. To put it more crassly, throwing money at schools is not a good strategy to improve education. While this may be partly true in developed countries, developing countries like Zimbabwe require that government plays a major role in financing education, including e.c.e. Unfortunately, as Nziramasanga (1999) affirms, communities were expected to fund the relocated early childhood education programme through fees and levies. Most of these communities are poor and, therefore expecting them to finance early childhood education was a rather ambitious expectation.

5.3.5 Summary on availability of resources

What is evident from the foregoing discussion on availability of appropriate resources is that school diversity was ignored by policy makers and planners when e.c.e. was mandated. In particular the promulgation of the grade zero/e.c.e policy did not take into consideration the differences between schools which were previously disadvantaged; schools that are in rural and high density areas with their associated poverty and need; and those in suburbs and their associated affluence. As Rogan and Grayson (2003) point out, not all schools have the capacity to implement a given innovation to the same extent. Resources are certainly one major factor that influences school capacity. In this study I argue that planning for resources as well
as actual provision could have enhanced primary schools’ chances of being ready for the introduction of early childhood education.

5.4 ADEQUACY AND USEFULNESS OF TEACHER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

According to the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) all primary schools in Zimbabwe were to attach classes of pupils aged between 3 and 5 years with effect from 2006. The Commission made this recommendation because it had observed that:

- there was an uneven distribution of early childhood facilities between urban and rural areas
- early childhood education was largely run by an assortment of private stakeholders
- the curricula of private preschools were outdated and inadequate, and
- there was no coordination and monitoring of early childhood programmes.

In order to provide for coherence and order early childhood education was made part of the formal primary school system. By being included in the unified planning of the curriculum, e.c.e. was granted equal status with other rungs of the Zimbabwean education system. Additionally, mainstreaming e.c.e. was seen as raising the visibility of that innovation (Oberhuemer, 2005). Continued visibility of e.c.e. would depend, among other factors, on the support that the programme received. This section thus discusses the adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems or mechanisms that were created so as to facilitate the installation and maintenance of this innovation. Descriptions by school heads, teachers-in-charge and grade zero/e.c.e. teachers converge on some common teacher support systems adopted in the five cases that were explored. Facilitation of workshop attendance (for teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers) and teacher supervision stand out as forms of support utilized in all the cases studied.
5.4.1 Workshops as a teacher support mechanism

With respect to workshops Fixsen (2005:41) asserts that “Effective training workshops consist of presenting information (knowledge), providing demonstrations (live or taped) of the important aspects of the practice or programme, and assuring opportunities to practice key skills in the training setting (behavioural rehearsal).” In this process participants’ (T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers) needs should be regarded as the greatest resource. This implies that whatever knowledge is presented, whatever demonstrations are made and whatever practice is provided should make use of participants’ experiences and/or contexts. From the foregoing, training needs to be ongoing and developmental rather than piecemeal. Teachers need both on-and off-site training. The former would relate the innovation (e.c.e.) to the realities of the specific school context and the latter would allow participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the innovation away from the pressures of daily routines.

Using this argument the once off workshops held for T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers were, therefore, inadequate to prepare, particularly T.I.C.s for implementing e.c.e. Additionally, where curriculum changes represent a significant shift, the embedding of new practices in T.I.C.s’ existing professional culture will not be completed solely by the provision of a single brief in-service programme or workshop. In my view what was required was a negotiation of meaning between T.I.C.s and curriculum planners at a series of workshops so that a shared vision of the implications of the change could be developed (Steyn, 2010). T.I.C.s’ understanding could have been further consolidated by the generation of specific e.c.e. classroom teaching procedures along with resource materials that can be used without much adaptation in the target classrooms. Such strategies could have minimised the problem of e.c.e. misconception by school heads and T.I.C.s. In short the workshops should have been extensive rather than intensive to allow T.I.C.s enough time to take on new ideas and have enough time to try them out and adapt them to their situation. Such an approach avoids taking schools’ and school personnel’s capacity to support educational innovations for granted.

One observation that can be made about workshops is that, while in some schools teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers were expected to
produce reports on workshop proceedings, in other schools no such reports were either expected or produced. While one school (Eastvale) conducted follow-up school-based workshops on issues raised at the district education workshops, such a practice was not evident in the other four schools. Differences among the five schools with respect to how to handle feedback from district education workshops and on the need to mount school-based workshops may be explained using Rogan and Grayson’s (2003) analytical framework on how implementation should be understood. One construct of this framework, capacity to support innovation, is concerned with factors that are likely to support or hinder the implementation of new ideas or programmes. This construct recognizes that schools differ in terms of their capacity to implement innovations. In the context of this study the characterization of the five schools by school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers portrays institutions with varying levels of resources. These variations, in a way, are indicative of each school’s capacity to support e.c.e.

Rogan and Grayson’s (2003) second construct, namely, profile of implementation sheds more light on schools’ variations with respect to handling feedback from staff development workshops. The profile recognizes that there can be different levels at which implementation might be said to occur. While some schools, because of their advantaged resource positions as well as their operational cultures, were able to mount follow-up school-based workshops, other schools were not able to do so. This in a way demonstrates different levels of innovation implementation in schools. Put in another way, levels at which implementation takes place differ from one school context to another. Such a view seems to be highlighting the influence of context in curriculum implementation (see adaptation and enactment perspectives in chapter 2). Additionally, the differences may also be a reflection of school heads’ lack of preparation for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e.

School heads needed to attend staff development workshops before early childhood education was introduced in schools. Staff development in this connection relates to the means by which school heads cultivate those skills whose application will improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the anticipated results of a programme, like early childhood education, are achieved. Enlightening are Coppola, Scricca and Connors’ (2004) views that staff development is a process whereby the
competence and confidence of teachers, including school heads, lie, not in serving the educational system in a passive manner but in actively seeking to contribute to the growth of the system. Such staff development could, at school level, lead to ensuring that every teacher, including school heads, becomes and remains a competent and responsive member who is able to do his/her job more effectively in the current role. Additionally, such staff development, so Karwoski (2011) observes, can encourage, in staff, a positive response to change so as to broaden experience and to prepare for new and challenging roles inside and outside the school, involving different or increased responsibilities.

5.4.2 Supervision as a mechanism of teacher support

Supervision was used by the teachers-in-charge to support early childhood education teachers in the execution of their duties. After each supervision session the teacher-in-charge and the teacher discussed observations made. It is important to recognize that none of the teachers-in-charge had a qualification in the teaching of early childhood education. As a consequence of this most teachers-in-charge pointed out that they were actually learning through their interaction with early childhood education teachers. Such a situation tends to reduce the supervisor’s (T.I.C.) confidence and support levels. There is, however, a persuasive body of knowledge which portrays an apprenticeship of observation model (Karwoski, 2011). In this model, teachers including school heads can learn more about what happens in early childhood education classes through many hours of observation and discussion. The apprentice, in the context of this study, is the teacher-in-charge who, instead of supervising, has to learn through interacting with his/her supervisee, the early childhood education teacher. This, in a way, tilts power relations in favour of the supervisee. Proactive behaviour by curriculum planners could have provided teachers-in-charge with consistent and focussed preparation for executing their new roles in the early childhood education programme. Such preparation was likely to enhance teachers-in-charge’s supervision confidence levels. T.I.C.s’ current perceptions point to the need for further capacity building to enable them to effectively supervise e.c.e. teachers.
In one extreme case post lesson observation conferences/discussions between the T.I.C and the e.c.e. teacher have not assisted the T.I.C. to produce reports which the teacher can use as a basis for further improvement. As intimated in chapter 4, the T.I.C. at this particular school was trained to teach grades 3 to 7 and hence, did not have the knowledge and the skills base for assessing and supervising grade zero/e.c.e. teachers. I am of the firm view that this particular T.I.C. is not aware that, when supervising early childhood education teachers, she should focus on the quality of teaching provided, its effect on the quality of learning, the range of teaching techniques used and their fitness for purpose, early childhood education teachers’ knowledge of subject matter and the degree to which work matched students/pupils’ attainment and abilities. One suggestion that could be made with respect to this particular school is that teachers who specialized to teach grades 1 and 2 could have been utilized to assist the teacher-in-charge to supervise and produce reports on early childhood education teaching/learning activities.

5.4.3 Teaching/learning resources as a mechanism for teacher support

The provision of teaching/learning resources is one form of support identified in four of the five cases explored. From the participants’ descriptions in these four cases Eastvale and St Columbus stand out above the other primary schools in terms of the provision of appropriate teaching-learning resources. Revelation School too has adequate teaching/learning resources to support the early childhood education teacher. The Westridge early childhood education teacher does identify provision of appropriate teaching/learning resources as a useful form of support framework operational at her school but would be happier with an improved supply of such resources. Charlie Pride early childhood education teachers seem not to be supported through the provision of teaching/learning resources. One implication that can be drawn from the above is that e.c.e. learners in urban schools are likely to benefit more (because of availability of appropriate resources) than their rural counterparts. Thus the rural-urban divide with respect to grade zero/e.c.e. provisioning, referred to in chapter 1, is not only further institutionalised but widened as well.
5.4.4 Individual school support initiatives

Besides provision of resources there were some forms of support adopted by individual schools. For instance, Charlie Pride teachers, who are both paraprofessionals, are supported through encouragement to complete “O” level studies and attending short holiday courses as well as inviting parents to tell stories to early childhood education learners. Encouraging paraprofessionals to complete “O” level may not have a direct bearing on early childhood teaching. It is only useful in as far as it enables the paraprofessional to meet conditions for acceptance to train as an early childhood education teacher. What this form of support however does is giving the paraprofessional a sense of belonging to the school community, a sense that may encourage him/her to attend, to the best of his/her ability, to the needs of early childhood education learners. Short holiday courses and using parents as resource persons are a direct form of support to paraprofessionals. While it is not the intention of this study to generalize the findings, conditions at Charlie Pride may find expression in other rural primary schools. Consequently adopting the latter forms of support could assist untrained teachers to manage early childhood classes in rural primary schools. While these were the only visible forms of support provided to Charlie Pride teachers, at Eastvale parents donated in cash and in kind towards end of session gatherings and excursions for grade zero/e.c.e pupils. There is a clear demonstration of a dynamic process where the school and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the learner (Van Wyk, 2006). It is highly probable that such parental involvement creates a positive experience for the e.c.e. learner. Parental support was however not prominent in the other four schools.

St Columbus arranges visits for its early childhood education teachers, to other primary schools in the district. Such visits, *inter alia*, focus on early childhood education implementation, provision of resources, availability of Ministry of Education policy documents on early childhood education, and the relationship between early childhood education and the rest of the school. While visits by St Columbus teachers to other schools in Gweru district can hardly be described as developing a community of practice, such an approach could be a pointer in the right direction with respect to improving early childhood education practices in future.
Such visits to other schools present teachers with opportunities to dialogue on early childhood education matters with other practitioners. Such opportunities were, however, missed in the other schools where no such visits were arranged. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration Hargreaves (2000) observed that such a relational or social system frame for innovation implementation takes the promotion and support of teachers’ learning communities inside and outside the school as integral to their ability to respond successfully to change. A fact of teaching life that I agree with is that early childhood education teachers should create opportunities to talk together, learn and reflect together, and examine pupils’ work together. McLaughlin (2000) and Edwards (2012) emphasize the importance of strong professional communities in which teachers can wrestle with the demands of a new programme, like grade zero/e.c.e. Professional development through such learning communities should persist beyond team training to provide numerous and frequent opportunities for implementers to receive on-going coaching and mentoring as well as support and exchange ideas with their peers over time, especially as they try out new things (Whitman, 2005). Literature on education reform includes many references to the benefits from creating forums for networks, where implementers participate in the on-going exchange of ideas and experiences for continuous learning from each other (Kennedy, Chan and Fok, 2011).

5.4.5 Outside school support

Support from outside agencies is one construct used by Rogan and Grayson (2003) to explain the implementation of programmes in schools. This form of support can be described as the kind of actions undertaken by outside organisations such as the district office and non governmental organisations (NGO). Support from NGOs may be material or non-material. Material support may include provision of physical facilities such as buildings, books or some teaching/learning materials. Non-material support is mostly provided in the form of professional development. In the context of this study non-governmental organizations were approached with requests to provide primary schools with support with respect to teaching/learning resources. Westridge, at the time of conducting this study, had submitted two such applications but had not yet received a response. St Columbus, on the other hand, had received
a positive response to its request for teaching/learning materials. These materials had not, however, been delivered at the time of conducting this study. As for Charlie Pride, there was no response from the local chief’s daughter who had promised to look for donors to put up early childhood education classrooms as well as providing the requisite teaching/learning resources. What appears to be evident is that each school adopted teacher-support mechanisms that are consistent with not only its geographical location but also with resources at its disposal. It would thus appear that the variation in the quality and quantity of teacher support reflects the varying degrees of the selected schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/e.c.e. that is, varying capacities to support the innovation.

5.4.6 Summary on teacher support

Support provided or lack of it is one of the most commonly cited reasons why educational innovations fail to be implemented. Miles and Huberman (1994:273) highlighting the importance of support observed that “…large scale change bearing innovations lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that their users received once the change was under way.” One of the findings of this study is that there was no ongoing support for school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers in most of the schools which constituted this multiple case study. This lack of ongoing support thus seems to have contributed to some of these schools not being quite ready for the introduction of this innovation. Literature makes it clear though that, support needs to be used in combination with pressure. In this connection Fullan (2007) argues that if centrally regulated reforms are to succeed pressure and support are both necessary. As Dalin (1998:252) points out “Pressure without support will get us nowhere. The more extensive the changes, the more support required.” Early childhood education, as a system-wide innovation required both support and pressure for it to take root and be implemented in primary schools. Providing ongoing support to the key participants is an acknowledgement that early childhood education implementation is a process, not an event and that its implementation does not proceed on autopilot. One lesson evident from this study is that policy makers should take into account that curriculum implementation is not linear, as espoused by the fidelity perspective, but is messy and complicated.
Educational programmes, like e.c.e., are implemented in specific contexts which may require that certain conditions be met before actual implementation takes place. These conditions, which may not have been anticipated by policy planners highlight the need for implementers like school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers to be provided with as much support as possible.

5.5 PREPAREDNESS OF GRADE ZERO / E.C.E. TEACHERS

It is indisputable that teachers are the key to the success of educational reform (Smith and Desimone, 2003). Their knowledge, beliefs and perceptions play a fundamental role in understanding and implementing educational reforms (Blignaut, 2007). If teachers are to implement an innovation successfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practice of the proposed change. It is desirable that they understand both the theoretical underpinnings and classroom applications of the innovation, but it is the latter that tends to prove most essential, especially in contexts where teachers are not well trained and/or lack sound subject knowledge.

5.5.1 Early childhood education teachers' educational qualifications

Descriptions from the school heads, teachers-in-charge and documentary analysis were used to ascertain the state of preparedness of grade zero/e.c.e. teachers in the five schools that were explored in this multiple case study. Evidence from documentary analysis indicates that most of the teachers at this level in the selected primary schools held a diploma in early childhood education. This is a three year post “O” level qualification offered by teachers' colleges. In this programme students learn, among other things, theories and principles of child development, theories of learning, how to teach early childhood education learners, the role of play and how learners are assessed. In chapter four I indicated that one of the teachers in an urban primary school holds a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Education. This is a three year post “O” level university qualification which covers in more detail the same areas as are covered by diploma holders. The early childhood curriculum at universities is however, broader than at diploma level. Drawing on
findings from cognitive psychology (Shulman, 2004) education researchers posit three types of knowledge that are essential for teaching: pedagogical knowledge, in which teachers know general strategies of teaching; content knowledge, what teachers know about their subject matter; and pedagogical content knowledge, the knowledge of how to teach a particular subject in a manner that fosters students’ understanding. Following this argument, I propose that diploma and degree teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions gained through teacher education programmes, constitute sound preparation for teaching e.c.e. learners.

In chapter 2 Loucks and Hall’s (1978) concept of levels of use was discussed. The concept indicates teachers’ skill or competence levels which are largely developed through a formal teacher education programme. Diploma in Education and e.c.e. degree holders were exposed to e.c.e. theories, learner motivation, learning through play and other methods of teaching learners at this stage. In the light of the foregoing it may be argued that such teachers operate at the refinement, integration and renewal levels of use. These are levels where teachers take ownership of the innovation, enrich it or even reconceptualise it by making major modifications. In the context of this study, with particular focus on the content of the e.c.e. curriculum, I am of the view that teachers who hold the foregoing qualifications are at the integration and renewal stages of use and are, therefore, ready to implement the innovation.

Writing on prerequisite skills a qualified early childhood education teacher in the USA context should have, Burchfield (2006) observed that such teachers, among other things, should have studied theoretical principles of child development and learning; be able to develop practices and programmes that are developmentally appropriate for young children; be able to establish a daily schedule to foster continuity and provide large blocks of time so that children can do complex, integrated study and are able to develop a plan for the transition of children from pre-kindergarten to primary school programmes. The early childhood education curriculum in Zimbabwean teachers’ colleges and universities appears to be covering most of the areas identified for a developed country by Burchfield (2006). In addition to the above, in chapter 2 I highlighted the American Governing Board (2004) requirements that qualify one to teach at the e.c.e. level. According to that
Board an early childhood teacher is a qualified professional with an undergraduate degree in early childhood education. While such teacher qualifications may be expected for the American education system, in a developing country like Zimbabwe being a holder of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education is a very high achievement which is cherished by Ministry of Education officials, school heads, teachers-in-charge and indeed the local community. Considering the content covered at diploma level in early childhood education it may be appropriate to classify diploma holders as having a solid general education and good subject mastery. The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education holder is even more and better qualified and consequently ready for executing her role as an early childhood education teacher.

In Zimbabwe early childhood education is a relatively recent innovation. School heads and teachers-in-charge whose teachers thus hold either a diploma or degree in early childhood education count themselves fortunate. This is so because the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, which is responsible for training teachers, only started the training of early childhood education teachers in response to the Ministry of Education’s proclamation that grade zero/e.c.e. should be introduced in primary schools with effect from 2006. Such evidence of the uncoordinated early childhood education efforts (lack of policy coherence on early childhood education) by the two ministries of education in Zimbabwe is perhaps the reason why trained teachers at this level are hard to come by as reflected in rural Charlie Pride’s case. At this school two paraprofessionals currently teach grade zero/e.c.e. learners. The two are not qualified to operate at this level but because early childhood education was introduced at the same time for all primary schools in Zimbabwe, rural primary schools like Charlie Pride had no choice but to recruit unqualified “O” level school leavers as early childhood education teachers. In Loucks and Hall’s (1978) classification, the paraprofessionals are at the orientation and preparation stages. They are trying to become aware of what e.c.e. is and also becoming aware of what it means to be a teacher. By their own admission (see chapter 4) they feel highly inadequate to teach e.c.e. learners. For all intents and purposes, with reference to teacher preparedness, Charlie Pride is not ready for the introduction of e.c.e. It is, perhaps, in the light of situations like the one at Charlie Pride that Patton (2000) observed that research indicates that children learn more from good teachers than from bad ones. Darling Hammond and Ball (1998) corroborate this view when they
report that teacher expertise, that is, what teachers know and can do as measured by the level of teacher education, had the greatest influence on student learning. In their view, nothing can compensate for a poorly trained teacher (including an untrained teacher) who lacks the necessary knowledge and skills to help children master a given curriculum. For this rural school it would seem that teachers, as frontline implementers of e.c.e. were not given sufficient thought by policy planners.

It is not the objective of this multiple case study to generalize its findings to all Zimbabwean schools. In fact, doing so would be against the grain of qualitative inquiry whose tenets guided this exploration. At the same time, I do acknowledge that there are more primary schools in rural areas than in urban areas in Zimbabwe (Nziramasanga, 1999). Findings on the conditions under which early childhood education is being implemented at Charlie Pride can indeed find expression in many other rural primary schools in Zimbabwe.

5.5.2 Early childhood education teachers’ teaching experience

In ascertaining early childhood education teacher preparedness for this innovation this study also considered how long teachers have been engaged in their present jobs. Documentary analysis revealed that all the qualified teachers had less than two years experience. Going by McLaughlin’s (2000) recommendations (see chapter 2) such teachers have not yet prepared several groups of learners for the formal primary school system hence they cannot be said to be effective in executing their roles. While this observation may be true in the context of the developed world, like in the U.S.A, where early childhood education programmes have been running for a long time, the situation being described in the current study is one of a developing country that is introducing a new programme in its formal education system. Getting hold of a qualified teacher in such a system is considered to be a great achievement.

Unqualified teachers in the selected schools had longer teaching experience than the qualified ones. This may be attributed to the fact that when the programme was introduced in primary schools there were no qualified early childhood education teachers. Consequently to get the programme off the ground “O” level school leavers
were engaged as early childhood education teachers. One observation that can be made on the issue of teaching experience in the context of this study is that, as a new programme early childhood education does not have experienced qualified teachers. For the time being making use of recently trained and qualified teachers looks like the best possible option. These teachers will gain experience as the programme becomes not only routinized but also institutionalised in Zimbabwean primary schools.

5.5.3 Summary on state of e.c.e. teachers' preparedness

From my personal interviews with school heads and teachers-in-charge, qualified grade zero/e.c.e. teachers were described as displaying confidence and a capacity for warm relationships with learners. Such teachers were said to be nurturing towards early childhood education learners, skilful communicators, good role models and allowed children to learn through play. Unqualified early childhood education teachers did not, understandably, exhibit these characteristics. Such a picture points to the need for the Ministry of Education to ensure that persons engaged as early childhood education teachers are adequately and sufficiently trained. Only then, would we be able to say confidently that Zimbabwe primary schools are ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education with respect to availability of qualified teachers.

5.6 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT E.C.E. LEVEL

Evidence from extant literature reviewed in chapter 2 demonstrates that the quality of teaching displayed in a school is one clear manifestation of that school’s state of readiness for the programme being implemented. Taylor’s (2002) analysis of the concept teaching was adopted in this study. The analysis focuses on, among other things, macro and broader issues such as availability of curriculum guidelines (syllabus) in schools, methods used to teach early childhood education learners, impact of resources on teaching, teacher-pupil ratio as well as the role of assessment and record keeping at this level of the primary school.
5.6.1 Availability of curriculum guidelines

Descriptions by school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers highlight a number of issues that were raised with respect to how early childhood education learners are taught. Firstly, it is evident from the participants’ descriptions, that the five schools use an Early Childhood Education and Care (E.C.E.C) syllabus produced in 1999 as a guideline for teaching at this level of the primary school. This syllabus aims to assist learners to get along with other children and adults; take care of their personal needs; and facilitate the learning of names, addresses, numbers, colours, shapes and sizes. Developing writing skills, letter recognition skills, and oral language skills are also some of the aims of this syllabus. That primary schools use the same E.C.E.C syllabus document means that the same curriculum is generally being implemented in all primary schools in Zimbabwe. This is consistent with Nziramasanga’s (1999) recommendation that a standard curriculum be used by all e.c.e. teachers. This recommendation is consistent with the technical-rational perspective of curriculum implementation. As a result of the top-down nature of this perspective it is expected that schools are provided with copies of the syllabus from the Ministry of Education. From the policy planners’ point of view and indeed from the teachers’ point of view, the E.C.E.C. syllabus guides and supports practitioners, delimits the objectives of e.c.e., and provides a common framework of guiding principles for enhancing programme implementation. At the operational level, however, schools, in this case study, which employed qualified early childhood education teachers were able to identify elements in the E.C.E.C. syllabus which were considered obsolete and did not implement them in their teaching of grade zero/e.c.e. learners. As highlighted in chapters 2 and 4, this document was developed for use by nursery school and unqualified teachers and not specifically by qualified early childhood education teachers. What this points to is that the document should be updated so that it takes into account early childhood education realities as envisioned in circular 14 of 2004. Curriculum policy makers thus need to ensure that appropriate and relevant syllabi are in place before new innovations, like early childhood education, are introduced in schools.

All primary schools in this multiple case study also use the book entitled Learning Through Play produced by the curriculum planning section of the Ministry of
Education. The publication of a long and detailed book or guide accompanying the E.C.E.C. syllabus seems to compensate for insufficient teacher training on e.c.e. guidelines. Since both school heads and T.I.C.s were not qualified to supervise e.c.e teachers, such a guide would be extremely useful for this category of teachers. The paraprofessionals would indeed benefit from a book of this nature. The book contains theoretical and methodological support, including the basic theoretical principles of the learning/teaching process, teacher’s expected role, communication patterns and assessment procedures. The book provides suggested methods of teaching, questions that can be asked, and suggested teaching and learning resources as well as how to control e.c.e. learners. Consistent with the fidelity perspective the book/guide constitutes an interpretation of the syllabus by its very creators. As a result the book does not avoid a standardisation of pedagogical practices through concrete examples of “good practice”, although the preamble of the book states that its objective is only to provide “ideas” about the implementation of e.c.e. Notwithstanding the above, for the unqualified teacher this document is central to their work. Lacking in knowledge on how to teach and what to teach Learning Through Play is the manual that enables them to function at the e.c.e. level.

5.6.2 Time tabling learning at the e.c.e. level

In all the five cases teaching and learning at this level was time tabled. This is consistent with how other primary school programmes are organized. As Click (2004) testifies, time tables ensure that there is order in programme implementation. In the context of this study, time tables were a useful time management strategy. The e.c.e. time tables that I analysed in the five schools reveal that learners are involved in, among other activities, free play and rhymes. Some of these activities are more enjoyable than others such that without a time table some activities could receive more attention than others. On the few occasions that I observed e.c.e. lessons teachers tried to adhere to times allocated to specific activities. This provided for a systematic approach to teaching and learning. It also ensured that all planned activities were implemented. Time tables were, however, provided to schools, with little or no input from teachers. Such an approach, consistent with the fidelity perspective, does not empower the teacher. Teachers, including T.I.C.s
should have been involved in the development of the time table so that they are aware of the principles that guide time table construction at e.c.e. level.

5.6.3 Learning through play

Early childhood education learners were largely taught through play. Learners use play as a way to discover more about themselves and their world. As Catron and Allen (2003) avow (see chapter 2) in play children create what they have observed, rehearsing roles and making representations of objects. From the participants’ descriptions, the use of play was dependent on availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources. As observed under the section on appropriateness of resources some schools had more appropriate resources than others; consequently, the range of play activities available to learners differed from one school setting to another. Except for Charlie Pride and Westridge, it may be argued that the other three schools have reasonably sufficient and appropriate resources which enable pupils to learn through play. These schools could thus be said to be fairly ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education with respect to the use of play - a key and fundamental teaching and learning approach at this level of the primary school.

5.6.4 Class size and quality of teaching and learning

Class size was also identified, by participants in this study, as a factor affecting the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. At Eastvale, with a class size of twenty pupils and an abundance of appropriate teaching/learning resources class size was not an issue. The SDA at this school resisted introducing early childhood education in 2006. It also did not enrol a large e.c.e. class. It would appear that this SDA was more informed than the curriculum policy planners, about what preparations were necessary as well as what class size was appropriate for effective early childhood education teaching and learning to take place. In the other four schools, however, classes tended to be large, (with about 40 pupils in a class) and this tended to inhibit individualization of teaching. In some of these cases available teaching/learning resources could not be accessed by all pupils because of large
classes. With respect to the latter what is evident is that certain critical conditions requiring attention in concert with the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education were neglected. These included contextual factors such as resource availability, teachers’ work load and classroom conditions such as high teacher-pupil ratio. The advocated 1:20 ratio (Nziramasanga, 1999) is still unattainable in most of the schools in this case study. A high teacher-learner ratio makes it difficult for learners to receive individualised teaching. Early childhood education teachers in three of the five schools of this study clearly point out that they were not able to attend to learners both during lessons and in assessing pupils’ work. According to these teachers, working in such classrooms can be highly frustrating and overwhelming as they struggle to give attention to all learners.

5.6.5 Assessment, record keeping and quality of teaching and learning

One broad issue raised by the school heads, teachers-in-charge and early childhood education teachers is that pupil assessment and record keeping are an integral part of teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. In four of the five schools (where early childhood education teachers were qualified) there was evidence of assessment records that were kept by early childhood education teachers. At these schools, although in varying degrees and levels, each early childhood education learner had a folder also called a portfolio in some schools, where achievement or lack thereof in particular subject concepts and/or skills was recorded. A pupil would only proceed to the next concept or skill if the previously failed concept/skill had been achieved. At Charlie Pride, however, the paraprofessionals who taught grade zero/e.c.e. classes were not clear of how assessment and record keeping should be done. The teacher-in-charge too was not sure of how assessment records can be developed for early childhood education learners. As a result, no such records were kept at this school. The development of portfolios or folders for each e.c.e. learner is consistent with an assessment technique called pedagogical documentation. Caldwell (2007) defined pedagogical documentation as a method used to capture children’s learning experiences systematically through observations, transcriptions of classroom interactions and analyses of their work products. A further analysis of this concept was provided by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2006:47) when they asserted
that “Conceptually pedagogical documentation refers to a process and content in that process.” The content is the material that records children’s interactions and their work. This material can take many forms, including, but not limited to, anecdotal records, records of children’s interactions, concrete artefacts and examples of children’s work at different stages of completion. The process involves the use of the content as a means to promote dialogue and to reflect upon the pedagogical work through revisitation and interpretation. Looked at this way, observations by teachers that assessment and record keeping (pedagogical documentation) are a standard ingredient of e.c.e. teaching, become clearly evident. The key function of such assessment and documentation is thus to provide learners with a concrete and visible memory of what they have been able to achieve in order to serve as a jumping-off point for the next steps in learning.

The process of pedagogical documentation that occurs at e.c.e. level is done within the framework of formative assessment. Conceptually formative assessment has been defined as frequent, interactive assessments of learners’ progress and understanding to identify learning needs and to adjust teaching appropriately. Formative assessment is evident in this study where e.c.e. learners were not able to understand certain concepts. They could only proceed to the next concepts after demonstrating an understanding of the previously failed concepts. Formative assessment through pedagogical documentation, which I want to call assessment for learning, is a process e.c.e. teachers in Zimbabwe should conduct with a view to seeking and interpreting evidence for use by both teachers and learners to decide where learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. It has been pointed out elsewhere in this study that rural schools do not have qualified e.c.e. teachers and that teacher output from colleges and universities is low (Dyanda et al., 2005). The implication of such a state of affairs is that the quality of teaching and learning as reflected through pedagogical documentation is not yet high enough in e.c.e. classes. Additionally, teachers’ colleges and universities should ensure that skills in pedagogical documentation feature prominently in their teacher education programmes. Pedagogical documentation content should focus on what and how children learn and should also help teachers reflect on their actions.
5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the main findings of this study and attempted to show the implications of it. Evidence from the foregoing discussion on teachers’ perceptions reflect that lack of and inadequate teacher preparation, use of an outdated E.C.E.C. syllabus, and large classes stand out as prominent hindrances to primary schools being ready for the introduction of e.c.e. The latter is a direct result of a low teacher output from teacher education institutions. Notwithstanding the preceding observations some appropriate teaching/learning resources, though largely inadequate, are, however, available in four of the five schools which constitute this multiple case study. Additionally, e.c.e. teachers in four of the five schools are not only adequately qualified but project personal characteristics that enhance the implementation of e.c.e. Notwithstanding the above observation it would appear that adopting a technical-rational perspective to e.c.e. implementation without complementing the perspective with the adaptation and the enactment perspectives does not seem to contribute to schools being quite ready for the introduction of early childhood education.

Early childhood education is a topical subject in developing countries. The five case studies explored portray teachers’ perceptions of how Zimbabwe has attempted to mainstream early childhood education into the formal primary school culture and structure. While it is true that studies on the introduction of early childhood education have been conducted in other countries, no studies on schools’ state of readiness for the introduction and implementation of early childhood education have been conducted in the Zimbabwean context. It is my hope that other than providing object lessons on how to plan for the successful introduction of innovations, like early childhood education, this study will also contribute to the growing body of literature on innovation implementation in developing countries, particularly in Southern Africa. In the next and final chapter of this thesis I make concluding remarks and recommendations.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I presented an analysis and discussion of the key findings of this study. In particular, teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education with respect to how teachers, including school heads and teachers-in-charge were prepared for the innovation, the availability and appropriateness of resources, the adequacy and usefulness of teacher support systems, the preparedness of early childhood education teachers and the quality of teaching and learning at early childhood education level were discussed and analysed. In this chapter I make concluding remarks and recommendations, suggest areas for further research, and reflect on my journey in this multiple case study.

6.2 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions are made:

- Current efforts to implement e.c.e. are based on the assumption that all primary schools are essentially the same and will benefit from the same implementation strategy. Thus, centrally imposed change or innovations, like early childhood education, implicitly assume that implementation is an event rather than a process; that the change proceeds on autopilot once the policy has been enunciated.

- There are social, institutional and personal circumstances affecting the way in which policies are understood by those who are supposed to put them into practice. It is therefore necessary to look at the interpretation that the policy text has been given in practice in order to determine the coherence or incoherence between policy and its impact.
Factors that determine school capacity to support curriculum implementation are inadequately considered or ignored. Yet successful implementation of curriculum reforms or any other educational innovation will ultimately depend on the extent to which policy makers and planners take school realities into account.

Teachers, including school heads and T.I.C.s, play a pivotal role in curriculum implementation. Factors such as their background, training, subject matter knowledge, motivation, commitment to teaching and their attitudes towards the proposed innovation influence their capacity and willingness to implement change.

Putting into practice an innovation, like grade zero/e.c.e., requires the direct, constant and consistent involvement of implementers (teachers) at all stages of innovation development.

Curriculum implementation sometimes falters because no provision will have been made for the unique circumstances in which it will be realized. This is prevalent in centralized education systems, like in Zimbabwe, where “a one size fits all” approach is normally adopted because capacity to support innovations is usually taken for granted by policy planners.

Lack of resources, for use in the implementation of innovations like grade zero/e.c.e., appears to be an enduring problem for schools in developing countries, including Zimbabwe.

Opportunities for teacher collaboration, in the implementation of grade zero/e.c.e., were generally not created in most schools in this multiple case study.

From the foregoing it is the contention of this thesis that qualified e.c.e. teachers had the knowledge and skills necessary for operating at this level of the primary school. For school heads, T.I.C.s and paraprofessionals, however, implementing e.c.e. was
like building a plane while it was flying, with the building taking much longer to catch up with the speed of the plane.

6.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

From the many questions raised by this study issues that emerge and may require further research include, but are not limited to the following:

- Implementation literature suggests that a combination of top-down and bottom-up curriculum implementation strategies produce desired effects. In the light of this observation it may be important to investigate how such an approach could be used to enhance the implementation of new programmes operating in a traditionally centralized system.

- Another line of inquiry should investigate how the Ministry of Education can galvanize adequate and appropriate resources to support e.c.e. implementation in schools.

- While e.c.e. teacher preparation in Zimbabwe is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, teacher deployment is a function of the Ministry of Education. Perhaps it may be necessary to investigate how the two education ministries can be assisted to coordinate their activities so that teacher supply is not disproportionately outsriped by teacher demand.

- An additional line of enquiry could be investigating ways and means of empowering early childhood education practitioners with a view to improving service delivery in this section of the primary schools.

- After a few years of early childhood education implementation in primary schools, it may be appropriate to conduct a large scale country-wide survey on conditions in primary schools in order to establish whether this innovation
has indeed been institutionalized as well as suggesting what else could be done at national level to create a supportive framework for the continued implementation of this innovation.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

• While centralized education systems tend to adopt technical-rational/fidelity modes of curriculum implementation, this study recommends the adoption of an eclectic approach where the adaptation and enactment perspectives are utilised together with the technical-rational perspective. Adopting such an approach allows data on practice to inform policy through a backward mapping model wherein policy is enacted to alleviate gaps identified between actual and desired practice. Public policy should be formed as it is being executed and likewise be executed as it is being formed.

• Educational innovations often focus on changing the visible structures within schools (restructuring) and tend to ignore prior knowledge, attitudes, experiences, beliefs, norms and values (reculturing) of school heads and T.I.C.s within schools. Although it may take a long time, the preceding can be changed through instituting pre-implementation programmes. It does not appear that such an arrangement was put in place by the M.O.E. One lesson that could be learnt from this case study is that key participants in innovation implementation, like school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers, should receive re-orientation and retraining well before innovations are introduced.

• In many cases policy planners seem to believe that policy is normative and practice should follow suit. Given the complexity and the unpredictability of innovation implementation an initial piloting followed by a progressive implementation of e.c.e. could have helped policy planners to identify some of the challenges primary schools experienced as they struggled not only to install but also to implement e.c.e. Indeed, a phased approach could have taken into account the diversity of the schools which were to implement e.c.e.
• Before any new educational programme is introduced in schools it is necessary that those who will be involved in its monitoring are adequately prepared for it. For instance officers mandated to disseminate e.c.e. information to school heads and to run workshops for T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers should receive a trainer-training programme to ensure their increased awareness of the implementation of the e.c.e. innovation in practice for practising teachers and to maximise the chances of e.c.e. curriculum objectives being achieved.

• In matters of policy implementation primary school heads’ roles need to be granted considerable attention. The clearer their roles in the implementation process the better since ambiguity is often experienced as a threat. Consequently, as key gate keepers in the education system, school heads should be amongst the first practitioners to be re-oriented, re-trained and well informed about the introduction and implementation of new innovations, such as grade zero/e.c.e. in primary schools.

• Teachers-in-charge should attend intensive staff development sessions on early childhood education during school holidays. These staff development sessions should be developmental particularly during the first critical years of e.c.e. implementation in order to provide them with the support necessary to update their pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge on the teaching of e.c.e. Adopting such an approach enables T.I.C.s to maintain the same vision of the e.c.e. innovation. Additionally, this enhances their competence and confidence levels in supervising the day to day activities of early childhood education teachers and learners.

• Teachers-in-charge should have reduced teaching loads so as to enable them to adequately supervise early childhood education teachers and learners in
their respective schools.

- Curriculum policy change and implementation is increasingly shaped by broad forces of consultation of stakeholders on the nature and direction of the change that is perceived to be desirable. Such dialogue fosters more commitment from school heads. T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers and gives them a sense of ownership. It is thus recommended that curriculum policy planners engage these practitioners as a way of ensuring that the phenomenology of change, that is, how people actually experience change, is taken care of in the process of implementation.

- Communication channels between policy planners and implementers should be kept open whenever a curriculum reform or innovation is designed and implemented. This is so because awareness leads to interest which in turn leads to involvement which subsequently leads to commitment.

- The government should enter into formal public-private implementation agreements with other stakeholders like non-governmental organizations. Such an approach does not only have the potential of bailing out governments whose e.c.e. budgets are low or non-existent but can also increase the resources that can be used in early childhood education implementation.

- Primary schools, in this multiple case study, tended to have big early childhood education classes. While the recommended teacher-pupil ratio at this level is 1:20, most schools exceeded this stipulation. It is thus recommended that e.c.e. class sizes take into account what resources are available in primary schools.

- From data presented by school heads, teachers-in-charge and e.c.e.
teachers, parents did not play a significant role with respect to e.c.e. matters in this multiple case study. It is therefore recommended that schools make concerted efforts to involve parents so that they become an integral part of both the planning and implementation of e.c.e.

• The Ministry of Education is committed to introducing e.c.e. in Zimbabwe primary schools as reflected by the various statutory instruments that have been put in place. This has, however, not been matched by similar commitment levels in terms of resource provision and capacity building. As a result of the foregoing it is recommended that the Ministry of Education provide adequate capacity development and material resources in order for schools to be ready for early childhood education implementation.

• The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, which is responsible for training early childhood education teachers through teachers’ colleges and universities, should increase its current enrolments so as to ensure that in the short to medium term all early childhood education learners are taught by qualified teachers.

• Programme implementation depends on adequate support. Effective teacher support mechanisms should thus be put in place by both the Ministry of Education and S.D.A.s to ensure effective installation, implementation and institutionalisation of early childhood education.

• In the long run the Ministry of Education, regional and district education offices and schools should promote collaboration between early childhood education practitioners. Such collaboration allows practitioners to share information and provide collegial support.
6.5 REFLECTION

This qualitative multiple case study is located in the interpretive paradigm. Instead of focusing on the research process I draw attention, in this section, to my experiences and growth as a researcher during the tenure of this study. This research literally and figuratively took me on a journey full of awe and bewilderment, frustration and hope. Throughout my earlier studies I had been used to conducting quantitative research and therefore would not easily be persuaded to attempt a research study that adopts qualitative methods. In fact, I believed that all research was quantitative. This belief was even evident in my initial research proposal for this current study.

With guidance from my promoters and extensive reviews of literature on research methodology, I began to realize and believe that the general is in the particular. I also came to realize that to get to the particular I had to become the chief data gathering instrument in this study. Consequently, I developed a keen interest in qualitative research. One thing I can definitely say about this qualitative study is that it was about listening, thinking and making meaning from what I heard and experienced as well as from what I saw. I thus came to understand school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers by listening to them, watching them interact, and thinking about the meaning beyond, beneath, and around their words and actions. In this process my concern was with these teachers’ perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of early childhood education. As I reflect back I can now confidently say that school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers’ actions and perceptions cannot be understood apart from the school setting in which the actions are situated; reciprocally, the e.c.e. setting cannot be understood without understanding the actions and perceptions of school heads, T.I.C.s and e.c.e. teachers. My research journey was both refreshing and intriguing and as a result of my involvement I believe that I am now a different person from who I was before I conducted this exploration.

Qualitative studies, though, have their moments of frustration and despair but they are also exciting and full of hope. Getting to a school on four occasions without being able to interview a key participant, like a school head, can be frustrating. Such was the case at two schools which I eventually dropped from the multiple case study. At
some schools, however, participants were forthcoming, providing all the necessary information at their disposal on their perceptions of primary schools’ state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education.

As I interviewed participants in this case study I observed jovial e.c.e. learners approaching either the T.I.C. or the e.c.e. teacher asking for permission to visit the ablution blocks. Unbeknown to the e.c.e. learners the T.I.C. or the e.c.e. teacher would be recounting the challenges they experience in implementing the e.c.e. programme. When a nation claims that children are its future, that nation needs to be fully aware of the social obligations implicit in such a statement. Any country and citizenry that truly believes attention to children’s care and education during the early years is of estimable value to society would make every reasonable effort to invest in early childhood education. High quality programmes for the very young would be regarded as an immediate necessity, not a distant goal to be addressed after other goals are achieved.

Corroborating the above view, UNESCO (2004) asserts that the child’s first few years last forever. If these first few formative years are not adequately and sufficiently taken care of, then as nations we risk forfeiting talent and expertise that could be nurtured by creating conducive learning environments for our children. Early childhood education provides a useful foundation to ensure that children grow to become the best possible persons they can. By getting children ready for formal school through early childhood education programmes, we arm them with the tools necessary to build fulfilling lives, become productive citizens, and take their place in the global community. For this to happen in developing countries, including Zimbabwe, curriculum policy planners and practitioners need to provide an enabling environment which creates rich opportunities for the effective implementation of early childhood education programmes. Cluoder (2008:94) sums up the above view thus:

Whoever works with children has got to recognize within himself/herself his/her own childhood so as to promote the child’s well-being. If we forget our childhood, we lose our humanity. We no longer see each other as humans.
REFERENCES


UNICEF. (2001). *We are the children: meeting the promises of the world summit for children*. New York: UNICEF.


Appendix 1 Interview schedule for participants

Teachers’ perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe: A case study.

1. How was the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education communicated to you?

2. How were you prepared for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education?

3. How do you feel about the manner in which you were prepared for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education?

4. Briefly comment on the nature and the number of classrooms set aside for early childhood education at your school.

5. How many toilets have been exclusively set aside for grade zero/early childhood education learners at your school?

6. In your view, is your school ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education with respect to availability of classrooms and toilets? Justify.

7. What is your opinion on the adequacy of grade zero/early childhood education furniture in your school?

8. Briefly comment on the size of the furniture used by grade zero/early childhood education learners in your school.

9. What teaching / learning materials do grade zero/early childhood education teachers and learners use at your school?

10. How much money does the school set aside for the grade zero/early childhood education programme?

11. Comment on the adequacy of grade zero/early childhood education teachers in your school.

12. What is your opinion on the appropriateness of grade zero/early childhood education teachers’ qualifications?

13. How often are parents involved in the grade zero/early childhood education programme at your school?

14. What forms of support are provided to grade zero/early childhood education teachers at your school?
15. How often are grade zero/early childhood education teachers and student teachers supervised at your school?

16. What do grade zero/early childhood education supervisors focus on when observing teachers during lessons?

17. How many copies of the grade zero/early childhood education curriculum (syllabus) does your school have?

18. How do grade zero/early childhood education teachers make use of curriculum (syllabus) objectives?

19. What is the teacher-pupil ratio in grade zero/early childhood education classes at your school?

20. With the benefit of hindsight, do you think that your school was ready for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education? Justify.
Appendix 2: Questionnaire for participants

Teachers' perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe: A case study.

My name is Ezron Mangwaya I am doing a PhD in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. I am carrying out a study on Teachers' perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe: A case study. The responses to this questionnaire are anonymous and will be treated in the strictest confidence. Please note that the information you provide will be used for the purpose of this study only. Please respond to the items as honestly as possible. Thank you in advance for responding to all items on this questionnaire.

Biographical information

Please fill in the following or tick where appropriate:

1. What is your sex?
   - Male [ ]
   - Female [ ]

2. Age range
   - 18-25 years [ ]
   - 26-30 years [ ]
   - 31-35 years [ ]
   - 36-40 years [ ]
   - 41 years and above [ ]

3. Home Language
   - English [ ]
   - Shona [ ]
   - Ndebele [ ]
   - Tonga [ ]
   - Other (specify) [ ]

4. What is your highest academic qualification?
   - Junior Certificate [ ]
   - O level [ ]
   - A level [ ]
   - Bachelors degree [ ]
   - Other (specify) [ ]
5. What is your highest professional qualification?

- Certificate in Education [ ]
- Diploma in Education [ ]
- Diploma in early childhood education [ ]
- Bachelor's degree [ ]
- Other (Specify) [ ]

6. Teaching experience

- 0-2 years [ ]
- 3-5 years [ ]
- 6-10 years [ ]
- 11-15 years [ ]
- 16 years and above [ ]

7. Number of years at this school

- 0 – 2 years [ ]
- 3 – 5 years [ ]
- 6 – 10 years [ ]
- 11 – 15 years [ ]
- 16 years and above [ ]

8. Number of years teaching early childhood education

- 0 – 1 year [ ]
- 1 – 2 years [ ]
- 2 – 5 years [ ]
- 5 – 10 years [ ]
- 10 years and above [ ]

9. Area of specialization at college/training school

- Nursery school training [ ]
- Paraprofessional training [ ]
- Infant education training [ ]
- Early childhood training [ ]
- Other (specify) [ ]

8. Post of responsibility held

- Substantive school head [ ]
- Acting school head [ ]
- Substantive deputy head [ ]
- Substantive teacher-in charge [ ]
- Early childhood education teacher [ ]
Appendix 3 Checklist for teaching-learning resources

Checklist of grade zero/early childhood education teaching / learning resources in Zimbabwe primary schools

Indoor equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of grade zero classes</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. in place</th>
<th>Condition of resource</th>
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<td>Chairs</td>
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<td>Shelf units</td>
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Outdoor equipment

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<th>School</th>
<th>No. of grade zero classes</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. in place</th>
<th>Condition of resource</th>
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<td>Climbing ladders</td>
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<td>Seesaws</td>
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<td>Swings</td>
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<td>Plastic balls</td>
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<td>Ropes</td>
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<td>Hoops</td>
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Buildings

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of grade zero classes</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
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<td>Classrooms</td>
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<td>Toilets</td>
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### Administrative materials

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of grade zero classes</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. in place</th>
<th>Condition of resource</th>
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<td>Minutes of meetings with parents</td>
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<td>Staff development schedules</td>
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<td>Record of conferences attended</td>
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<td>Record of teacher supervision</td>
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### Other teaching materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of grade zero classes</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. in place</th>
<th>Condition of resource</th>
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<td>Syllabus</td>
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<td>Teachers' resource books</td>
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<td>Pupils' picture reading books</td>
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</table>
8 September 2010

Mr E Mangwaya and Dr SE Blignaut
Education Faculty
NMMU

Dear Mr Mangwaya and Dr Blignaut

TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF READINESS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF GRADE ZERO/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY.

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the September meeting of the Faculty Research, Technology and Innovation Committee of Education (ERTIC).

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The ethics clearance reference number is H10-Edu-ERE-016.

We wish you well with the project. Please inform your co-investigators of the outcome, and convey our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Ms J Elliott-Gentry
Secretary: ERTI
Appendix 5 Application for permission: Ministry of Education

12 August 2010
The Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture
P.O.Box 167
Causeway
Harare
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dear Dr. Mahere

My name is Ezron Mangwaya, and I am a Curriculum Studies student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. The research I wish to conduct for my Doctoral thesis involves an exploration of teacher perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr S.E Blignaut (NMMU, South Africa) and Dr S. Pillay (NMMU, South Africa).

I am hereby seeking your consent to approach primary schools in Gweru district to provide participants for this project. I have provided you with a copy of my thesis proposal which includes copies of the measure and consent and assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the NMMU Research Ethics Committee (Human).

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Education with a bound copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 263-54 256839 or 263 913 955599 or mangwayaezron@yahoo.co.uk Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ezron Mangwaya
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
Cc Gweru Regional education office
   Gweru District office
Appendix 6 Application for permission: Regional Director of Education

The Provincial Education Director
Midlands Region
P.O.Box 737
Gweru

Re: Application for permission to conduct research in Gweru district primary schools

My name is Ezron Mangwaya, and I am a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies at Midlands State University. Currently I am a PhD student at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in South Africa. I am conducting research on Teacher preceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe: A case study under the supervision of Dr S.E. Blignaut and Dr S. Pillay of the Faculty of Education. I am kindly requesting for permission to conduct this research in your schools. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the NMMU.

Aims of the Research
The research aims to:

- Determine the nature of teacher preparation and availability of resources for the introduction of early childhood education
- Determine the nature of support systems, profile of early childhood education teachers and how early childhood education learners are taught in Gweru schools.

Significance of the Research Project
The research is significant in two ways:

1. It will provide information on the extent to which Gweru primary schools are ready for the grade zero/early childhood education innovation
2. It will provide insights on the various levels at which primary schools are operating with respect to early childhood education

Benefits of the Research to Schools

1. Results will be disseminated to the Ministry of Education, Provincial education office, district education office and schools
2. Results will inform both curriculum development and curriculum practice with respect to early childhood education policy and its implementation

Research Plan and Method

Data will be collected using a short questionnaire (on biographical details), interviews, observation and document analysis. Participants will be expected to: a) provide the researcher with appropriate responses to questions asked b) provide the researcher with the necessary documentation for analysis and, c) member check researcher’s interpretation of their contributions. All information collected will be treated in strictest confidence and neither the school nor individual participants will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and the school head, through the provincial and district office, may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty.

School Involvement

Once I have received your consent to conduct this study, I will
- arrange for informed consent to be obtained from participants
- arrange time with your schools for data collection to take place

For any further information concerning this research you can contact Ezron Mangwaya at +263 054 256839 or +263 913 955 599 or mangwayae@msu.ac.zw

Ezron Mangwaya
Appendix 7 Application for permission: School Heads

[Teacher perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education in Zimbabwe: A case study]

Project Information Statement/Letter of Invitation to School Principals

My name is Ezron Mangwaya, and I am a PhD student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). I am conducting research on **Teacher perceptions of the state of readiness for the introduction of grade zero/early childhood education: A case study** under the supervision of Dr. S.E. Blignaut and Dr S. Pillay of the Faculty of Education. The Provincial Department of Education has given approval to approach schools for my research. A copy of their approval is contained with this letter. I invite you to consider taking part in this research. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the NMMU.

**Aims of the Research**

The research aims to:

- Determine the nature of teacher preparation and availability of resources for the introduction of early childhood education
- Determine the nature of support systems, profile of early childhood education teachers and how early childhood education learners are taught in Zimbabwe schools.
Significance of the Research Project

The research is significant in two ways:

3. It will provide information about the extent to which Zimbabwe primary schools are ready for the grade zero/early childhood education innovation
4. It will provide insights on the various levels at which primary schools are operating with respect to early childhood education

Benefits of the Research to Schools

3. Results will be disseminated to Ministry of Education, Provincial education offices, district education offices and schools
4. Results will inform both curriculum development and curriculum practice with respect to early childhood education policy and its implementation

Research Plan and Method

Data will be collected using a short questionnaire (on biographical details, interviews, observation and document analysis. Participants will be expected to: a) provide the researcher with appropriate responses to questions asked b) provide the researcher with the necessary documentation for analysis and, c) member check researcher’s interpretation of their contributions. All information collected will be treated in strictest confidence and neither the school nor individual participants will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and the School Principal may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty.

School Involvement

Once I have received your consent to participate in the study, I will

- arrange for informed consent to be obtained from participants
- arrange a time with your school for data collection to take place

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Ezron Mangwaya  Dr S.E. Blignaut
Researcher  Supervisor
NMMU  NMMU
Dear Sir/Madam,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT AN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN MIDLANDS PROVINCE

Permission to carry out a research on:

- General Primary School’s Enrolment
- Readiness for the Implementation of Spheres
- Early Childhood Education

In Midlands Province has been granted on these conditions:

a) that in carrying out this you do not disturb the learning/teaching programmes in schools

b) that you avail the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture with a copy of your research findings.

c) that this permission can be withdrawn at anytime by the Provincial Education Director or by any higher officer.

The Education Director wishes you success in your research work and in your University College studies.

EDUCATION OFFICER (PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND LEGAL SERVICES)
FOR PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR: MIDLANDS

Zimbabwe

Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture
P.O Box 707
Gweru
Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE
Appendix 9 Invitation for teacher participation

Faculty of Education
NMMU
Tel: +27 (0)41 504-xxxx  Fax: +27 (0)41-504-xxxx
E-mail Faculty Chairperson:  sylvan.blignaut @nmmu.ac.za

Date 12 July 2010

Ref: (H10 – Educ - ERE -016)

Contact person:  early childhood education teacher

Dear

You are being asked to participate in a research study. I will provide you with the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of you (participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and your rights as a study subject. Please feel free to ask the researcher to clarify anything that is not clear to you.

To participate, it will be required of you to provide a written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions.

You have the right to query concerns regarding the study at any time. Immediately report any new problems during the study, to the researcher. Telephone numbers of the researcher are provided. Please feel free to call these numbers.

Furthermore, it is important that you are aware of the fact that the ethical integrity of the study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the university. The REC-H consists of a group of independent experts that has the responsibility to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and that studies are conducted in an ethical manner. Studies cannot be conducted without REC-H’s approval. Queries with regard to your rights as a research subject can be directed to the Research Ethics Committee (Human), Department of Research Capacity Development, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

If no one could assist you, you may write to: The Chairperson of the Research, Technology and Innovation Committee, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.
Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in any research. If you choose not to participate in medically related research, your present and/or future medical care will not be affected in any way and you will incur no penalty and/or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

If you do partake, you have the right to withdraw at any given time, during the study without penalty or loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you should return for a final discussion or examination in order to terminate the research in an orderly manner.

If you fail to follow instructions, or if your medical condition changes in such a way that the researcher believes that it is not in your best interest to continue in this study, or for administrative reasons, your participation maybe discontinued. The study may be terminated at any time by the researcher, the sponsor or the Research Ethics Committee (Human).

Although your identity will at all times remain confidential, the results of the research study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specialist publications.

This informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

Yours sincerely

Ezron Mangwaya
RESEARCHER