

# **Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe**

By

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Masimba Takaendesa, student number u18280804, affirm that the thesis, *Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe*, is my original work. It has never been previously submitted to any other tertiary institution. All the sources that I have used in my research work are acknowledged in-text and in the references. The requirements of the University of Pretoria were adhered to.

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- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

## DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my late parents, Naison and Raina Takaendesa, who laid a solid foundation for my academic journey. Memories of their encouraging words and wisdom I still cherish today. If it was not for them, I would not have reached this far.



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## ABSTRACT

The experiences young children encounter from the time of their birth shape their future. As such, the best legacy to give a child is a sound education, hence there is a need to increase access to the varied early childhood development services so that more children can benefit. The study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The motivation for carrying out the study was the seemingly wide gap, where birth to three educare in Zimbabwe was limited and did not have the same status as other ECD programmes for three- to five-year-olds that are easily accessible and found in both private and public school centres. The current status of educare means Zimbabwe is lagging behind in providing early year services for all young children.

The theoretical framework is guided by the attachment theory of Bowlby and Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership model. The inquiry is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm and is qualitative in nature. The sample comprised of 16 participants, which consisted of 10 parents with children between birth and three years, five each from Mutoko and Murewa districts and six district education officials, three from each district mentioned. Data generation was through narrative inquiry, document analysis and qualitative questionnaire. Thematic analysis was used to present and analyse the findings.

The findings of the study revealed that, despite there being less activity in birth to three educare provisions, parents and education officials were convinced that children could immensely benefit from accessing and participating in the programme. A major finding was that holistic development of children is enhanced through participation in educare and opportunities for early identification and intervention on developmental delays are among other benefits. It was also found that the government of Zimbabwe is facing some challenges regarding educare provisions. Chief among these concerns is lack of a comprehensive early childhood development policy, lack of an approved educare curriculum and infrastructure, among others. Hope is, however, not lost regarding educare provisions. It is believed that the results of the study can lead to a paradigm shift in early childhood development programmes, where the significance of educare can be realised and promoted.

## LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

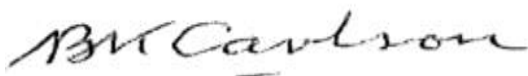
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
DSI	District Schools Inspector
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NELDS	National Early Learning Standards for Children Birth to Four Years
NIPECD	National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 Introduction

The first five years of a child's life journey are very crucial due to the unmatched rapid rate of development that is associated with it. The best legacy to give a child is a strong foundation that will underpin his development in all future endeavours. According to Shonkoff (2009) the child's early years are crucial in laying a solid foundation for future developments. In this regard, a quality educare programme is the answer. The importance of early childhood development should see governments and other key stakeholders working together to provide quality services that will ultimately benefit young children.

The experiences children encounter in educare settings are necessary to build strong foundations for future successes. Learning begins at birth, this makes educare provision more relevant and a necessity to enhance children's development. The experiences children gain early in their life have a lasting impact on their development (Feeney, Christesen, and Moravicik, 2010). Subsequently, countries the world over are making frantic efforts to develop and improve their early childhood development services to accommodate all deserving children.

The provision of educare is one way of ensuring that young children can have a solid base that can enhance their potential in life. Ministry of Women and Child Development:India (2014) states that parents are key stakeholders in early childhood education and care, hence their participation is important. According to Durisic and Bunijevac (2017, p. 144), "parents and families are essential stakeholders and have a major impact on the success of the process of education and upbringing of children." My study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Thus, it attempted to understand how parents and education officials view educare services in Zimbabwe.

## 1.2 Background

Zimbabwe is a signatory to different conventions on education. The Zimbabwean government is bound by the Jomtien Education for All (EFA) Framework of Action 1990 and the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 to provide every person, child, youth and adult educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The government responded to the dictates of these conferences on education by developing a number of early childhood development policies. Notably, The government of Zimbabwe (2004) instituted Secretary's Circular Number 14 of 2004 which directed that all primary schools, with effect from 2005, were required to attach at least one ECCE class of 4-5 year olds. Again, The government of Zimbabwe (2005) established the Director's Circular number 12 of 2005, which mandated that ECD classes were to be attached at every primary school in phases. Phase one in Section 2.1 focused on the attachment of ECD classes for 4-5-year-olds and this was to be done during the first five years. In phase two, the focus was on the attachment of 3-4-year-olds classes, which was to be achieved in the second five-year programme.

The government of Zimbabwe (2005) developed another policy framework, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005, which gave guidelines on the establishment and operation of Early Childhood Development centres in the country. Peculiar in this policy is the age of attendance. Section 9 clearly states that "no child may attend an early childhood development centre before he or she attains the age of three years". However, all the policies have no provisions for birth to three years' children, hence this impact on educate for children in this age category.

In 2015, Zimbabwe was one of the 195 countries that ratified the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 agenda. The agenda has 17 Goals, which participants agreed to implement in their respective countries to better the lives of their people. Amongst these is Goal Number 4 which sought to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015, p. 21). Therefore, governments are compelled to act and spearhead the provision of quality education for all their citizens. Governments were supposed to come up with strategies that would see every child, despite his or her age, disability or gender effectively accessing suitable learning environments. Other countries came

up with some strategies and interventions. In Finland, “education facilities provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all” (Statistics Finland, 2020, p. 19). The government of Ghana, came up with different strategies that sought to achieve the SDGs. For example, the Ghana Education Strategic Plan (ECP) (2010-2020) was developed to provide frameworks that would guide goal achievement in the country. In a research study by Mohammed (2017), Ghana sought to provide “quality and child friendly universal basic education for all through various opportunities for all categories of children”. Since Goal Number 4 is all encompassing, it means even birth to three education is provided for. In South Africa, the Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education (2016) was developed. It mandated that all 5-year-old children be enrolled in early childhood development settings (Grade R).

The Department of Statistics South Africa (2019) and the Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education 2016 “mandated improvements in the quality, curricula and teaching for the categories birth to 4 years old.” It is therefore evident that some policy developments regarding birth to four years in South Africa were made in recognition of the SDG Goal Number 4. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed “The Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030 (The government of South Africa, 2019). The policy highlighted what the Department intended to achieve with regards to education provisions at all levels. Unfortunately, not much is available in the Zimbabwean context concerning education provisions, hence the government as a key stakeholder should come up with strategies to address this existing gap within the current ECD programmes.

Research evidence indicates that some young children are lacking enough early stimulation. Children birth to three years require programmes that provide them with early stimulation. For instance, in India “Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) makes a positive contribution to children’s long-term development and learning by facilitating an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation stages of lifelong learning” (Ministry of Women and Child Development:India, 2014, p. 7). The envisaged interactions of children and their caregivers in stimulating ways in education is crucial in their development of cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains.



Equality of opportunities is a key benefit of early childhood development. Equity refers to a fair distribution of opportunities between children from diverse classes, contexts, abilities and disabilities. In the words of MacEwan (2013, p. 3), “The evidence strongly indicates that children from low-income families benefit substantially, both cognitively and socially or behaviourally, from high quality early childhood education, thus helping to close the achievement and opportunity gap between income groups.” Since children come from varied backgrounds, educare provision can equalise opportunities for the haves and the have nots. It tallies well with the Sustainable Development Goal Number 4 which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO Regional office for Southern Africa, 2019, p. 2). Policy development since independence in 1980 bears evidence of the government’s drive to make education for all a reality in Zimbabwe. Although a surge of investments in early childhood development is evident, not much was done to develop and promote educare practices.

The increased number of women joining the workforce in an effort to boost the family financial basket means efforts to provide their young children with proper care facilities have to be made. A project carried out by Adaba, Rost and Bajraktari (2015) on women empowerment found out that “working mothers recognised the role of quality childcare centres in freeing their time to work and earn an income, and to advance economically.” Young children require facilities that offer quality services that aid their growth and development. Furthermore, Adaba et al. (2015) stated that some of the parents felt happy about their children’s participation in childcare since they benefitted educationally and nutritionally among other key aspects of development. Having children in educare affords parents some breathing space to be gainfully employed. They do not have any worries about their children since they will be cared for by professionals and this can positively impact on their development. It is therefore sensible for government and other key stakeholders to have established educare programmes that provide proper care and address birth to three years children’s developmental needs.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

Quality care is a crucial aspect required for young children to have a strong foundation for later developments. Access to quality ECD programmes increases cognitive

abilities, school achievement and improves literacy and numeracy skills of young children (Bivens, Garcia, Gould, Weiss and Wilson, 2016). The study sought to explore the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The findings of my study will add new information on educare practices. In the words of Chiparange and Saruchera (2016, p. 1), “Despite the remarkable awareness in Zimbabwe of Early Childhood Development, there is insufficient motivation for communities, local authorities and central government to make strategic plans for universal position.” My study can contribute towards the development of suitable and relevant policy guidelines that are currently missing. For instance, some notable changes were brought to young children’s services by the Chinese National Strategy for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (Chiang, and Hadadian, 2010). Early childhood development programmes should be inclusive of educare provisions because these children also deserve a better start early in their life.

As a parent of young children, I have realised the importance of educare. Educare provision can positively impact on young children’s learning and development. Mwangi and Serem (2013) propounded that the Jomtien Conference of 1990 commitment to develop education in Africa asserted that learning begins at birth which forced Kenya to include three-year-olds into preschools according to the 1989-1993 Development Plan. Vandebroek, Lenaerts and Beblavy (2018) assert that many parents and guardians have been unaware of the importance of educare which promotes emergent children’s holistic development. Exposure to quality educare programmes can enhance young children to reach their full potential in life. The narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe are crucial in addressing the developmental needs of young children. The purpose of carrying out this study was to address a gap, where educare in Zimbabwe is limited and does not have the same status as ECD provisions for three to five-year old children which is easily accessible since it is found in both public and private schools and ECD centres.

#### **1.4 Purpose statement**

During the first five years development is most rapid, hence there is need for the provision of a conducive environment that can promote learning. The provision of educare services for children between the ages one to three can positively impact on their development greatly (Doyle, 2014). Quality care is the most important

requirement if young children are to have a strong foundation for later development (The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, n.d). The Zimbabwean early childhood development programmes both in public and private centres have their services tailor-made for 3-8 years children. Regarding educare, there are not many centres that offer this service; hence children are missing out on the benefits available. In Zimbabwe, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to develop policies, implement them and monitor progress of early childhood development programmes. However, in Mutoko and Murewa districts where this research was conducted, educare is not readily available; hence parents have no option except to keep their children at home in the hands of guardians or domestic workers. The problem is compounded by the lack of policy provisions on educare. Existing early childhood development policies in Zimbabwe have a bias towards increasing access to ECD children 3-5 years.

The Education Act (1987), as amended in 2006, embraces all children; however, it does not clearly specify educare provisions for birth to three years children (The government of Zimbabwe, 2006). It is therefore insignificant to think of educare provisions when there is inadequate information and policy guidelines to help guide the operations of the early childhood development programme. The problem investigated concerns educare provision in Zimbabwe which could be compounded by the non-existence of a comprehensive policy that covers all the early years age groups and guide practices. One then wonders, where are the birth to three-year-olds? Does the lack of a comprehensive policy framework mean they are not part of the ECD programme? If so, why then does Zimbabwe's early childhood development definition stipulate the 0-8 years if, as in the policies, the birth to three age group is insignificant? How does Zimbabwe justify the ECD definition? There is a mismatch between the Zimbabwean ECD definition and practices on the ground where children birth to three are not catered for in the available policies. Hence, the unravelling of parents' and district education officials' narratives regarding educare in Zimbabwe could be the starting point to contribute towards increasing access and policy amendments. Parents, as the first teachers of their children, can play a role in influencing early childhood development changes for the benefit of their children.

## **1.5 Research questions**

The following are the research questions that guided this study;

### **1.5.1 Main research question**

What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?

### **1.5.2 Sub-research questions**

- What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?
- What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?
- What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the overlapping relationships between school/educare and home?

## **1.6 Delimitation of the study**

The delimitation of this study was on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in Mutoko and Murewa districts of Mashonaland East province. The choice of the two districts was due to them bordering each other, which made my travelling easy as my residency is in Mutoko. My familiarisation with early childhood development programmes that existed there facilitated my undertaking of this research..

## **1.7 Limitations**

The rurality of the two districts may affect the generalisability of the study findings. Due to my interests and opinions on birth to three provision, I may have been biased and failed to see other existing gaps and this may impact on the findings. In an effort to mitigate on the biases, the data was verified through triangulation. Instead of relying on one source of data (narratives), the researcher corroborated the information that was collected through other data sets such as document analysis and interviews.

## **1.8 Significance of the study**

Educare seems to be invisible and less accessible in Zimbabwe. The significance of this study is that it may be relevant in bridging existing gaps in educare provisions in Zimbabwe. The narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe can influence policy makers to consider developing a comprehensive ECD policy in future. Implementation strategies of policies can also be influenced by this study.

The growth and development of early childhood development programmes can be influenced by how the parents and district education officials view educare. The information generated by this research can contribute to the public's understanding of educare. It is hoped that educare can be popularized through the carrying out of this research study. The fact that educare can provide equality of opportunities means that the study is significant in that all beneficiaries of the programme will have an equal footing in life. There is a high probability of more children reaching their full potential through participation in educare. Findings of the study could be used to promote quality early childhood development practices in Zimbabwe. Some considerations on teacher or caregiver training can be made to fully meet the requirements of educare settings. It is my hope that a surge in the establishment, registration and operationalisation of educare centres will be realized through this study.

## **1.9 Theoretical framework**

The attachment theory of Bowlby (1907-1991) and the overlapping relationship model of Epstein in the 1990s were used to guide this study. The study focused on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. By nature, birth to three children should be in the custody of their primary caregivers. However, studies have shown that learning starts at birth, meaning that more and more people are taking cognisance of early childhood development programmes such as educare. Participation of children in educare immensely benefits them. The attachment theory becomes handy in educare settings because the experiences of children during the first three years influence their development. Therefore, the nature of care they receive from their caregivers should be of a high

quality so that a solid foundation for relationship building in the early and later years is laid.

On the other hand, every successful early childhood development programme must closely work with the parents. This makes the overlapping relationship model of Epstein relevant in this study. The model has six types of parental involvement which are key. Parental involvement as guided by this model, can go a long way in unravelling the narratives of parents and district officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. More on the conceptual framework is discussed in chapter two.

### **1.10 Clarification of terms**

It is appropriate to define some of the terms that were used in this study so they become contextualised to the research study. Therefore, the following concepts are explained in this section:

#### **1.10.1 Narratives**

Wolemuth and Agosto (2019) say a narrative involves the art of storytelling; it gives an overview of a person's life where information regarding every day events is shared. Polkinghorne (1988) cited in Hazel (2007) says a narrative reflects an individual's life, inclusive of actions and events. Narratives can be defined as the representation of scenarios, actions and events that are of interest to the presenter and the observer. Narratives are key in drawing conclusions regarding the life history of an individual or a community. In this study, narratives refer to the shared experiences by the parents and district education officials with regards to educare provisions. Parents and district education officials were requested to share their stories regarding educare in Zimbabwe through narratives and semi-structured interviews.

#### **1.10.2 Parents of children birth to three**

Nesmith Library (2015) defines a parent as a father, mother or legal guardian. In addition, Muhlwa (2020) says a parent is an individual who, according to law, has custody, guardianship or access rights to a child. This study refers to parents of

children birth to three years as mothers or fathers who are responsible for their everyday requirements.

### **1.10.3 Educare**

Educare is a programme designed to nurture young children's learning and try to bridge the achievement gap between children from rich and poor families. Sathya (2015) postulates that "Educare" is a Latin word which means to elicit or to draw out that which is within. It is concerned with reaching deeply into the child's higher levels of consciousness and bringing out the values and divinity that are inherent there. The concept 'educare' entails shifting from the traditional ways of early childhood services where emphasis was on education, rather, it seeks to enhance the aspect of care as well so that children can holistically develop (Glosbe, n.d). Educare refers to a programme that seeks to provide children birth to three years with quality early education and care practices. In the context of this study, educare is defined as the provision of a programme where education and care are equally important.

### **1.10.4 Early childhood care and education (ECCE)**

"Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to any type of pre-school, childcare provision that is subject to a national regulatory framework" (van Belle, 2016, p. 74). The European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice and Eurostat (2014) in Vandebroek et al. (2018, p. 34) assert that ECCE refers to "provision for children from birth through to compulsory and primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, for example, it has to comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures." ECCE refers to the provision of an all-inclusive education and care programme for children from birth to eight years. In this study, ECCE refers to the first three years of a child's life in my thesis.

### **1.10.5 Policy**

"A policy is a statement of principles, values or intent that guides decisions and actions, or (more usually) determines the decisions and actions to achieve a service's goals" (Tusla, 2018, p. 9). Mackay and Shaxton (n.d) say "Policy refers to a distinct path of action which is suitable for the pursuit of desired goals within a particular context, directing the decision making of an organization or individual." Cochran and Malone (2014,p.3) state that "policy can be described as the overall framework within which government actions are undertaken to achieve public goals, with a good working



definition of public policy for our purposes being the study of government decisions and actions designed to deal with a matter of public concern.” Thus, a policy refers to plans or guidelines used in making decisions regarding birth to three educare provisions in the Zimbabwean context.

### 1.11 Research methodology

Every research conducted is unique in its own way hence, I used the qualitative research approach. The choice of the methodology used was due to the purpose of the research and resources available. A qualitative approach suited this study very well because it sought to have a deep understanding of parents’ and district education officials’ narratives regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Research methodology entails the specific techniques used in a research study (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Methodology refers to how data that answers the research topic is to be collected, presented and analysed. The table 1.1 shows a summary of the data collection methods:

**Table 1.1: Data collection methods**

Research questions	Data source	Data collection instrument	Justification of the instrument
What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?	Primary sources of data	<p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years</b></p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire for the District education officials</b></p> <p>Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, instead of having oral narratives and interviews, a qualitative questionnaire was developed and electronically sent to the parents and education officials. They filled in responses to the given set of questions.</p> <p>Literature related and relevant to birth to three educare policy and practice from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>The narratives of parents brought insights into the perceptions of parents and education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Qualitative questionnaire with education officials also highlighted their views regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Literature was consulted in an effort to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on educare provisions.</p>



<p>What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?</p>	<p>Primary sources of data</p>	<p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years</b></p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire for District education officials</b></p> <p>Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a qualitative questionnaire was developed and electronically send to the parents and district education officials. They filled in their responses to the given set of questions.</p> <p>Literature related and relevant to educare from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>The narratives of parents brought insights into the perceptions of parents and education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Qualitative questionnaire with District education officials also highlighted their views regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>In an effort to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on educare provisions, literature was consulted.</p>
<p>What are the narratives of parents regarding the overlapping relationships between school and home during the first three years of educare?</p>	<p>Primary sources of data</p>	<p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years</b></p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire with education officials</b></p> <p>Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, instead of having oral narratives and interviews, the researcher used a qualitative questionnaire which was send to participants electronically. They filled in responses to the given set of questions.</p> <p>Literature related and relevant to educare provisions from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>The narratives of parents brought insights into the perceptions of parents and education officials regarding educare provisions in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Qualitative questionnaire with education officials also highlighted their views regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Literature was consulted in an effort to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on educare provisions.</p>

### 1.11.1 Research outline

The table below, shows the research outline

**Table 1.2: Research outline**

Research paradigm	Interpretive paradigm Narrative inquiry	
Research methods	Qualitative approach Narrative inquiry	
Selection of research participants	Purposive sampling	Parents or caregivers with children birth to three years District Schools Inspectors District Education Officers
Data collection	Narrative inquiry (stories, personal experiences)	Qualitative questionnaire transcriptions
Data collection instruments	Narrative guide, qualitative questionnaire	
Data analysis	Thematic analysis	
Ethical	Informed consent Confidentiality	
Trustworthiness	Transferability Dependability Confirmability Credibility	
Study outline	Chapter 1: Introduction and background Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual framework Chapter 3: Research methodology Chapter 4: Data presentation, interpretation and analysis Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions and recommendations	

## 1.12 Thesis layout

### Chapter 1: Introduction and background

An overview of the research is given in this chapter, it include the rationale of the study, the problem statement, research questions that guided the study and concept clarification. The chapter also highlighted then methodology, delimitation and limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review. The concept of educare internationally, regionally and locally is looked at deeply. This results in some comparison of policies from Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

The research study used qualitative research approach, the interpretivist research paradigm and the narrative research inquiry. The chapter presents the research methodologies that were employed in the process of data collection. Consequently, the population, sample of participants, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are some of the key aspects highlighted in the chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Data presentation, interpretation and analysis**

Chapter 4 focuses on the data presentation, interpretation and analysis process. The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. The results are interpreted and analysed in line with themes that emerged from the collected data.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter, presented the summary of literature findings as well as the empirical findings in this study. The chapter also contains the recommendations made.

### **1.13 Concluding remarks**

The chapter looked at the background to the study where key indicators relating to unravelling the narratives of parents and district officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe were presented. It was noted that the Zimbabwean government, being a signatory to a number of conventions on education, has made some tremendous progress on ECD provisions. Since 1990, a number of policy frameworks on ECD provisions have been developed. These include Secretary's circular number 14 of 2004, Director's circular number 12 of 2005 and Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005, among others. Further scrutiny of these policies indicated that they are more biased towards 3-8 years' provisions at the expense of educare. It therefore means that a gap still exists in the Zimbabwean context.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

A literature review is concerned with the evaluation of existing information on a topic or an area. The available literature regarding educare is explored in this chapter. The importance of educare calls for an increased investment in the early childhood development sector. Effective implementation of such a programme and quality of care pivots on the nature of policies available. Literature findings from desktop research and writings regarding early childhood indicate that tremendous growth and development takes place during the first five years. Consequently, educare should be developed, promoted and supported since it is beneficial to children's holistic development. In this chapter, I presented the literature that is relevant and related to the research questions that guided my study on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The review played a pivotal role in identifying gaps in the existing literature regarding educare. Through studying literature, a better understanding of educare in Zimbabwe and the world over was achieved.

In chapter 2, the attachment theory and the School-Family-Community Partnership model are outlined. My understanding of these items informed my choice of the theoretical framework that guided my study on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

#### **2.2 Perceptions of parents and district officials regarding educare**

Successful implementation of educare relies heavily on how parents and district education officials perceive it. It is also buttressed by the nature of policies available. Parents should be concerned with the suitability and relevance of any programme that targets their children. Thus, how they perceive educare is critical to its success. Parents and district education officials' view of educare can either encourage them to embrace the service or discourage them. Ministry of Women and Child Development:India (2014), states that the family is a key component in early childhood service provision and its participation influences a child's care, development and

learning. The choices and decisions made with regards to educare depend on how parents and district education officials perceive it.

## **2.2.1 Benefits of quality educare**

There are many benefits that can be realised through educare. The benefits have seen countries the world over making frantic efforts to establish and improve their early childhood development services. Shonkoff (2009, p. 2) says “cognitive, emotional, and social capacities are inextricably intertwined throughout the life course.” A quality educare programme should be provided so that children can benefit from it. Evidence of what other researchers and writers say regarding educare is the focus of this section.

### **2.2.1.1 Cognitive development**

Among the many benefits of educare is cognitive development. It refers to the human beings’ capabilities of receiving, processing, integrating and responding to information. Cognitive development in young children is widely influenced by Jean Piaget, a cognitive development theorist. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development: India (2014) supportive educare services play important roles in the development of cognition; children need to be exposed to appropriate activities. Cognitive development during the preoperational stage depends on how the child understands his or her environment and it is basically through sensory experiences such as hearing and seeing. Piaget, Inhelder and Weaver (2000) view children between two to seven years as operating in the preoperational stage. Educare services play a significant role in the development of cognition in young children. The European Commission (2014) as cited by Vandebroek et al. (2018, p. 34) says “learning and education, indeed, do not start when a child enrolls in compulsory education—but much sooner.” The environment in which the child grows up has an impact on cognitive development. Therefore, young children who participate in educare programmes have a better chance of developing problem solving and thinking skills.

### **2.2.1.2 Physical development**

The early years between birth and three are regarded as critical in shaping the children's future endeavours (Wood and Hedges, 2016). Related to the foregoing presentations pertaining to the benefits of educare, physical development of children is one area that is vital. Physical development encompasses the ability of the child to use and control the body. According to the New Jersey Council for Young Children, (2013, p. 49), "the physical, gross and fine motor skills and abilities that emerge during the infant and toddler stages of development affect the young child's connections with others, with things and with their environment." In educare, children are exposed to learning opportunities that enhance balance, mobility, and coordination of the whole body. Physical development is essential in helping children to interact and explore their environment. It empowers children in terms of their connections with their immediate environment, including people and objects.

### **2.2.1.3 Social and emotional development**

The potential benefits of educare on socio-emotional development are so immense. Socio-emotional development refers to the ability of a child to form relationships and interact with peers, caregivers and adults. "Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that make up the foundation of human development" (Shonkoff, 2009, p. 2). Children's development is intertwined and interwoven; hence social development will have great influence on how the child's other facets develop. Through educare provisions, the experiences that children encounter will help to optimise their future development. Gordon and Browne (2014) advocated that early educare provision is key in socio-emotional skills development. This entails that service providers, should strive to provide quality services that will enhance the development of these critical skills in young children. Early childhood development programmes are very important in that they help build a base on which young children can make friends, resolve conflicts, regulate their behaviours and be acceptable members of the society. Minnet (2014) put forward that parents and other caregivers guide and encourage young children to develop acceptable social and emotional skills. By the age of three, if young children receive nurturing and responsive interactions, they should form relationships with their caregivers and regulate their emotions.

#### **2.2.1.4 Brain development**

During the early childhood years, between birth and three years, significant developments that have long term influence on children take place, for instance brain development is most rapid. The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (n.d, p. 2) claims that “the brain develops through a dynamic interaction between underlying biological processes and exposures and experiences in the environment.” On the same note, the World Health Organisation (WHO), (2020, p. 1) argues that “the earliest years are especially important, being the time when the brain develops rapidly; it is therefore a critical period for the child to receive nurturing care.” The early childhood phase is a window through which the child’s early experiences can be seen and, as such, a nurturing and caring environment should always be availed. Lally and Mangione (2017) opine that children’s experiences early in their lives can lay a solid foundation for later brain development, whether in the home or early learning environment. It is therefore important to provide quality care to young children. Educare settings should have caregivers who are reliable, consistent and able to work with young children. It is important that personnel in educare strive to address the needs and interests of young children under their care. Since parents play crucial roles in the growth and development of children they should collaboratively work with early childhood development caregivers towards their quest to have them reach their full potential.

Taguma, Litjens and Makowiecki (2012) affirm that brain development rapidly takes place during the first five years. The early childhood development programmes in a country have an important responsibility to provide nurturing care that enhances brain development. Considering the sensitivity and plasticity of the brain during the first years, policies and strategies that guide quality early childhood development programmes are therefore called for (Shonkoff, 2009). The World Health Organisation (2020) opines that the early years are critical and there is need for care that is nurturing. The ability of a caregiver to provide a conducive environment that is developmentally appropriate is critical in making educare an effective programme for brain development. Shonkoff (2009) states that brain development is an ongoing process which starts at conception through to adulthood. Young children who spent their early childhood years attending an early childhood development programme like



educare encounter better opportunities for brain development. The environment plays a significant role on brain development. It influences brain development in young children, as such it should always be conducive, safe and secure. Children should access quality early year programmes for them to have a strong foundation that enhances brain development.

### **2.2.1.5 Early identification and intervention**

Mortimer (2002) in Hickman and Jones (2014, p. 117) state that “early intervention is an essential component to any debate on early years and inclusion.” Educare provision is regarded as key in stimulating and nurturing the development of children so they can succeed later in life. Children from birth to three are not immune to developmental defects, which may have greater impact in the future if they are not identified early in their life. Early identification is critical in the early years and can result in preventive intervention measures being taken. Shaughnessy and Kleyn (2012, p. 3) put forward that the early childhood environment provides an opportunity to ensure that all children begin school “ready to learn”. It is imperative that teachers and caregivers in the ECD sector be trained and equipped with skills that can enable them to identify defects in speech language or articulation disorders in children under their care.

Early identification and intervention for children who show signs of developmental delays during the first three years is important and should be exercised greatly. According to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2020) the delays are varied, and these are inclusive of uncommon developmental patterns in cognition, , visual and hearing impairments, as well as physical. If these are not identified early they can have ripple effects on children’s life. WHO and UNICEF (2018, p. 6) echo that “preventive and promotive interventions in the early years achieve more and cost less than remedial interventions at later ages.” The aim of early identification and intervention of defects in children’s development is to mitigate the risks associated with disabilities in the near future of the children. A quality early educare service that is nurturing, caring and supportive will go a long way to making early identification and intervention possible, thus the sooner a defect is detected, the better.



### **2.2.1.6 Learning readiness**

Enhancing learning readiness is another benefit of an early childhood development programme. Learning readiness refers to the level of preparedness a child has reached to engage in learning as he /she enters school. “The nurturing and interacting style of the primary caregivers at home, and in out-of-home programmes at the educare centres, have the strongest influence on children’s motivation and learning” (Ministry of Women and Child Development:India, 2014, p. 7). The experiences children encounter during the early years enhance their skills development and competences towards learning. The zeal, attitude and curiosity that children exhibit towards activities commonly found in schools defines their learning preparedness.

United States Department of Health and Human Services (2014) put forward that Learning readiness entails the eagerness children can have towards learning. This implies that quality educare, backed with relevant policies can significantly impact on learning readiness of children from diverse contexts. It is therefore crucial for all stakeholders in the education sector to work towards establishing birth to three educare services that meet and address the needs and interests of children. For instance, there is need for knowledgeable caregivers who will be able to plan and design activities that are stimulating and motivating in educare settings.

### **2.2.1.7 Equity promotion**

Equality of opportunities for children from diverse backgrounds is a key benefit of educare provisions. Equity refers to a fair distribution of opportunities between children from diverse classes, contexts, abilities and disabilities. In the words of MacEwan (2013, p. 3), “The evidence strongly indicates that children from low-income families benefit substantially, both cognitively and socially or behaviourally, from high quality early childhood education, thus helping to close the achievement and opportunity gap between income groups.” It is clear that children come from different backgrounds and if nothing is done to equalise the haves and the have nots the gap will continue to widen. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (2019, p. 5) states that “all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society.” It is envisioned that if opportunities are fairly provided in the educare, the

probability is high that all children will have an equal footing as they progress in their school work and ultimately in the labour market.

Early childhood development levels the playing field for all children. It therefore calls for greater support if inequalities are to be reduced. For instance, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), (2018) in Sierra Leone states that the government came up with “the Child Rights Act, the Agenda for Prosperity, the Education Sector Plan (2014-2018), the Free Health Care Services for children from 0-5 years and their mothers which were fully endorsed and implemented by the government.” The role played by the Sierra Leone government was meant to provide early stimulation for all children despite their context. The developments taking place in Sierra Leone regarding the ages 0-5 years are very important, they are meant to provide early services for these children. It is however unfortunate that nothing of this sort has ever happened in Zimbabwe. Due to this lack of activity with regards to educare issues, there is no way improvements on the services could be made. This is despite the fact that Zimbabwe is a signatory to the JOMTIEN and the Dakar conventions where ECD provisions for all age groups is a top priority. The Zimbabwean government, should be making some effort to develop guidelines for educare, just like what is happening in Sierra Leone. There should be no disparities regarding accessibility, quality, infrastructure and resource provision in educare if equity is to be realised.

### **2.2.1.8 Economic benefits**

Investing in the early childhood development sector has some economic benefits. The Kudroli Foundation (2019) agrees that education at all levels potentially improves the “economic and financial lifestyle” of the people in a country. The future of the citizens is guaranteed to be successful if accessibility to quality education from early childhood development is increased. Economists view that investment in early childhood development is beneficial as it bears a lot of fruit in the future. For instance, the World Bank Group (2018, p. 4) states that “making quality childcare available-which is often an element in ECD intervention-allows more parents to work and be more productive to society.” Quality educare service provision will see parents having faith in the system and in return they are likely to be more productive through having less stress and not missing work altogether.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) give emphasis to all children being afforded equal opportunities to access quality education at all levels from early childhood development (Grant, 2017). It is widely believed that accessing equitable and quality education at all levels has economic benefits in the long run. As such, a nation that invests in early childhood development is likely to increase taxes because it will result in highly educated citizens who are employable in high paying jobs. Karoly (2016) says that cost and economic benefits of early childhood development are immense, for example, criminal activities in future will be lower. It is therefore of paramount importance to improve investments in early childhood development settings so that children will have the best footing. The government can deliver policies that encourage even private players to play a role in supporting educare services.

### **2.2.2 Components of quality educare**

There are a number of components that ensure the quality of educare services available. According to Willoughby (2016, p. 2), “The quality of any early years care and education setting is hugely important for babies and young children, and it is essential that decisions by parents about where their child is cared for and by whom are made with quality, not just practicality and cost, very much in mind.” Therefore, parents and district education officials’ understanding of the importance of educare will allow for positive decisions.

#### **2.2.2.1 A safe and stimulating environment**

A safe and stimulating environment is perceived by parents as one of the components that determine quality in educare. Parents and the district education officials have to consider that educare has safe and stimulating environments which are crucial in helping children realise their potential. Mwoma, Begi and Murungi (2018) echoe that early childhood development settings must ensure that children are protected from unsafe conditions. Children’s development is negatively affected if they are consistently exposed to unsafe and unsuitable environments. Therefore, it is crucial for young children to participate in educare programmes that have stimulating environments, safe and secure. Educare settings, should be full of enough and relevant play materials. It enhances their interaction with the environment and increases their chances to freely explore and gain experiences that help shape their

future. If the environment is safe and stimulating, parents will be confident that it is conducive and appropriate to support birth to three-year-olds development.

Families and district education officials are important partners whose role in the successful implementation of educare is crucial (Anderson, Traynham, and Krutsick, 2017). Early childhood development provides a rich foundation on which life long achievements are built. Portugal and Luis (2016, p. 174) forward that “the quality of the educator’s attitude have a direct impact on the children’s development and learning.” Without the necessary conditions, the holistic development of young children can be negatively affected, hence the need to have a safe and stimulating environment.

It is a general belief of parents, district education officials and other stakeholders in early childhood development that high quality educare services have greater impact on children’s development. A safe and stimulating environment is one sure way of providing quality services which parents consider very much when it comes to matters concerning their children. According to The World Bank Group (2018, p. 3) “Research has established that children who receive quality early childhood services in a stimulating and nurturing environment are better placed to prosper in life.” It is the general belief of parents and other stakeholders in early childhood development that high quality services have greater impact on the children’s development.

#### **2.2.2.2 A good curriculum**

The stipulations of early childhood development policies of a country should greatly influence practices. One of the components of quality educare provisions is the availability of a good, suitable and relevant curriculum. Meggitt, Bruce and Manning-Morton (2016, p. 395) claim that “the best way to prepare children for their adult life is to give them a good childhood that meets their needs and builds on their interests.” A curriculum for young children should be play based and seeking to build a strong foundation for their development. If the parents are to have their children in an educare programme, they should have strong convictions that the curriculum offered is relevant and suitable for their children’s development. Mohammed (2015) submits that activities and experiences that children encounter in early childhood development environments such as educare will shape their future. An appropriate educare

curriculum greatly impacts on the quality of care young children experience and this ultimately influences their development and future endeavours.

Mccain, Mustard and Mccuaig (2011) state that programmes for young children require a sound and relevant curriculum so that there is a proper guide on activities. An educare curriculum should fully embrace the concept of developmentally appropriate activities which is key in guiding the learning and development of young children. Developmentally appropriate practice fosters the development of children so they can reach their full potential. For instance, the methodology approach in the Indian ECCE programme “is largely based on creating a stimulating learning environment for the child through planned activities/ tasks which are joyful, and involve active thinking/learning by the child” (Ministry of Women and Child Development:India, 2014, p. 7). It therefore means that activities and methodologies suggested in a curriculum should address the developmental needs of children.

Mohammed (2015) further stated that educare can provide support and encouragement to children in the early stages of their life. There is need for a relevant and suitable curriculum. The curriculum is an important component of quality educare provisions because the intention is to address the needs and interests children as unique individuals. A relevant educare curriculum influences the setting up of the learning environment and governs how children can acquire the knowledge and skills. European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice (2014) state that the content and curriculum in educare has to be suitable so it can impact on children’s development. A good curriculum can guide caregivers’ interactions with the children under their care. As such, caregivers in educare settings should be creative and resourceful. Unlike India, which has a good and relevant curriculum for birth to three years’ children, Zimbabwe lags behind since there is no specific curriculum for this age group. Thus, to some extent quality of educare services is compromised because obviously operators will not do things uniformly, thereby exposing children to some content and activities which may not be quite relevant to their developmental levels.

### **2.2.2.3 Effective parental involvement**

Parents are crucial stakeholders in the early childhood development sector and they have a right to demand quality services for their children. Li-Fen, Moore and Lin (2014)

view that it is necessary for parents to consider seriously components such as safe and stimulating environment, a good curriculum, sensitive caregiving practices, teacher qualifications and cultural sensitivity whenever they think of quality ECD provisions. Quality educare programmes should embrace the involvement of parents in its activities. “The bond a child makes with their first attachment figure (parent or other primary caregivers) is the building block for nearly all other important steps in growing up” (Multnomah County Family Court Services, 2014, p. 7). Therefore, the parent or caregiver involvement with the child plays a role in defining future trajectory developments. Parents get involved with their children through a number of ways, for instance they can play games, feed the child or change a diaper. A Ministry of Education (2011) report cited in Pennells (2018, p. 43) states that “partnership with parents is deemed an essential component of quality early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.” Effective parental involvement thus can greatly contribute to quality educare in Zimbabwe.

The involvement of parents and families in educare plays an important role “they may understand the child rearing approach taken in the child care centre and extend the care and stimulation practices at home” (Ministry of Women and Child Development:India, 2014 , p. 7). Parents should know that their participation is appreciated and valued greatly. A successful educare programme for young children depends on the nature and support of parents. Tusla (2018, p. 2) further stated that quality educare services “can be provided in partnership with parents who are, of course, their children’s first and most important guardians, carers and educators.” Effective participation of parents in educare can have an impact on educare in Zimbabwe. Through sharing of knowledge, attitudes can change and this can help shape educare policies and practices in future.

#### **2.2.2.4 Early childhood development policies**

Policies are an important component of quality educare service provision. Tusla (2018) posits that policies ensure that service providers are consistent in their approaches and should follow the laid down principles and values for educare as enshrined in policies. Everything that happens in educare settings has to be guided by a policy. It is through policies that quality can be measured, that is whether programmes would be meeting policy stipulations or not. According to Kathyanga (2011, p. 18) “in ECD,

a policy gives guidelines about how policy makers and implementers deal with ECD issues which give ECD administrators and teachers a sense of confidence.” Through the overlapping relationships in educare, it should be known that policies play crucial roles in quality provisions. The duties and responsibilities of parents, teachers and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education among other stakeholders would be clearly spelt out. For instance, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) (2018) in Sierra Leone came up with an ECD policy. The policy recognises that learning starts at birth and takes cognisance of families, the community and the nation at large to commit themselves to the learning, growth and development of young children.

It is important for a country to have comprehensive early childhood development policies since this can guide quality practices in the varied settings where young children would be found. According to Tusla (2018) having such a policy is a regulatory requirement that can help uniformity in educare as well as ensuring consistency and quality provisions. Effective educare provisions require a comprehensive policy that can be successfully implemented throughout the country. A relevant and suitable policy framework entails that there would be appropriate programmes for young and that the practices would best meet their needs and interests. For instance, “The Belgian federal government has a stated policy intention to move towards a more integrated system of early years education, care, health and family support.” (Pascal, Bertram and Peckham , 2019, p. 12). Policies are key in maintaining and improving quality provisions in early childhood programmes. The successful implementation of educare programmes in Zimbabwe can be influenced and regulated by a comprehensive policy, just like in the case of Belgium.

#### **2.2.2.5 Professional and stable caregiver workforce**

The availability of educare professional caregivers enhances quality of the programme. This is important for the sector because knowledgeable personnel will significantly contribute towards the success of educare throughout the country. It is considered as one of the most critical components of quality early childhood services. Caregivers in educare settings should have basic knowledge of child development issues as this is critical in the operations of the service. “Child day care providers and caregivers need training and supervision to provide nurturing care for the children



placed with them” (WHO and UNICEF, 2018, p. 6). Educare require professional and competent caregivers who will be able to provide sensitive caregiving practices. Sensitive caregiving practices refer to the ability of a caregiver to promptly and appropriately work with young children in an effort to meet their needs and interests. The sensitivity of a caregiver is very important to children at all times.

In research by Mesman, Basweti and Misati (2018) regarding the sensitivity of infant caregiving among the rural Gussi in Kenya, findings indicated that “sensitivity was mostly non-verbal.” For instance, it is the duty of the caregiver to first inspect the environment before children descend on it for different activities.” Canada and Bland (2014) forward that the perceptions of parents regarding quality of educare depends on the staff and their ability to interact well with the children under their care. It has been found that knowledgeable and specialised caregivers on child development are particularly very important if educare is to be a successful programme (Wechsler, Melnick, Maler and Bishop, 2016). Hence, parents as key stakeholders in educare consider caregiver professionalism as an important aspect of quality in early childhood development settings.

The availability of professionally qualified caregivers in educare settings is one way of preserving and maintaining quality. Wechsler et al. (2016) propound that retaining high-quality staff and minimising on high staff turnover is key in maintaining quality standards in early childhood development. Having professionally qualified personnel in educare, is something crucial as it determines the nature and quality of care rendered to the young children under their care. To some extent, such caregivers can also assist parents, especially first time parents, on effective child rearing practices. They will be able to educate such parents on attachment issues such as being consistently available and responsive to the children’s needs and interests. The caregiver in educare settings has to work towards providing an environment that is conducive, stimulating and safe for children. Opportunities for children to interact between themselves and with play materials should be made available in educare settings.



### **2.2.3 Challenges regarding educare**

A significant increase in early childhood development has been realised in most countries the world over. This has been due to a number of factors, such as governments' responses to the Jomtien and Dakar Conferences on Education, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among other aspects. However, most developing countries still face a number of challenges in their early childhood development programmes. Some of the challenges developing countries like Zimbabwe face include, among others, lack of professionally qualified teachers/caregivers, lack of adequate and relevant resources, and the lack of a relevant and suitable curriculum.

#### **2.2.3.1 Lack of professionally qualified caregivers**

Lack of professionally qualified caregivers is one of the many challenges that impede educare in Zimbabwe. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2007) cited in Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016), the availability of knowledgeable and qualified personnel in educare is key for the programme to succeed. The caregivers will be able to plan and provide activities that are developmentally appropriate. The knowledge they possess will help them nurture young children's dreams. Caregivers who are knowledgeable, have the required skills to work with birth to three children are critical if quality educare provision is to be realized. Ibhaze (2016, p. 177) echoes that in Nigeria, "the teacher quality is generally low." It should be emphasised that professionally trained ECD caregivers be engaged in all settings for young children if the sector is to be successful. These will be competent and committed teachers, who possess the requisite knowledge of child development. OECD (2011) states that increased investment in teacher education is key to deliverance of high-quality early childhood development outcomes. Teachers for all ECD levels should have specific knowledge and competences, this enables them to effectively work with young children. Qualified personnel in ECD are conversant with the expectations and can provide developmentally appropriate experiences to the young children so that their development is fully enhanced. Unfortunately, appropriately qualified caregivers are not enough in most of the developing countries, Zimbabwe included.

### **2.2.3.2 Lack of resources**

Resources provision is key in the successful implementation of educare. Stakeholders should make sure that there are enough and relevant resources available. Investments in the early childhood development sector demands a lot of resources. Ibhaze (2016) highlighted that material resources such as furniture, paints, newsprint and television sets among others should be adequately provided. The availability of enough resources is vital if educare provision is to be a success. “When resources are available for ECE programmes at pre-primary school level, it helps the caregiver/teacher to nurture and support the development of young children, and to successfully implement curriculum” (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016, p. 74). Resources provision is key to effective educare services. Research carried out in Zimbabwe by Moyo, Wadesango and Kurebwa (2012) show that centres lacked stationery, picture books, see-saws and toys. Another research by Chikwiri and Musiyiwa (2017) found that lack of resources (material) is a challenge that is affecting the successful implementation of ECD programmes in Zimbabwe. This is caused chiefly by financial constraints faced by most centres. Due to lack of resources in educare, Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) argued that this breeds failure. Lack of resources, thus impact negatively on children’s development.

### **2.2.3.3 Infrastructure**

In their research, Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) say the results show that there were inadequate classrooms for ECD. Most of the teachers who participated in the research agreed that the classrooms were not standard. This means that learners were being accommodated in buildings that are sub standard, hence impacting on teaching and learning of young children. According to The government of Zimbabwe (2005) early childhood settings shall provide indoor playing space to allow for at least 2,25 square metres and 5,5 square metres of outdoor space per child. Research carried out in Kenya by Shikomera (2017) found that there is no quality infrastructure in ECDE. The findings revealed that the lack of adequate facilities impact negatively on teaching and learning in the centres. What the study found in Kenya resonates well with what is prevailing in the Zimbabwean context where facilities and infrastructure are not up to standard in most cases.

#### **2.2.3.4 Funding**

Another challenge that has a serious impact on educare provisions for children birth to three years is lack of funding. According to Alabi and Ajaiya (2014) adequate funding should be availed so that educare becomes a success. If educare is poorly funded, it leads to problems with staffing, water and sanitation facilities, ratio issues, and provision of standard infrastructure. (Ibhaze, 2016). The Zimbabwe National Budget Statement presented on 7 December 2017 revealed some significant reduction in funds allocated towards ECD (Makokoro, 2017). From the contents of the budget statement, one has the impression that the government wanted to relegate ECD responsibility to the parents and communities.

Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2015) put forward that, the total government expenditure on pre-primary education is limited. The lack of funding impact on the quality of service provision in educare. This clearly shows that governments are not prioritising early childhood development in their budgets. Funding of the early childhood development sector should be seriously looked into by the government and all stakeholders.

#### **2.2.3.5 Accessibility**

Young children are active learners from the time of their birth, capable of interacting as competent persons with their world. It has been found that the first three years of a child are crucial in laying the foundation for future developments (Farrel, 2006; Wood and Hedges, 2016). Even though educare provision has benefits to the child, accessibility remains a major challenge. Vandebbroeck, Lazzari and Van Lancker (2013) say that there is a growing concern regarding accessibility to early years services especially for children from poor backgrounds and ethnic minority families. Zimbabwe is no exception with regards to the accessibility of ECD programmes that cater for children birth to three years. A robust move to increase accessibility is therefore required from all stakeholders. The development of a comprehensive and all-encompassing policy should be the starting point as such a policy will greatly impact on the issues of accessibility for this great service which is currently missing.

### **2.2.3.6 Early childhood development curriculum**

Quality of educare provisions is also determined by the curriculum on offer. An early childhood development curriculum is the vehicle through which any educational programme can be successfully implemented. The National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) (2012) in Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) highlights that the early childhood development curriculum guides children in achieving their goals. The availability of a relevant educare curriculum is important because programme implementation will be procedurally followed. The caregivers and other stakeholders will be in a position to know the expectations of the curriculum. The ECD curriculum is a critical area that can help shape the future of the learners. The Department of Basic Education (2015, p. 1) in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) “provides guidance for those developing programmes and working with babies, toddlers and young children from birth to age four.” Despite a relevant curriculum being important, Zimbabwe has a massive gap since there is no curriculum for the birth to three years programmes.

There is, however, a mismatch between ECD teacher training and the situation on the ground regarding educare provisions (Majoko, 2017). Despite there being no curriculum for this age group, the University of Zimbabwe, the custodians of the teaching diploma, requires trainee teachers in early childhood development to embark on the infant-toddler programme during their training. The infant-toddler programme is the closest to providing children in the birth to three years category access to early childhood development services. The infant-toddler programme equips teacher trainees with the knowledge and skills required in dealing with birth to three age group issues so that they can aid their development. It lacks a curriculum, however, or the backing of policy guidelines. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) say, a relevant curriculum helps to ensure that staff or teachers cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups. Unfortunately, the lack of a national educare curriculum in Zimbabwe is one reason there are disparities in the infant-toddler programme between teachers’ colleges.

## **2.2.4 A comparison of Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe educare and policy provision**

In Australia, the policies are clear that “all children from zero to five years of age have a legal entitlement to early education and care and early health services, with high enrolment rates in early childhood or primary education” (OECD, 2017 cited in Pascal et al., 2019, p. 19). It suggests that countries are striving to provide early childhood development services of the highest quality. Therefore, each country is actively developing policy frameworks to guide the early childhood development sector. In this regard, a comparison of Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe educare and policy provision is focused on in this section.

### **2.2.4.1 Australia educare and policy provision**

Australia is one of the developed countries that has some unique and very important policies that are inclined to educare provisions. It should be noted that different countries have different approaches to early years’ provisions. For instance, in Australia there are some relevant and specific policies that addresses provisions that covers birth to five years (OECD Australia, 2016). Programmes in Australia are known as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and are provided in different settings and contexts. Australia was selected because it has invested heavily in ECEC, and this has seen an increase in access and participation by children from birth to five years. The comparison of educare and policy provision help to highlight what different countries are doing to provide early years’ services to their youngest citizens. That can also help to highlight existing gaps and possible ways they can be plugged.

In Australia, there are some specific policies that guide operations in early years services. ECEC provides a strong foundation in young children’s lives and learning. This has seen significant differences in how early childhood education and care services are organised and provided from country to country. This entails that each nation has policy guidelines that are in line with the goals and objectives that it seeks to address. Australia, like any other country, has policies that are peculiar to it and these are the focus of this presentation.

- **National Early Childhood Investment Strategy-Investing in the Early Years**

In Australia, available programmes include those that offer services for children from 0 to 3 years (OECD, Australia,2016). These are provided in accredited childcare centres and include half day and full day services. Staff in ECEC in Australia has to be adequately qualified. In Australia, one policy framework that guide these operations is the National Early Childhood Investment Strategy-Investing in the Early Years policy document. The Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWR) (2009a) cited in Garvis, Pendergast and Kanasa (2013, p. 105) proposed that “governments should work towards ensuring that by 2020 all children will have the best start in life so that their future and that of the nation will be better.” The framework prioritised six key areas concerning birth to three children, which are:

- (a) strengthen universal maternal, child and family health services*
- (b) provide support for vulnerable children*
- (c) engaging parents and the community in understanding the importance of early childhood development*
- (d) improve early childhood infrastructure*
- (e) Strengthen the workforce across early childhood and care and family support services and*
- (f) Build better information and a solid evidence base.*

The presence of a policy like this in Australia means that programmes for young children are of a high quality. Everything that happens in the sector is provided for in the policies.

- **National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care**

The Australian Government formulated and produced the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care on 1 January 2012, a policy that seeks to improve the quality of early childhood services. This was a step in the right direction since early childhood play significant roles on the developmental status and educational outcomes of young children. The framework provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and

care and outside school hours' care services across Australia (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2010-2011). According to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECOQA) (2012) in Li, Nyland, Margetts and Guan (2017), "now in Australia, children in the age group birth-5 years, attending a variety of services, are included under the same regulatory package, the National Quality Framework (NQF)." The NQF institution is clear evidence that educare is recognised and supported in Australia. This implies that early childhood education and care service providers have to adhere to the guidelines and stipulations of this framework.

The National Quality Framework in Australia is key in making sure that national standards, quality and consistency in ECEC settings are closely maintained. OECD, Australia (2016, p. 8) provides that "the NQF harmonised the separate regulatory frameworks into a single framework underpinned by nationally consistent legislation, and an NQS (a set of benchmarks) against which services are inspected (or assessed) and rated." The NQF will mandate all ECEC players to provide services of high quality and they should be addressing child development issues. The NQF also recognises the importance of parents and it calls for relevant information to be passed to them timeously since this can help them make informed decisions regarding their their children.

A number of improvements that should be done in ECEC services have been highlighted in the NQF and these include the issue of staff-to-child ratio which should be low so that children can receive individualised care and attention. OECD, Australia (2016, p. 5) states that "in Australia ECEC settings are required to meet nationally consistent staff-to-child ratios set out under the Education and Care Services National Regulations." It further provides that in pre-primary education settings (ISCED 02) where children are three years and above, the maximum should be 11 children. For children under three years, the maximum staff-child ration should be between 1:5 for children between 2/3 and 1:4 for children under two years.

- **National Early Learning Framework**

In Australia, ECEC is regarded as the basis for child development, hence it plays an important role. OECD, Australia (2016, p. 8) says "around one third of 0-2-year-olds



attended some form of formal childcare (ISCED 0 and other registered ECEC services) in 2013.” This is an important policy document since it provide guidelines to ECEC services. It brings about the belief that a solid foundation for all later learning and development is laid during the first five years. The guidelines cover provision of birth to five years ECCE services by different players through the transition to school. The framework recognise that young children have underlying potentials; as such, educators need to provide them with opportunities that will help them realise this. All ECCE programmes that are developed should be guided by this framework, hence consistency is guaranteed.

Waldemarian, Boyd, Hirst, Sageidet, Browder, Grogan and Hughes (2017) state that in Australia, there is a National Quality Framework, that has guidelines for early childhood provisions. The reforms that have taken place in Australia concerning early childhood education and care are huge. Apart from the strategies discussed earlier, Australia also introduced an Early Years Learning Framework in 2009. The Australian Government: Department of Education and Training (2018) the Early Years Learning framework sought to provide quality programmes for all children in Australia from the time of birth until they transitioned to the school system. The EYLF highlights the guidelines that service providers should follow in ECEC provision. The guidelines makes it possible for standardised service provision which is critical if quality is to be realised and maintained. This framework is meant to help educators to come up with quality ECEC programmes for the varied age groups from birth to five years. It also underscored accessibility issues and it advocates for increased access whereby every child in Australia has equal opportunities to participate in a quality early years programme.

ECEC policies in Australia embrace the birth to three children services. According to Baxter and Hand (2013), in Australia ECE programmes follow two specific models - a government and a non-government model. ECEC is the mandate of both state and territory governments in Australia and this has resulted in variations in implementation approaches and strategies. DEEWR (2009) states that the Early Years Learning Framework aims to develop birth to five years children through play based methodologies and this helps in their transition to school. The Early Years Learning Framework is a curriculum document that brought some important changes to ECEC



in Australia. Some of the changes made relates to staff qualifications, where those working with birth to five children had to be holders of a Certificate 111 level qualification (Li et al., 2017). The aim is to try and positively influence the development of young children, and thus the governments has played a great role of coming up with policies that govern and provide guidelines for their provisions.

One critical area in the early childhood sector is human personnel. Knowledgeable and highly qualified staff is key, if the services offered to young children are to be credible, effective and efficient. According to OECD (2012) in Australia, personnel in ECEC settings should have a childcare diploma, an advanced diploma or a four-year degree qualification in early childhood education from a university. The issue of qualifications is meant to provide quality early childhood education and care because the teachers will have the relevant and necessary qualifications to guide and promote holistic development in children. Having policy guidelines on educare is one positive thing that Australia has managed to do. It also translates into the quality and nature of the programmes offered.

#### **2.2.4.2 South Africa educare and policy provision**

South Africa is the African country whose early childhood development policies are analysed and compared to Australia and Zimbabwe. South Africa is fairly progressing well in early childhood development provisions. The choice of South Africa was due to it having some specific and relevant early childhood development policies that guide provisions for children from birth to four years. Policy availability relates to a high degree of quality assurance in the ECD sector.

Early childhood development in South Africa refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age, with the active participation of their parents and caregivers (Department of Basic Education: Republic of South Africa, 2009). Since this is how South Africa defines ECD, it is imperative to have a view of what its policies are regarding educare practices. The South African government has a number of policy frameworks on early childhood development; however, this research focused on a selected few that are most significant to my research study. The chosen policy frameworks are as follows: the National Integrated Plan for ECD 2005, the National Early Learning and Development Standards for

Children Birth to Four years, the South African National Curriculum Framework for Birth to four 2014 and the South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development.

- **The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) for children birth to four years**

This policy framework is a curriculum focused policy whose goal is to provide for the needs and interests of birth to four years' children. According to the Department of Basic Education: Republic of South Africa (2009), the framework is a guide to all ECD service providers, who are expected to benchmark their curriculum for birth to four years' children according to the dictates of this policy. The policy seeks to guide practitioners on how they can execute their duties in early childhood development settings. Educare has long term benefits. It enables the young child to develop in all the domains- cognitive, social, emotional as well as physical (Munene, 2019). Section 3 of the policy has the desired outcomes for children birth-8 months (babies), 18-36 months (toddlers) and 3-4 years (young children). The stipulations of the policy clearly highlights the significance of relevant curriculum.

- **South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development – Moving Ahead (2013/14-2016/17)**

The development of a comprehensive early childhood development policy framework is one key element of a successful early childhood development sector. Evidently, to succeed government departments and stakeholders have to harmoniously work together. The Department of Social Development (2013/14-2016/17) seems to address critical components, where the objective, an outcome, activities, responsible department, a budget and a time frame are clearly outlined. There is no room for complacency in the implementation of this policy document because each item has a lead department and progress reports are needed from time to time. If the proposals in this document were followed, then the early childhood development sector in South Africa would be one of the best in the world.

In South Africa, the early childhood development programme is mostly offered by the nonprofit organisations and private sector. The Department of Basic Education (2015)

states that government plays a critical role in regulating and funding the ECD programmes in public and private sectors. Educare provision in South Africa is both centre-based (ECD centres/creches, playgroups) and non-centre based. The centre-based provision seems to be advantageous since it usually has a curriculum as compared to the non-centre based. The non-centre based early childhood development programmes are mostly found in informal settlements. Non-centre-based crèches are usually not registered; hence they face a lot of challenges such as lack of enough material resources and government support.

The availability of qualified staff in the early childhood development sector is one of the key aspects of a quality programme. In South Africa, ECD staff should be between 18-60 years old and must be trained (Cape Town Project Center, 2007-2015). The Department of Social Development of South Africa (2006), alluded that the minimum qualification is the registered Basic Certificate in ECD NQF Level 1 of the South African Qualifications Authority. Staffers who have this qualification possess some basic knowledge, competences and skills to be engaged in ECD settings for children birth to four years. Such staff are, however, encouraged to upgrade their qualifications so that they are equipped with the relevant knowledge of child development and skills to work with young children. They also become abreast with research findings in ECCE and new developments taking place in the area. According to Government Gazette (2017) the new policy of the Minimum Requirements for Qualification for Early Childhood Development Educators 2017 has implemented competencies for ECD educators and universities have collaborated to provide a standardised qualification for ECD educators which will be implemented in 2022.

South Africa has some relevant educare policies which work as guidelines in its provision and implementation. This is unlike the situation in Zimbabwe, where none of the available policies has clear stipulations for educare. On curriculum, the Department of Basic Education (2015) affirms that the South African National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four should be implemented in early childhood development settings. This highlights the government's commitment to provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum. The curriculum framework guides operations and the designing of learning and activities.

- **The National Curriculum Framework for birth to four 2014**

Consequently, South Africa has the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which “provide guidelines for those developing programmes and working with babies, toddlers and young children from birth to age four” (The Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. 1). The NCF is earmarked for use in different ECD settings so that it benefits all children through purposeful learning experiences that address the needs and interests of young children. To this end, it identifies six early learning and development areas service providers should follow as they develop their own curricula. Through the development of policy frameworks such as the NCF, it is evident that policy makers made efforts to ensure appropriate and equitable ECD provisions. The basis of this policy guideline is for consistency and avoidance of a haphazard curriculum being developed and offered in early childhood development services across South Africa. Accordingly, policy makers have made the effort to ensure appropriate, equitable ECD policy, particularly through supporting poor and vulnerable children (Biersteker, 2012). The basis of this policy guideline is for consistency and avoidance of a haphazard curriculum being developed and offered in early childhood development services across South Africa.

- **The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015**

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy was approved in December 2015 and it is envisaged that the successful utilisation and implementation of the policy framework presents many children with opportunities for a better future. In South Africa, the aim is to have an appropriate package that is all encompassing and caters for all the ECD age groups. The achievement of this goal requires massive support and resource mobilisation from the government and other stakeholders. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy of 2015 has the potential to present many children with opportunities for a better future. The government of South Africa (2015, p. 7), states that South Africa’s vision 2030 goal is to make sure that “A full comprehensive age and developmental stage appropriate package of quality early childhood development services is available and accessible to all infants and young children and their caregivers.”

The proclamation of the The National Early Childhood Investment Strategy-Investing in the Early Years is evidence of the commitment by South Africa to provide quality early childhood development programmes that enhance the development of children. It therefore calls for massive support and resource mobilisation from the government. This policy framework addresses early childhood development issues such as age of attendance among others. This is the kind of commitment that is needed if a quality educare programme for all age groups is to be realised.

#### **2.2.4.3 Zimbabwe educare and policy provision**

Zimbabwe as a signatory to the Jomtien and Dakar conferences is mandated to pay greater attention to its education system. For instance, the Dakar Conference was meant to check on progress member countries had made since the 1990 Jomtien Conference. The Jomtien had set a number of targets, one of which was the expansion of early childhood care and development activities (International Labour Organisation, 2012, p. 51). According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2002, p. 38), “Throughout the world there is growing understanding that the period from birth to the start of primary education is a critical formative stage for the growth and development of children.” Thus, Zimbabwe has actively worked towards promoting early childhood development for certain age groups. In this section, an analysis of current ECD policies is carried out. The selected policies are, Secretary’s circular 14 of 2004, Director’s circular 12 of 2005, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005, and Director’s circular number 48 of 2007.

- **Secretary’s circular 14 of 2004**

A laudable response by the Government of Zimbabwe to the 1999 Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training resulted in the institutionalisation of the Secretary’s circular number 14 of 2004. It is a policy document that sought to establish and promote early childhood development. In 2004, the government of Zimbabwe seriously considered early childhood development as part and parcel of the education system. The year 2004 saw the government going back to the drawing board and retrieving a 1999 Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training Report that was gathering dust. The report made some very important recommendations on early childhood development that had been ignored for quite a

long time. Amongst the recommendations was one that sought to increase access to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The government of Zimbabwe (2004) responded to the commission's findings and recommendations by developing this policy framework which sought to increase accessibility to early childhood education and care. The policy gave birth to a two phased approach where, during the first five years with effect from 2005, schools were expected to take on board at least one ECEC class of 4-5-year-olds beginning in January 2005.

Another class of 3 to 4-year-olds was to be attached to the schools during the second phase in 2006. The Secretary's circular 14 of 2004 also clearly stipulates that these classes were to be manned by appropriately qualified teachers. When this circular was issued, I believe authorities had not done their homework thoroughly. Firstly, there were no appropriately trained teachers for these classes by then. Secondly, they never bothered that schools where these two classes were to be attached had not enough suitable infrastructure. It therefore means schools were to be burdened so they could accommodate this new baby. Thirdly, there was no curriculum for use by teachers in these classes. The lack of a curriculum means that things could be haphazardly done, and this posed challenges to the development of the children.

- **Director's circular 12 of 2005**

This circular is more of a follow up on the Secretary's circular number 14 of 2004. It gives "guidelines on the provision of Early Childhood Development in primary schools" (The government of Zimbabwe, 2005). The policy framework indicates that schools should strive to provide quality programmes that enable the healthy development of children. In section 2.0, the circular highlights that the ECD programme in the schools should be implemented in two phases just like in the Secretary's circular number 14 of 2004. However, the difference is that this circular clearly specifies that the two phases are of five years each. The clarity on the phases is important because implementation would be gradual and it gives room for service providers to prepare on things like infrastructure, teachers, materials and equipment. The circular also stipulates the ratio to be adhered to in ECD settings. In section 3.3, it says "ECD centre or classes are expected to operate on a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:20." Although there

were no fully qualified ECD teachers by then, the circular emphasised that these “classes were to be manned by appropriately qualified teachers.”

The circular highlights the importance of parents as they were expected to play crucial roles in the development of ECD centres within the primary schools. They were expected to be key on construction and furnishings of the centres as well as payment of fees and levies. Since ECD was to be a part and parcel of the formal primary school set up, it automatically means that the heads had to play significant roles in making this happen and fully functional. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officials were also set “to provide professional advice” on quality ECD provisions so that the children would immensely benefit. The methodology that is emphasised in the circular is play way, hence ECD teachers should be well versed in it so they can plan and deliver their activities accordingly. The policy is key in ECD provisions, but it is, however, biased towards 3-5-year-old children since it says nothing regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

- **Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005**

ECD provisions in Zimbabwe are regulated by the provisions of Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005. This is a policy framework that has 16 important sections that should be adhered to by ECD service providers if their services are to be deemed of a high quality. In sections 3 and 4, the policy framework spells out the requirements needed by one to establish and register an early childhood development centre. For instance, registration can only be done when the Secretary of Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is satisfied with the premises and qualifications of the staff who should have a recognised nursery teaching qualification or its equivalent (The government of Zimbabwe, 2005, p. 542). Section 4(b) indicates that registration can be done when there is efficient and suitable instruction that aims to help children’s holistic development.

One other key aspect that is regulated by the SI 106 of 2005 is the age of attendance. According to the government of Zimbabwe (2005, p. 542), “No child may attend an early childhood development centre before he or she attains the age of three years.” The specifications of the policy means educare is not fully catered for here. The lack of specific guidelines for this programme could be the reason there seems to be less



activity regarding educare policy and practice. Educare issues are lacking and this impact on practices where quality cannot be provided.

The policy states that, “the early childhood development centre curriculum shall be appropriate to the physical, mental and social development of children” (The government of Zimbabwe, 2005, p. 542). In this policy the issue of a curriculum is merely highlighted and not discussed to show the nature of content, methodology, classroom organisation and other aspects. It therefore entails that educare curriculum issues have not been addressed.

Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 provides for accommodation and facilities for early childhood development. Section 11(a) provides for “a total indoor playing to allow for at least two, comma, two, five square metres of each child.” To make sure that health and quality provisions exist in primary schools, the policy also highlights that wash facilities be provided. For example, there should be a ratio of 1:12 squat-holes or flush water toilets. The ratio is deemed enough because it gives room for cleaning purposes to be undertaken periodically. The issue of relevant accommodation and other facilities reveals that, if everything is done according to policy stipulations, quality will be improved. Although the policy guides ECD operations in Zimbabwe, it lacks specifics on educare policy and practice. Practices can be haphazardly done, thereby impacting on quality provisions.

- **Director’s circular number 48 of 2007**

The Director’s circular number 48 of 2007 sought to provide guidelines on all ECD operations in schools and private centres. The Director’s circular 48 of 2007 seems to be a repeat of Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 on establishment of ECD centres, registration of ECD centres and age (enrolment). However, on enrolment, an addition that “children below the age of three should be enrolled at drop in centres” was made. Unfortunately, nothing else has been said regarding educare in Zimbabwe. It is evident that the Zimbabwe government developed and implemented policy frameworks; however, the majority have a bias towards 3-5 year old children at the expense of educare services. The status of the policies reveal a gap where available policies lack specifications for birth to three educare provisions. Thus, it is well known that whenever there are gaps, quality is compromised.



- **Secretary's Circular Number 2 of 2017**

In an effort to improve on curriculum issues, this policy framework gave guidelines on the implementation of a new curriculum in primary and secondary schools. This was to take place during the period 2015-2022. The curriculum was implemented in phases, beginning with Infant school (ECD A and grade 1 (3-8 years), Junior school (Grade 3) and in secondary schools forms 1, 3 and 5). The policy is however silent regarding an educare curriculum.

Zimbabwe, just like Australia and South Africa, made efforts to develop early childhood development policies that sought to benefit children in different contexts. However, most of the policy frameworks have a bias towards provision for 3-5 year old children. Policies in Australia and South Africa clearly identify either birth to five or birth to four years (depending on each country's age ranges). This is unlike the Zimbabwean situation where no such specifics exist in the policies. Most of the Zimbabwean policies lacked specifications on educare. For example, the Director's Circular Number 48 of 2007 in section 4.0 clearly highlighted the age of enrolment which is pegged at three years. It stated that, "No child shall be enrolled at an ECD centre before he or she attains the age of three years" (The government of Zimbabwe, 2007). The policy went further to highlight that children below the age of three should be enrolled at drop-in centres. The mentioning of drop-in centres is an indicator that children birth to three years are to some extent thought of in this policy framework. However, no specifications about these drop-in centres are given in the policy and in any other subsequent policy available in Zimbabwe.

Unlike in Australia and South Africa where there are clear curriculum policy documents for birth to three years' children, Zimbabwe seems to be lagging behind. Available policies like the Secretary's Circular Number 14 of 2004 and the Director's Circular Number 12 of 2005 have a bias towards 3-5 years' provisions (The government of Zimbabwe, 2004 and The government of Zimbabwe, 2005). The noted differences in the three countries is that there is a curriculum gap in the Zimbabwean context. As such, if birth to three educare provisions are to be of a high-quality, all the energy has to be exerted towards the development of a suitable and relevant curriculum.

Information presented in this section is indicative of the varied progress levels regarding birth to three educare provisions in Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe seem to be lagging behind on policy development, implementation, and on curriculum issues, aspects that are key in improving quality. The table below shows a summarised version of early childhood development policies and their focal points in Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

**Table 2.1: Summary of early childhood development policies in Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe**

Country	Early Childhood Development Policies	Focal point
Australia	National Early Childhood Investment Strategy-Investing in the Early Years	Children 0-3 years are taken care of in varied childcare services. It aims at providing children with the best start in life. It has six key areas regarding children 0-3 years.
	National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care	The focus is on improving quality of child care services for children birth to five years.
	National Early Learning Framework	A curriculum framework that provide guidelines to ECEC services.
	The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NIELDS) FOR Children Birth to Four years	A curriculum based policy framework Provide guidelines on the learning and development needs of children birth to four years.
	South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early	Advocate for the harmonious working together of government

<b>South Africa</b>	Childhood Development – Moving Ahead 2013/14-2016/17	departments and other key stakeholders.
	The National Curriculum Framework for birth to Four 2014	A curriculum framework that provides guidelines for all programmes that cater for children birth to four years.
	The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy	Covers the period from conception to seven years. The policy seeks to have a multi sectoral approach to ECD services.
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	Secretary’s Circular 14 of 2004	Establishment and promotion of ECD. Advocated for the attachment of classes for 4-5 year olds at existing primary schools.
	Director’s Circular 12 of 2005	Provide guidelines on a two phased approach to ECD provisions in primary schools for 3-5 year olds.
	Statutory Instrument 106 Of 2005	Provide early childhood development centre regulations. Specifies three years as the age of attendance.
	Director’s Circular No. 48 of 2007	Provides guidelines on the implementation of ECD programmes in schools and centres. Specifies that children below the age of three should be enrolled in drop-in centres.

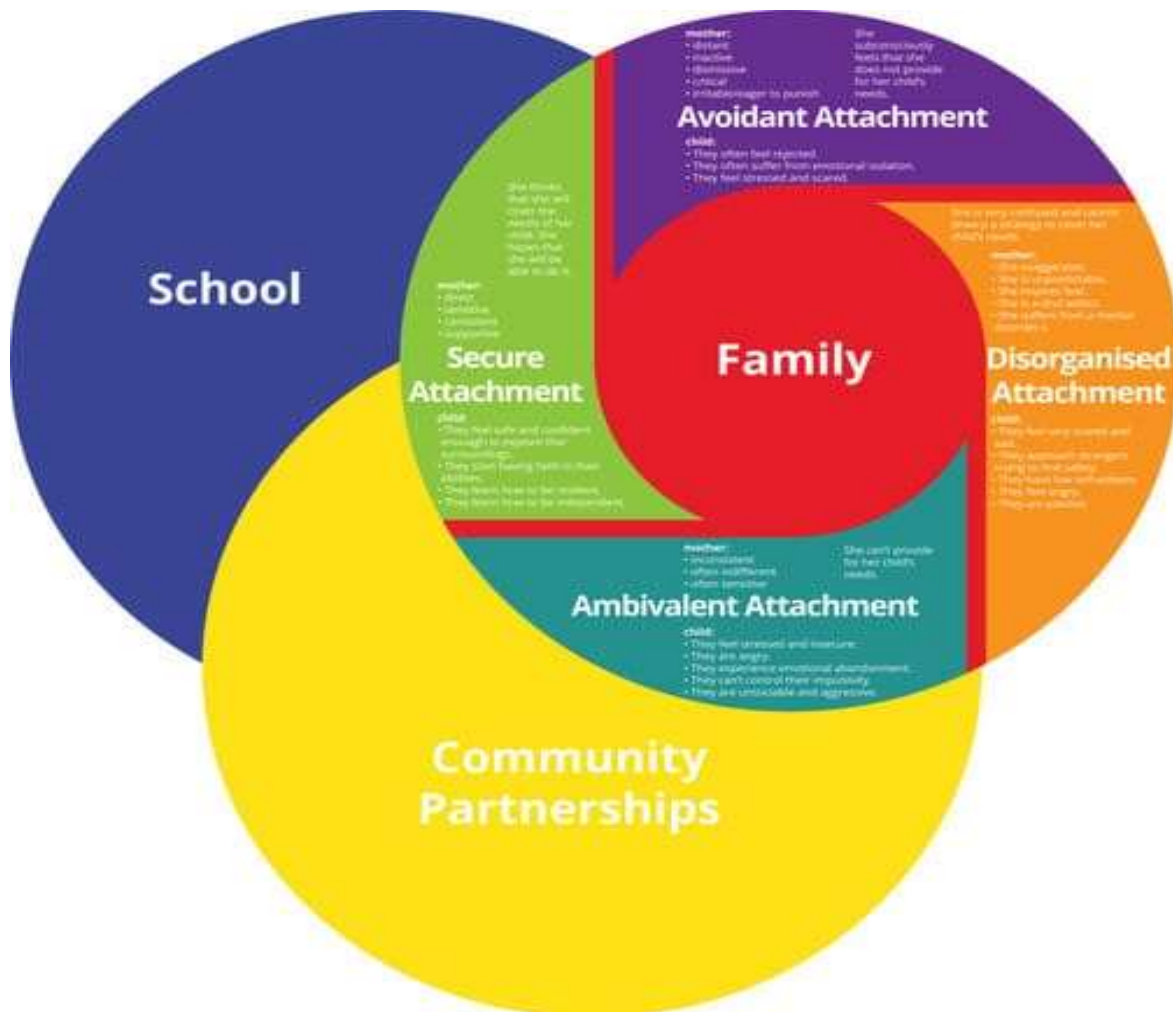
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Secretary's Circular Number 2 of 2017</b></li></ul>	The policy provided guidelines on the implementation of a new curriculum from 2015-2022.
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The presentation on policy guidelines from Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe sought to highlight similarities and differences regarding early years programmes in these countries.

### **2.3 Theoretical framework**

Many countries the world over are beginning to take educare provisions seriously, hence the attachment theory and the School-Family-Community Partnership model become relevant to this study. Whether children are at home or in educare settings, they will have to form attachments, of course the critical aspect is the quality of caregiving practices available. The study focused on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe adopted the attachment theory of Bowlby (1901-1990) and the School-Family-Community Partnership model of Epstein. These were theoretical lenses through which issues on current ECD policies were perceived and analysed with regards to educare provisions.

**Figure 2.1: A diagrammatical representation of the theoretical framework**



***Birth to Three Children’s attachment patterns; Home, School and community interactions and Development support systems (Ideas adopted from Bowlby’s Theory of Attachment & Epstein’s Theory of Parental Involvement)***

The diagrammatical representation of the theoretical framework has the family as the focal point. The attachment theory and the School-Family-Community Partnership model have significant contributions to young children’s development. From the model, the blue colour represents the school (educare settings) whilst the yellow colour represents Epstein’s School-Family-Community Partnership model. Bowlby’s attachment theory has four colours, each representing the four types of attachment patterns that can be developed by children with their parents or caregivers. The red circle depicts the family as the point at which the model, theory and school converge. What happens in each of these circles has an influence on the family and ultimately

the child. The theories significantly influence the child's development in that attachment is a result of the nature of caregiving practices by the caregivers who happen to be key in both theories. Cherry (2016) says the formation of the attachment bond offers comfort, security, and nourishment. This bond can be developed between the child and his or her parents as well as caregivers in the school set up. Kamerman (2000) cited by Degotardi and Pearson (2009) says global trends on early childhood development have prompted many to pay empirical attention to the nature and impact of child care nursery programmes on children's relationship development. The early years play a significant role in the child's socialisation, behaviour and future successes. The theoretical framework relates Bowlby's attachment theory and Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership model because these two have aspects which can lead to positive child development and early learning. For instance, young children need caregivers who are consistent in providing warm and nurturing care, this can be realised through Epstein's parenting. The parents' and district officials' knowledge and beliefs about educate practices are influenced by the larger community. Parents or caregivers should have sensitive relations with children in the home, school or community context if secure attachment of children in any context is to be achieved.

### **2.3.1 Bowlby's attachment theory**

The attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby, a psychologist in the 1950s. Bowlby studied young children's maternal deficiencies, the findings, led him to come up with the attachment theory. He believed that the development of young children depends on the nature of relationships that exist with the caregivers. According to Bowlby (1980, p. 39) "Attachment behaviour has become a characteristic of many species during the course of their evolution because it contributes to the individual's survival by keeping him in touch with his caregiver(s), thereby reducing the risk of his coming to harm, for example from cold, hunger or drowning." Attachment focuses on the relationships between children and their caregivers. Therefore, the caregiver should serve a complimentary function whereby his or her behaviour is towards the protection of the young child. Ward and Brown (2014, p. 237) state that "children who experience sensitive, loving, responsive, attuned, consistent, available and accepting care become securely attached to their caregivers." The anxiety and fear of the

unknown children may have prior to their participation in educare programmes is minimised through caregivers who are loving and caring.

Whether children are at home or in a school environment, the attachment theory is applicable. Shirvanian and Michael (2017) say that, the relationship that is developed between the child and the caregivers is a result of the nature of their interactions. Positive interactions are credited with the development of secure attachment patterns, hence caregivers should strive to achieve that always. This plays a crucial role as the child is helped to regulate their relationships with caregivers. The way the caregiver and the child interact in both settings influences how the child will develop. The use of the attachment theory in this study serves as a basis through which caregivers in educare settings would bench mark their caregiving practices. The attachment theory is key in birth to three educare practices because, through warm and loving care and the responsiveness of caregivers, children can adapt to a new situation. Children have instincts to be closer to a figure where safety and security are guaranteed, thus the caregiver in educare is a figure who can provide this security. Therefore, how the caregivers conduct themselves in educare settings should be within the parameters of the attachment theory.

With the advent of ECD, Yoshikawa and Kabay (2014) say parents with young children, especially those around 18 months and below can have them enrolled in educare centres. In the educare centres, the children should be taken care of by knowledgeable caregivers who will expose them to activities that are appropriate to their developmental levels. Apart from the primary attachment figure in the home setting, once a child is enrolled in a birth to three educare, the caregivers should step in and help the child settle. The relationships that caregivers in birth to three educare settings establish with children under their care should be informed by the attachment theory. Lindon (2012) puts forward that according to Bowlby the development of positive attachment patterns, require the availability of the caregiver and consistency in caregiving practices. Caregivers should know that any disruption of the attachment pattern may put children at emotional risk. Caregivers should, therefore, be physically and emotionally available to continuously offer children their support since this is critical in the development of positive relationships.



Shirvanian and Michael (2017, p. 97) postulate that “Studies show that early child-adult attachment significantly affects a child’s socio-emotional and cognitive development, we propose that establishing attachment-based child care can contribute to a healthy and happy childhood.” Positive relationships that are established early in the child’s life are crucial in developing independent behaviours, interactions with peers and other pro-social behaviours. It is important for educare caregivers to provide quality services, so that the children can establish some positive attachment relationships. The attachment theory helps to provide explanations of how the parent-child or caregiver-child relationship exerts an influence on the child’s development in educare settings. Positive attachment relationships that can be developed between children and their caregivers enhance their adaptation in educare.

In the African perspective, even though the biological mother is the primary caregiver, the child, from a very tender age is exposed to other members of the family, be it maternal or parternal grandparents or other adult members of the extended family. Seymour (2013) says, the kinship groups and communities play a major role in providing child care. Thus, the child is exposed to multiple caregivers and this relates well with Bowlby’s view that children come into the world biologically preprogrammed to form attachments. The attachment theory becomes handy in educare settings because the experiences of children during the first three years influence their development. It is therefore of paramount importance for educare caregivers to provide high-quality care since the development of positive attachment during this phase is of utmost importance in the future. In this regard, the participation of children in educare, can benefit them immensely.

### **2.3.1.1 Attachment styles**

There are basically two types of attachment styles that can be developed depending on the nature of caregiving provided. According to Honari and Saremi (2015,p.153), “Attachment styles can be secure or insecure.” The two are secure attachments and insecure attachments. There are basically three types of insecure attachment patterns, these are resistant/ambivalent, avoidant and disorganised. A brief presentation of each pattern is given below:



- **Secure attachment**

Positive interactions and responses between the caregiver and the child usually result in the development of secure attachments. Shirvanian and Michael (2017, p. 122) forward that “the primary caregiving model helps children to be engaged in special relationships with a key person who understands their needs”. Secure attachment thus develops in environments where there are warm, friendly and responsive caregivers. Educare caregivers have to provide warm and loving relationships to help children develop secure attachments that ultimately promote their development (State of Victoria: Department of Education and Training, 2016). Children in educare settings require caregivers who are loving and caring, thus making the attachment theory relevant in this study. Caregivers in educare settings should be sensitive to the needs and interests of children as this is vital in their development of secure attachment.

- **Insecure attachment - resistant/ambivalent**

It would be unfortunate for children in educare settings to end up developing insecure attachments. There are, however, conditions which may lead to this. For instance, if the interactions between the caregiver and the child lack consistency, the child is likely to be insecurely attached. According to Newman (2017, p. 2), “when children fail to develop positive attachments to their parents or caregivers during infancy, children often suffer in their socio-emotional growth.” Children who develop this generally lack confidence and self-esteem. They are anxious and find it difficult to let go of the caregiver. In educare settings, such children would not freely explore the environment for fear of losing the caregiver. Through the unravelling of parents and district officials’ narratives on educare provisions in Zimbabwe, strategies for minimising insecure attachment development could be shared and ultimately employed.

- **Insecure attachment – avoidant**

Children who exhibit this type of attachment do not care much for the primary caregiver’s presence or absence as they can be easily comforted by other caregivers. Insecure attachment-avoidant, normally is a result of inconsistent caregiving practices. The probability of children with avoidance type attachment exhibiting aggressive behaviours in life are very high (Newman, 2017). Thus, in educare practices, it could

be due to high staff turnover, and this should be avoided at all costs. To minimise the development of insecure-avoidant attachment, caregivers in educare settings should aim at providing quality care practices. It is also important to have a low caregiver child ratio, since this makes supervision and monitoring of children easy. According to Geddes (2018, p. 18) “The caregiver needs a form of response that reflects awareness and support that can contribute to more positive experiences for the child.” It also increases the chances for more positive interactions between the child and the caregiver. Positive interactions between the child and the caregiver can increase the chances of minimising insecure-avoidant attachment patterns developing in children. Therefore, inconsistent caregiving practices should be avoided or minimised at all cost since they have life-long repercussions.

- **Insecure attachment – disorganised**

Again, inconsistent caregiving practices may result in a child exhibiting disorganised behaviour patterns. Generally, these children are not predictable at all as sometimes they cannot be easily comforted when stressed and they show traits of fear and confusion with the caregiver. According to Rholes, Paetzold, and Kohn (2016), insecure attachment-avoidant is a result of inconsistent caregiving from the caregivers. The development of this type of attachment in educare settings is not encouraged, hence caregivers have to improve on their caregiving practices.

### **2.3.2 Epstein’s school-family-community partnership model**

Epstein developed a theory that explains the relationship between parents and the school. This relationship can be influenced by the history or development of children as well as the changing experiences of the school, the child and the parents (Epstein, 2011). The model views the relationships of schools, families and communities as one of overlapping spheres of influence. The concerns of all the spheres is the child’s welfare. Their focus will be on helping the child realise his or her full potential later in life. There are particular spheres that may or may not overlap depending on different forces that may bring the spheres together or pull the spheres apart (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn and Van Voorhis, 2002). The overlapping of spheres play crucial roles in helping stakeholders understand the relationship between the home, school and the community as well as their influence on learning and development.

Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) reported that family engagement and community partnerships do not only increase children's performance, but also change a child's attitude towards school. The attitudinal changes could be either positive or negative depending on the nature of the forces available. Epstein (2011) says the child is central to these spheres as we can assume that the reason for interaction amongst these spheres would be the child. The family becomes more involved in the education and care of the children during the early years, before they attend school. For instance communication can be improved. Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein and Lloyd (2013) state that early learning experiences at home may be initiated by informed parents and/or may be guided by preschool teachers. It is also important for the home and the educare or school authorities to collaborate and work together. The model of overlapping spheres applies to this narrative research regarding the birth to three-year-olds' educare, since the school, the family and the community all have significant roles to play in the growth and development of young children.

Parents, families and communities get involved in early childhood development services in different ways. The School-Family-Community-Partnership model, is relevant to this study because what happens in the home environment has an influence at school and sometimes in the community. The nature of parental involvement in educare settings, will reflect the attitudes of the larger community. Active participation of parents in educare, can be the bridge between the home and the educare environment. In the African context, "it takes a village to raise a child". The whole community, play a significant role in nurturing and educating children directly or indirectly. Epstein (2001) avers that the development of partnerships between the school, family and community can significantly improve the school climate, parental skills among other things. Educare settings, thus becomes part and parcel of the larger community, hence it has a responsibility to mold and support children. For instance, parental education and support sessions can be provided through educare settings and this can as well influence the whole community on issues such as attachment, involvement in their children's education or other developmental projects. The school-family-community partnership model identified six types of involvement, which I hope will help improve educare in Zimbabwe. These are of utmost importance because they help bridge the gap between the home and the school

environment, which obviously benefits the child. The six types of involvement are discussed below;

### **2.3.2.1 Parenting**

In the framework that was developed by Epstein, parenting has been identified as key to the first type of involvement. “Parental involvement in the education of young children begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school” (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017, p. 140). This entails the level of engagement that parents and their children partake in various activities. The life of children in the home environment during their first years has an impact on their overall development later in life. Parenting involves sharing of information and resources, and it is important in strengthening parental involvement and increasing participation which has influence on child development (Epstein, 2013). Parenting could mean actively interacting with the child through games, getting engaged in pre-reading activities, colouring and matching activities, among other things. This instils confidence in the child and will help the child reach his/her potential.

### **2.3.2.2 Communicating**

There should be a harmonious relationship between the family, the school and the community. One important aspect is that there has to be a two-way communication system, which benefits both parties. Parents and teachers should work together. Their efforts to support the child will ultimately result in the achievement of positive changes in behaviour and sometimes performance (Newchurch, 2017). Communication between the parents and the teachers is crucial in the development of the child. Parents and teachers should share information on each child, and it could be about health, allergies, or the child’s background. The process could be through conferencing, school or home visits and newsletters among other forms of communicating. Epstein (2013) believes that constant communication with parents and keeping them abreast with policies influences attendance by learners. It is quite significant for parents to be in tune with the activities that take place in their children’s educare programmes. Communication is critical in creating and maintaining relationships which can be fully utilised in the home and in the centre environment.

### **2.3.2.3 Volunteering**

This is an important part that parents need to play in the early childhood development sector. Volunteering allows the parents and the caregivers to connect with each other, the family and the community at large. Volunteering means one is striving to make the educare services for birth to three much better in different dimensions. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) believe that parental involvement may result in some volunteering to use their skills and competencies to help the school and teachers in various capacities. For example, some may use their marketing skills and volunteer to fundraise for the school. Attending school programmes like consultations, prize giving or meetings is another way in which parents get involved and this is crucial in establishing a strong bond between the home and the school. Through volunteering, there are benefits that come along for both, for instance, the school or educare centre can save resources and children develop better communication skills with adults or other children of their age. The parents can gain some knowledge of child development issues and they may also understand the teacher's job better.

### **2.3.2.4 Learning at home**

In the home environment, the nature of experiences that a child is exposed to have a great effect on his/her attitude towards school during the early years. A home environment that is safe, healthy and nurturing is what the child requires if he/she is going to be successful in school. Scotland Learning and Teaching (2010) says that working with young children is a task that parents need to embrace. The involvement of parents is essential since they will become aware of the significant influence early experiences and life circumstances can have on future outcomes of their children. According to Epstein (2001) parents' participation in children's education is of paramount importance because they will have a view of what happens in the school and classrooms, something that will enable them to assist their children at home. Through learning at home children develop good communication skills and positive attitudes and exhibit good behaviours. Home activities are a window through which the family can have a glimpse of what the child is going through in school or educare settings.

### **2.3.2.5 Decision making**

Parents are key stakeholders in the early childhood development sector. As such, they have a role to play in making decisions that concern educare participation by their child. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) add that parental organisations are quite significant in school governance and are crucial in decision making. Likewise, in the Zimbabwean context, a parental body (The School Development Committee) participate in every decision that a school or an early childhood development centre makes. Decision making includes issues to do with infrastructural development, levies to be paid or the purchase of movable properties like vehicles. Benefits that come along with decision making are many, some of which include a wide consultation which results in a shared decision and brings about a sense of ownership.

### **2.3.2.6 Collaborating with the community**

There are more benefits to birth to three educare policy and practice if collaboration with the community is taken seriously and embraced. According to the Center on Innovations in Learning, (2019), collaborating with the community involves identifying glaring gaps and sourcing resources together. The efforts of parents and school authorities can greatly benefit the child. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017, p. 142) suggest that collaboration will see the community as a source of “rich information for children and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programmes/services, information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programmes for students.” Collaboration in early childhood services is relevant in that stakeholders can work together as partners towards the success of a programme. This is important since parents, teachers and the community at large can have a shared vision on the expected outcomes and how they can be achieved. Collaboration can also increase the participation and support from all stakeholders. The participants in this research study; parents and district education officials, represented two different overlapping spheres and this makes Epstein’s model relevant. Their diverse views on educare may go a long way in the development of the programme.

## **2.4 Attachment and the first three years of educare**

The way in which the caregiver and the child interact is important in building trust and confidence in the child if there are positive responses always. Attachment focuses on the relationship of the child and his or her caregivers. The narratives of parents regarding the attachment theory during the first three years are critical in building positive relationships that will go a long way in enhancing holistic development of the child. The attachment theory sees the child as having instincts to be closer to a figure where he or she is secure. In this research, the parent and the caregiver are figures who could provide this security. As such, how parents regard educare during the first three years is of paramount importance to the programme and the child. The views of parents regarding attachment include the importance of attachment, building support systems, factors that may affect attachment and so on.

### **2.4.1 Importance of attachment**

It is imperative that parents and other caregivers deeply understand the importance of attachments formulated with the young children. In everything that they do regarding attachment, they should strive to build strong and secure attachments as these have positive impacts on young children. Young children from birth to three years heavily rely on their caregivers for all of their upkeep. This is a solid platform from which strong attachments are formed. Attachment is very critical in the development of young children because it determines how they will behave and interact with others in the future.

Bowlby (1988, p. 121) cited by Meggitt et al. (2016) suggests that the framework for attachment is the coordination of care seeking and care giving. The development of self-esteem, confidence, and independence in young children is attributed to the nature of their attachment in the early years. The ability of parents and caregivers to observe, understand and promptly respond the needs and interests of children greatly influence attachment relationships and their quality (Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, 2007-2019). Attachment is said to roughly begin developing at around six months, and increasing between 12 and 24 months. At 36 months attachment is expected to subside since the child would have developed some sense of independence from the caregiver, albeit for some time though. This makes parents



regard attachment issues highly because that is going to have long term effects on the child's development into adulthood.

The quality of the child's first attachment has greater impact than all following relationships. Parents are of the view that successful educare provisions for birth to three will greatly depend on the nature of attachment that the child has from home. Li et al. (2017) stress the importance of quality educare programmes for young children during the first three years. Evidence is now available regarding benefits of the experiences young children are exposed to early in their life. Children with secure attachments will benefit more from educare provisions as they would have a good understanding of themselves and can make interactions easily, all this leading them to freely explore their environment. Parents view viable early childhood development programmes as key to helping children develop competence skills which they will build on in later life. The Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development (2007-2019) states that the parent-child relationship has a bearing on attachment development. The relationship has to be of a high-quality if secure attachment is to be promoted. A comprehensive early childhood development programme that embraces educare should take into consideration attachment issues as they impact on the successes of the programme. Important factors such as the duration of the programme and the age of the learners and the content should be focused on in educare policy and practice.

#### **2.4.2 Caregivers' role regarding attachment in educare**

Educare is considered an essential part of young children's life, hence the caregiver is an important stakeholder. The development of children hinges on the nature of the experiences they will have with the caregivers. The caregiver plays a significant role in the development of attachment in educare settings.

##### **2.4.2.1 Nurturant**

One of the roles of a caregiver with regards to attachment is to be a nurturant caregiver. Children who engage in birth to three educare provisions are young and fragile, and hence they need caregivers who can professionally provide them with high quality care. A nurturant caregiver is ideal in educare settings because he or she can address the multiple needs of children. For instance, these children require love, food



and protection among other needs. Through the correct application of nurturance, young children are guaranteed survival and wellness (O'Neil, Danvers, and Shiota, 2018). In this regard, the duty of the caregiver is to be sensitive and responsive to the children's needs. Nurturant caregiving practices include the establishment of routines in educare settings. By nature, birth to three years children depend on their caregivers in as far as the establishment of schedules is concerned.

In educare settings, it is vital for caregivers to maintain specific times for toilet routine, feeding, playing and sleeping. Feinberg and Wehling (2018) state that a nurturant caregiver believes that children should be independent and take care of themselves albeit with close monitoring. The caregiver should not pamper the child, rather should provide a conducive environment where the child's needs are met and this will see the child blossoming and develop well. The Australian Government: Department of Education and Training (2018, p. 12) states that caregivers "who give priority to nurturing relationships and providing children with consistent emotional support can assist children to develop the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with others." Therefore, educare requires nurturant caregivers, who can consistently take good care of the children in their custody.

#### **2.4.2.2 Safety provision**

Environments for young children should be safe and secure. It is the duty of the caregiver to provide safety to all the children under his or her care in educare environments. Laughlin (2013) families who are gainfully employed require effective and safe programmes for their young children, hence educare provision becomes a necessity. Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of educare is that young children require environments that are safe as well as providing them with opportunities where they will actively use their multiple senses (Ministry of Women and Child Development:India, 2014). Under whatever circumstances, young children in educare settings should be protected from any form of harm since this may negatively affect their development. Portugal and Luis (2016, p. 174), states that "Children who experience well-being, strong feelings of security and of belonging have the best conditions for exploring, initiating interactions and learning." Quality birth to three educare thus has to consistently maintain high health and safety standards. The

caregiver should make sure that materials and equipment provided for use by children in birth to three categories are relevant and age appropriate.

The caregiver should be the first person to explore all the environs before children get engaged in it. He or she is responsible for checking all available equipment for any defects so as to avert any dangers. The participation of children in a safe and high-quality educare programme is of great benefit to the child in terms of attachment development with multiple caregivers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Centers with a low child-caregiver ratio and a consistent staff complement can greatly benefit the children's development of attachment relationships. A caregiver who is caring and diligently plays effective caregiving roles helps children to develop attachment bonds with him or her. The amount of concern that he or she has about the children will draw them closer to the caregiver. "Providing a good quality service for young children is hugely important for their wellbeing, learning and development; not only while they attend the service, but for the rest of their lives" (Tusla, 2018, p. 11).

#### **2.4.2.3 Responsiveness**

Another role of a caregiver with regards to promotion of attachment is to be responsive to the children's needs timeously. An effective caregiver promptly responds to the varied signals given by young children under their care. The quality of the experiences children encounter during their early years affect their attachment development in either way. The prompt responsiveness of the caregiver is key in building positive attachment relationships. An educare caregiver who provides warm and responsive interactions with children helps them to develop secure attachment relationships. The development of such relationships takes cognisance of the caregiver's responsiveness. Educare Model Framework Description (2014, p. 1) states that "young children who experience the world as predictable and supportive develop strong emotional foundations essential for learning." The caregiver's responsiveness lays the foundation for emotional development, communication and other key aspects of development. Timely responsivenesses of the caregiver are key in the attachment process. Therefore, caregivers and other staff who work in educare settings require training that will enable them to effectively do their work (Geddes, 2018). They should be able to promote quality educare through being consistent in their caregiving.

### **2.4.3 Factors that may affect attachment**

The quality of attachments formed between parents, caregivers and young children can be affected by a number of factors. They are inclusive parenting style, sensitivity, parental involvement and others.

#### **2.4.3.1 Parenting style**

The parent is the child's primary caregiver, whom s/he spends much of her time with. The quality of attachment to be formed rests greatly on the parenting style of the parents. In this regard, parenting style is one of the major factors that impact on attachment positively or negatively. Beith, Bulman, Forbes, Griffin and Tassoni (2010) suggest that children's ability to take responsibility and rationalise their behaviour is a result of parenting style. It has an influence on how young children are going to relate with others in and around their environment. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development (2007-2019) presents that development of parenting skills and social support increases the amount of time parents can spend with their children. Authoritative parents have been seen to be restrictive and demanding; however, at the same time they communicate and give their children a warm reception. Children who grew up in this parenting style tend to be independent, have a high self-esteem and generally are exploratory in nature. If positive and successful attachments are to be realised, the caregiver should be consistently available. Young children's needs and interests can only be addressed through the sensitivity and responsiveness nature of their caregivers.

Parents who do their best for their children most likely have strong attachments which may aid their growth and development. Insecure attachment can be realised from an authoritarian parenting style because of its characteristics which include too much controlling, less friendly and sometimes hostility. Children in this kind of parenting usually feel isolated, hence they may possibly not have stable interpersonal relationships. The views of parents on parenting styles enhances their understanding of attachment during the first three years. According to the State of Victoria: Department of Education and Training (2016, p. 11), "from birth, warm and respectful relationships with familiar adults build and strengthen secure attachments that are fundamental to children's learning and development". The narratives of parents and

district education officials regarding the attachment theory helps them to share information, knowledge and insights about their own skills and competencies in managing their interactions and relationships with young children. This is critical since they are helped to better understand their roles and the nature of support they can render to their children for optimum growth and development.

#### **2.4.3.2 Sensitivity**

Parental sensitivity is regarded as an indispensable factor when taking care of young children. Being sensitive refers to the awareness levels a parent or caregiver show when a child exhibits certain cues, such as crying, smiling or gesturing. Secure attachments are the result of adequate, consistent and timely responses of the parent or caregiver that are in tune with the child. Mountain, Cahill and Thorpe (2017) say securely attached infants and toddlers have parents who are sensitive to their needs. Such children are more cooperative and predictable throughout the process of caregiving. Parents and caregivers who are regarded as being sensitive to the cues of their children significantly aid the development of their socio-emotional skills. Consistency on the nature of care that is provided to a child is important as it boosts the child's security and impacts positively on his/her development.

Young children need adults who engage with them sensitively. Relationships that are nurturing play enormous roles in the realisation of secure attachments and positive outcomes in children. Secure relationships developed during the first three years play crucial roles in nurturing children's development positively (State of Victoria: Department of Education and Training, 2016). The nature and quality of parents and their children's close relationship plays a central role in the child's development. However, if interactions are not consistent, inappropriate, and negative, they lead to the development of insecure attachments. Children who are insecure do not get along well with their parents or caregivers as they sometimes ignore responses directed towards them from their caregivers. The views of parents regarding attachment, calls for sensitivity from the caregivers so that they strive to promote secure attachment in birth to three-year-olds as this brings about positive growth and development of the children as compared to insecure attachments.

### 2.4.3.3 Caregiver-child ratio

Attachment in birth to three educare settings can be impacted upon by the caregiver-child ratio. Significant and meaningful interactions between the child and the caregiver are only possible in situations where the ratio is low. Ainsworth (1979) cited in Warner, McCall, Groark, Kim, Muhamedrahimov, Palmo and Nikiforova (2017) says that a high caregiver-child ratio, compounded by multiple changes, poses challenges to children's interactions and this negatively affects their attachment. Due to high numbers, children obviously do not experience fruitful interactions with their caregivers. Tusla (2018) states that, without clear policies, educare settings will still have high numbers, which affect good quality provision. The caregivers will not be able to provide care to a large number of children, thus opportunities to form trusting relationships with educare caregivers are very limited. The lack of stable and consistent interactive relationships between birth to three educare children due to high numbers in settings greatly impact on attachment development.

Caregiver-child ratio is a challenge that is prevalent in early childhood development and it negatively impact on attachment development. "In Nigeria, the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 with a helper/an assistant stated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004). For the pre-primary class this is likely to be a problem in the sense that the developmental characteristics and the needs of the pre-scholars have not been considered" (Ibhaze, 2016). According to the Good Planet Foundation (2013) early childhood development classrooms in Nigeria are usually crowded, some, have as many as 130 children especially in the North. Research conducted by Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) in Zimbabwe found out that generally there is over-crowding in classrooms. This brings about a disproportionate ratio which ultimately impact on the quality of service provided. Due to a ballooned teacher-child ratio, it means individual attention will be negatively impacted on since the teacher will have a huge number to attend to. This is despite Zimbabwe having a specified teacher-pupil ratio of 1-20 for 3-5 year olds (The government of Zimbabwe, 2005). These numbers bear testimony that it would be difficult for children to develop secure attachment patterns when the caregivers are overwhelmed by the children under their care.

The International Labour Organisation (2012) states that a low caregiver-child ratio is one of the important factors in a quality educare programme. For ages birth to three

Litjens and Taguma (2010) cited in OECD (2011, p. 3) stated that there is no specific caregiver-child ratio; however, many believe that anything between a 1:3 or 1:4 ratio for infants and toddlers “is sufficient to allow staff to interact effectively with each child”. A lower ratio is key in providing adequate opportunities for interactions and this is crucial in the development of attachment. Sooter (2013) says that service providers do not adhere to policy provisions for example the ratio of 1:7 is hard to come by in most ECD settings. The lack of supervision and monitoring by the responsible personnel contributed to this and it effectively lower the quality levels. Sooter (2013) went on to highlight that the businessmen or women who dominated the sector do not employ enough staff so as to lower the ratio. To them, it would not be beneficial hence, their enrolments are determined by the availability of children. Zimbabwean policies are silent concerning the ratio of birth to three years and obviously this impacts on provisions and attachment development. Since there are different factors that have a bearing on educare, it is therefore important stakeholders to work together if a quality programme is to be realised.

## **2.5 Overlapping relationships and educare**

Parental involvement in early childhood development settings has significant impact on the programme and the child. Loomans (2014) says an overwhelming number of studies show that parental involvement has some positive academic outcomes. The overlapping spheres that exist between the parents, family, school and community influences these outcomes (Epstein , 2001). The first three years in the life of a young child are critical because basically this is when all critical developments take place. According to the Australian Government: Department of Education and Training (2018, p. 10), “Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children’s learning.” The overlapping relationships between educare centres and the home are of utmost importance to both parties since they benefit from each other. This collaboration between the parents, community and the school are an important aspect that can positively impact on the child’s development.

### **2.5.1 Significance of overlapping relationships in educare**

Overlapping relationships during the first three years of educare support children to reach their full developmental potential. When parents actively take part during the

early childhood development years, their children's development most likely takes a positive trajectory path. Through overlapping relationships, the participation of parents is key since they will be able to engage their children in meaningful ways that can enhance their development. According to research on teacher and parental influence on childhood learning outcomes by Benjamin (2015), parents who took part in their children's programmes were in a better position to establish connections between the home and the school environments. Thus, they will be able to bridge the gap that may exist between the home and the school in terms of the experiences that children encounter on a daily basis. According to Pennells (2018, p. 45), "Bringing together the voices of teachers and parents suggests a greater shared understanding of the purpose of communications is central to improving the effectiveness of two-way exchanges." It is important for parents to be aware of what children will be exposed to in the educare settings. This enables them to extend that into the home environment. The establishment of strong relationships between educare parents and practitioners is therefore crucial. Through this, knowledge that can enhance children's development can be shared and embraced.

Effective overlapping relationships have been found to improve communication levels of the home and the school. The Ministry of Women and Child Development:India (2014, p. 40) states that "joint ventures between parents and early childhood education and care settings are key in developing and maintaining harmonious relationships and can lead to healthy initiatives which will go a long way towards improving educare practices." Through communication, parents and teachers can develop stronger relationships that would be critical in enhancing and supporting child development in all facets. Strong partnerships and effective communication can be crucial in birth educare in the Zimbabwean context. Through effective communication, trust with each other is developed and this encourages both to focus their attention on the child's development and progress.

Parents and school authorities should consistently work together, this has greater benefits to both. Establishment of relationships between school and the home during the first three years is of paramount importance. Holistic development is the aim of all programmes for young children. The early years thus play an important role in laying a solid foundation which the child can utilise in later years and in life. To this end, the



relationship between parents and the school should be promoted as this has greater benefits to both parties. Garcia and Thornton (2014, p. 1) say “Current research shows that the involvement of family in learning helps to improve student performance, reduce absenteeism and restore parents' confidence in their children's education.” If the child's full potential is to be realised, support should be coming from the parents and the educare respectively. The State of Victoria:Department of Education and Training (2016, p. 9) says, “Early childhood professionals work in partnership with all families within communities to build links between home and other settings a child attend.” The overlapping spheres can help guide, inform and support all adults who work with children in educare settings. School-parent relationships help to create a harmonious working relationship that is full of positive experiences for the child since teaching and learning are extended outside the school premises.

Shirvanian and Michael (2017) highlighted that it is quite significant for parents to get in tune with activities their children are exposed to educare programmes. This is critical in creating and maintaining relationships which can be fully utilised in the home and in the centre environment. The connection of home and the ECD centre or school is relevant as it helps to support and further learning which ultimately benefit the child. According to Lin, Sulaimani and Henning (2020,p.162), “parents are infants' first teacher and continue to play an active role in their education and lives.” The parental support children get during the early years has great effect on the child's development and achievement in life. It is therefore wise for a parent to have knowledge and an understanding of educare provisions because he or she will better understand child development issues which helps guide them in nurturing or improving the competencies of language, numeracy and communication skills in young children. Collaboration between home and school can lead to better performance and socially accepted behaviour in children. The overlapping relationship between school and home during the first three years is key in promoting proactive connections between parents and teachers. Some positive effects of the overlapping spheres usually result in increased developmental skills and progress in the young children.

### **2.5.2 Factors that influence overlapping relationships between home-school**

There are many factors that can be at play with regards to home-school relationships. The participation of parents in educare issues is quite beneficial to the parent as well



as the school or ECD centre. The following are some of the factors that can influence home-school relationships.

### **2.5.2.1 Parents' aspirations**

Every family has high hopes for its young members and they aspire to provide them with the best footing early in life. Parents make choices for their children's early education and this is impacted upon by a number of factors. Parents aspire for their children to receive quality care during the early childhood development years. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) agree that children whose parents have high aspirations do not tire easily, a lot of effort to ensure that the child succeeds is exerted consistently. Parents would want their children to be highly educated as this is an indicator to a bright future with better employment chances and better packages. Having high aspirations for their children is the reason parents will make a lot of effort to shape their children's future.

Vryninides and Gouvias (2012, p. 319) state that "Parents' aspirations about their children's future prospects are of great importance as these prospects can potentially influence directly and, indirectly more importantly, indirectly the way parents get involved with their children's schooling at various levels and several instances." In addition, Magwa and Mugari (2017, p. 77) put forward that "Parents who are well educated communicate high academic aspirations for their children." The participation of a child in birth to three educare rests on the convictions of the parents. Knowledgeable parents, who are aware of the benefits of birth to three educare, will strive to have their children participate in the programme. A parent who has high aspirations for his or her child will not hesitate to have his or child in educare because that is where a solid foundation for future developments can be laid.

### **2.5.2.2 Socio-economic status**

The socio-economic status of a family is another determinant of parental involvement in the education of their young ones. Socio-economic status has high implications on the level of parental involvement. For instance, parents from a high socio-economic status have more opportunities to be involved because they have things like financial resources, high self-esteem and confidence. Chen, Kong, Gao and Mo (2018) forward

that a general belief is that socio-economic status of parents relates well with children's academic prowess and cognitive development. Notably, Eshetu (2015, p. 249) affirms that "Parents with high socio-economic status often have more success in preparing their young children for school because they typically have access to a wide range of resources." In addition, Magwa and Mugari (2017, p.78) in their study found that "Parents who belong to high socio-economic backgrounds are more involved in their children's work because they can provide for learning materials as compared to parents from low economic status." The parents have the potential to provide enough and relevant resources as well as making frantic efforts to support their children with all the necessities that can help them acclimatize to the school environment and be successful in life.

On the other hand, parents with a low socio-economic status participate less because most of them will be struggling with their own life. Donoghue (2014) propounds that the participation of less affluent families in the education of their children is not that effective. They have a greater probability of having no job or a low income which makes them struggle to feed their families, pay tuition, provide decent clothing and accommodation for their families. Due to low educational qualifications, the chances are these parents may not have a stable job, hence they hop from one contract or piece job to another. This makes it difficult for them to have the confidence and time to be involved with the school or educare settings.

### **2.5.2.3 Educational background**

The educational background of some parents is another factor that impact on their involvement in school matters. Parents with better educational qualifications play a more significant role when it comes to their children's life in the home and at school than those with limited qualifications. As fate would be, obviously those with higher qualifications have stable jobs that are usually well paying. According to Eshetu (2015), educated parents can provide resources as well as motivate their children to overcome hurdles in their educational journey. They are basically the role models of their children and would want their children to follow in their footsteps. They are also better placed than their counterparts in terms of educational material resources provision, something that gives them an advantage in parental involvement. Jafarov (2015, p. 39) states that parents with a poor educational background cannot fully get

involved in the education of their children because their knowledge is limited. These parents may fail to exercise their right to equally participate as partners in the education of their children as some lack confidence, thereby fearing to be involved. They usually lack confidence and feel inferior to teachers and their better off counterparts, something which hinders their participation in school matters.

The family is one of the key pillars and the support it renders to its children help them to effectively develop in all facets. As such, the participation of parents in educare programmes for birth to three children has been found to be influenced by their educational background. The educational level of parents is widely considered as one of the many factors that can influence effective participation in early childhood development programmes. According to Jafarov (2015, p. 38), parents with a higher level of education have a higher probability of participating in programmes where their children are enrolled. The participation is attributed to their level of understanding of the benefits of supporting their children. Li. and Qiu (2018) assert that parents with a relatively high educational level dream of their children surpassing them. As such they always hope to secure high quality opportunities for their children's education as well. They happen to be more supportive of their children's early years through actively participating in the activities of the centres and schools where their children will be enrolled.

Studies have also shown that parents with a low education level participate in early childhood development programmes where their children will be enrolled. In a research study done in Zimbabwe, Magwa and Mugari (2017) found out that parents with a low education level face challenges in helping their children with school work (Magwa and Mugari, 2017). Consequently, Magwa and Mugari (2017, p. 77) further found that parents with a low education level, "even when they attend some school activities, they are hesitant to take part in decision making because they feel they have nothing valuable to offer". The obvious lack of confidence such parents exhibit eventually results in them becoming less involved in their children's educational journey.

### **2.5.3 Barriers to overlapping relationships between home and school**

Effective relationships between home and school can be hindered by a number of barriers. Relationships between the home and the school are not smooth sailing; there are challenges associated with them. There are a number of barriers that can hinder effective involvement by parents and teachers in educare practices. It is therefore imperative to recognise some of the obstacles that negatively impact on parental participation in early childhood development services. The following are some of the barriers: attitude, educational background, resources-based/logistical barriers and institutional barriers.

#### **2.5.3.1 Attitudinal barriers**

Attitude is one of the most common obstacles to effective parental engagement in early childhood development. Available evidence shows that one factor that inhibits parental involvement is attitude. According to Lin et al. (2020) state that attitude is a barrier to effective involvement of parents at any level. Some parents do not even see why and how they should get involved. This entails that such parents see no significance of their involvement. Some do not just care about their children's welfare in the educational settings they are enrolled. On the same note, some teachers or educare centre staff also have attitudinal issues; some are not comfortable to work with parents. In some setting, parents are regarded as problematic and less knowledgeable, and hence cannot be effectively be involved. They may feel that the family has got nothing to do with school work, yet it is important.

#### **2.5.3.2 Resources-based barriers**

The availability of resources has an impact on the child's success in school work. It is unfortunate, however, that in some instances lack of resources is a barrier to effective parental involvement. A successful and quality educare programme requires a lot of resources like financial resources, transport and infrastructure. Results findings of a study by Chiparange and Saruchera (2016) in Mutare Urban pre-schools found out that some of the greatest challenges in the ECD sector is infrastructure, shortage of space and play equipment. Parents who lack adequate resources develop a feeling of

inadequacy and they rarely communicate with the school, let alone participate in school activities at any given time. Early childhood development services require pre-reading materials, outdoor equipment and indoor play materials. The absence of these material resources impacts negatively on holistic development of children. Baker et al. (2016) put forward that lack of time is a logistical barrier that affects parental involvement. Parents who have non-flexible work schedules barely have time to visit their children's schools or educare centres for a meeting, sports day or an event. Some may find it difficult to be granted permission which makes it difficult to get involved in their children's educare settings or schools.

### **2.5.3.3 Ineffective communication**

Another barrier to overlapping relationships that exist between home and school is ineffective communication of parents and school or educare authorities. The two settings need to consistently communicate with each other on matters concerning the welfare of the child. Magwa and Mugari (2017) say that lack of effective communication can result in parents who are not well versed in the overlapping spheres and how they should work. The parents may not be aware of what the school expects of them and vice-versa. When there is regular communication, relevant and important information about a child can be freely shared. In turn, parents feel appreciated, valued and confident, thereby becoming part and parcel of the schools or educare centre's enlarged family.

## **2.6 Concluding remarks**

The study unravels the narratives of parents and district officials regarding educare provisions in Zimbabwe. Literature reviewed focused on the perceptions of parents and district education officials and educare in Zimbabwe. The perceptions revealed that educare is beneficial to young children in many ways. For instance, there are opportunities for holistic development and brain development, among other benefits. However, despite the benefits of educare, still there are some challenges that negatively impact on provision of it. Of note, is the lack of an approved curriculum for educare provisions and this negatively impacts on practices since things could be done haphazardly.

In this chapter, attachment issues were also looked at and discussed. Attachment is an important aspect during the first three years because children require caregivers who are readily available and able to give quality care consistently. Attachment issues are relevant in this study because they give guidance to service providers on aspects like caregiver-child ratio or staff continuity. Overlapping relationships that may exist between the home and the school environment show that, if birth to three is to be an effective programme, there is need for harmonious relationships to exist and be maintained. The relationships could advantage or disadvantage the child; therefore, two-way communication is key. The effectiveness of birth to three years is very important. The theoretical framework was informed by the attachment theory and the Family-Community Partnership model. Caregiving in educare should be of a high quality, hence the need to have professionally qualified personnel who are knowledgeable of child development issues. On a different note, Epstein's model emphasises parental involvement, a key element of quality educare provisions. Chapter three presents the research methodology.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter three discusses the methodology employed in this qualitative research study. The research sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. In this chapter, the research approach, which is qualitative, is presented. The research design, research activities and the selection of participants are also discussed. The interpretist paradigm which underlines this study is explained in this chapter as well. The chapter also highlights the ethical considerations and trustworthiness among other aspects in the study.

#### **3.2 Research design**

Research design portrays a road map a researcher chooses to follow in the research process. Research design refers to a framework or structure used to provide guidance in the conduct of a research, it gives guidelines on aspects such as data collection methods and instruments (Bryman, 2016; Magwa and Magwa, 2015). Kumar (2014, p. 39) says, “The main function of a research design is to decide, describe, justify and explain how the researcher will find answers to the research questions.” In this research, I used the narrative inquiry research design. According to Kin (2016, p. 32), narrative inquiry “is one of the few human endeavours that is widely spread as a basic aspect of human life and an essential strategy of human expression.” The lived and experienced events of participants are critical in narrative research. As such, my research sought to find out on the lived experiences of parents and district education officials regarding educare in the Zimbabwean context.

Narrative inquiry is an approach that uses stories or events that are connected in a chronological order (Creswell, 2014). It requires the researcher having a good understanding of the participants so they can easily share their experiences freely. The participants in narrative inquiry are required to speak out on their experiences regarding a phenomenon. Wang and Geale (2015, p. 196) state that “In narrative inquiry, the researcher asks questions that will help him or her interpret and experience the world of the participant rather than try to explain or predict that world.” Thus, through narrative inquiry, sufficient information regarding birth to three educare can be

collected from the parents as they respond to the questions asked by the researcher. Narrative inquiry was therefore crucial in assisting me to have a better understanding of birth to three educare policy and practice from the perspective of the parents.

Clandinin et al. (2016) view narrative inquiry as the study of experience. Through narratives, a richer version of the events and experiences can be presented since the participants will be presenting on lived experiences. “Narrative inquiry is a way of knowing and remembering events and processes (in our own personal history) as well as a way of communicating about issues (telling stories about events and processes)” (Flick, 2014, p. 41). Haradhan, (2018) asserts that narrative inquiry is based on people’s stories about themselves or a set of events. The researcher chose the narrative inquiry design because the narratives combine views from the parents and district education officials’ experiences and it can have a great influence on educare practices in Zimbabwe.

### **3.3 Research approach**

According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research is a method used by a researcher to explore a phenomenon. Qualitative research approach help researchers to understand how groups of people or individuals ascribe to problems of different nature. It is an approach that makes it possible for researchers to comprehend and understand the experiences of their participants in their natural contexts. The qualitative approach gives the researcher the opportunity to interact and engage with participants during data collection.

Haradhan (2018) avows that in qualitative research, the interpretation of participants experiences is most critical in order to them. My study resonates well with the ideals of the qualitative research approach on understanding individuals in their natural context. The experiences of parents and district education officials on educare can only be found through their interpretations of the ECD provisions available. Punch and Oancea (2014) view that a major feature of qualitative research is that research is, by and large, naturalistic, preferring to study people, things and events in their natural settings. McLeod (2019) asserts that qualitative research aims at understanding individuals, groups and cultures as its participants feel it or live it. It was suitable and relevant in this study because it was deeply set within the participants’ lives and



provided a deep understanding of how the daily experiences of parents and district education officials can influence educare in Zimbabwe. In this study, I used narrative inquiry as my research design.

### **3.4 Research paradigm**

A research paradigm is defined by Bryman (2016, p. 474) as “a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, (and) how results should be interpreted”. The philosophical orientation of a research is what a paradigm entails. A paradigm will give rise to the methodological aspects that are going to be reflected in a research. A paradigm refers to “fundamental conceptions of how to do research in a specific field with consequences on the levels of methodology and theory” (Flick, 2014, p. 540). There are a number of paradigms that researchers can select for their researches, they include positivism, pragmatism, critical theory and constructivism among others.. My research is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm.

“Interpretivism is an epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2016, p. 546). It focuses on the researcher having to understand the subjective experiences of individuals who in this case are parents regarding their influences on the birth to three educare policy. Hammersley (2013, p. 26) forwards that “The interpretivist paradigm, is originally rooted in the fact that methods used to understanding knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be the same as its usage in physical sciences because human interprets their world and then acts based on such interpretation while the world does not.” The interpretive paradigm basically focuses on the researcher’s understanding of the world from the perspective of the subjective experiences of individuals. The interpretivist paradigm is naturalistic, since it appeals to real world situations as they unfold; more specifically, the interpretivist paradigm tends to be non-manipulative, unremarkable and non-controlling. The interpretive approach reflects the researcher’s interest in the participants. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) assert that the interpretivist approach strives to make the researcher have a better understanding of the participants so that he/she can make some interpretations of their actions and thoughts as they are in their context. The aim of the study was to find out about

educare in Zimbabwe through unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials.

Hammersley (2013) echoes that since multiple interpretations are established through relationships, the interpretivist researchers have to understand “the diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world through different contexts and cultures.” Researchers have to avoid bias at all costs as they engage themselves in the study of people and other social events as they make their own interpretations. The interpretivist paradigm was, therefore, deemed the most appropriate, because it facilitated the researcher’s understanding of these narratives. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) avow that the interpretivist approach strives to take on board the views of the participants, including how they interpret the world around them. It accommodates participants’ opinions of what the researcher is interested in, taking cognisance of their experiences. The researcher believes that personal testimony and experiences are a fertile ground for the production of rich narratives regarding educare.

The interpretivist paradigm is advantageous in many ways, for instance, researchers can also understand the social context instead of just making descriptions of objects humans or events (Pham, 2018). Interpretivists dwell much on language and other signs that are crucial in making their interpretations real. They should always come up with meanings that are in tandem with participants’ perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to come up with authentic information or data through probing the interviewees’ thoughts, values, perceptions and views regarding a phenomenon under study. According to Van Esch and van Esch (2013) the interpretivist paradigm concedes that the experiences of research participants on a phenomenon is crucial in a study. The participation of the researcher is of paramount importance in interpreting the findings in a research. “Interpretivism is a position that emphasises gaining a detailed insight into an issue as opposed to being concerned with being able to make generalisations about the world” (Mukherji and Albon, 2010, p. 22). The researcher asked participants questions which generated new ideas from the responses he got, and this gave value to the findings of the research. The focus of this research was on the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. As such, how each participant perceived this particular issue and made sense of it were critical in the research.

### 3.5 Research questions

The main question of the study is;

What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?

#### 3.5.1 Sub-research questions

- What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?
- What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?
- What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the overlapping relationships between school/educare and home?

### 3.6 Research sites

The study was conducted in two districts; Mutoko and Murewa of Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. It was carried out in phases. See table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1: Description of research sites**

Districts	Phase 1	Phase 2
Mutoko	Recruitment of participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centres</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Villages</li> <li>• Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education</li> </ul>	Transcription of narratives and qualitative questionnaires Data analysis Report writing
Murewa	Recruitment of participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centres</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Villages</li> <li>• Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education</li> </ul>	Transcription of narratives and qualitative questionnaires Data analysis Report writing

#### 3.6.1 Research setting

A research setting entails the physical or social context from which research is conducted. The study was conducted in two districts, Mutoko and Murewa, which are

in Mashonaland East Province. Mutoko district is situated at the 140 peg along the tarred road to Mozambique and Malawi. The area covered by the district is 4,092,5 square kilometers. The land is categorised into Small Scale Commercial Farms, Resettlement areas and Communal Areas (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012). The district is largely rural although there is the Mutoko growth point, an urban set up. There are public and private primary schools and ECD centres.

Murewa district is about 75 km north-east from Harare. The tarred road to Mozambique and Malawi passes through the district. Just like Mutoko, Murewa also has an urban set up known as Murewa Centre. The district is also home to a number of public and private schools and ECD centres. Agriculture is the main economic activity in the district. Figure 3.1 below shows Mashonaland East Province and its districts.

**Figure 3.1: Map of Mashonaland East Province**



### **3.7 The role of the researcher**

The focus of this research was on the narratives of parents regarding birth to three educare policy and practice in Zimbabwe. The researcher has different roles and responsibilities in qualitative research and plays an active role during the data collection process. Sutton and Austin (2015) advocate that the researcher's role is to make an effort to engage the participants so they can share their feelings and thoughts regarding the research topic. It is the duty of the researcher to prepare the interview questions and then play the role of an interviewer. All the participants in this research were selected by me, following specific criteria. The search for relevant and most suitable policy documents and reports required the researcher's active involvement and this predicted the researcher's role. The researcher sourced and researched different policy documents and reports to use in document analysis.

One of my major roles in this research was to select a representative sample. As the researcher, it was also my responsibility to construct the data collection instruments which included a narrative guide and an interview guide. It was envisaged that after data had been collected that the researcher would have to interact with the data, analyse it and then summarise the findings. The participants volunteered to participate in this research, hence it was my duty to ensure that they remained confidential and anonymous throughout.

### **3.8 Sampling and selection of participants**

There is no way a researcher can study the whole population. Instead, researchers do sampling, a process which involves the selection of fewer and useful participants. Punch and Oancea (2014) say sampling entails deciding the site or place and the participants from whom the data will be collected. In this research, purposive sampling was used to select the participants for data collection. The rationale behind the sampling needs to relate well with the focus of the study and it basically indicates who or what will be studied. All the selected participants in this research had a baby between the ages birth to three years. A total of ten parents was selected, they comprised of five each from the two districts of Mutoko and Murewa. This was

qualitative research, hence I needed detailed information from the participants, otherwise I would have reached data saturation if I had included more than ten parents. Six participants were selected from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Each of the two districts had three participating members. These were members stationed at their respective Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education district offices.

### **3.8.1 Purposive sampling**

The purposive sampling strategy was employed in this research study. Through purposive sampling, the researcher gathered data from parents who had a baby in the birth to three age range and district education officials from the two districts respectively. Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe and Young (2018) opine that purposive samples are selected based on their capacity to provide the much-needed information that is relevant to the topic under investigation. Punch (2016, p. 175) echoes that “Purposive sampling is drawn from the population in a deliberate or targeted way, according to the logic of the research.” In addition, Kumar (2014) purports that purposive sampling is useful and relevant when the researcher wants to construct a historical reality, describe a phenomenon or develop something about which little is known. The study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

Stage one looked at collecting data through narratives from parents who had at least a child between the ages birth to three years category. The rationale was that the holistic development of their children was crucial, hence, how they perceived educare had greater influence on their decisions and participation of their children in the programme. Education officials such as the District Schools Inspector were involved in semi-structured interviews. These were drawn from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Mutoko and Murewa districts, respectively. The reason for these choices was that ECD programmes in Zimbabwe fall under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. It is responsible for monitoring and supervision of activities in this sector. The district education officials are therefore at policy implementation level and are responsible for maintaining quality provisions through supervision and monitoring. Interviews were carried out to find out how they perceived an expanded ECD programme that is inclusive of educare. The possibilities of having

a shared vision with the custodians of the ECD programme made the education officials a valuable source of data. According to Yin (2016) participants in a qualitative research can be purposively sampled following specific criteria. As such, participants in this study were selected based on;

- Being parents or guardians of a birth to three year old child
- Having some basic command of English
- Occupying positions at the Education District offices
- Willingness to participate voluntarily.

Ten parents and six education officials made up the sample. The kind of sample I chose was satisfactory and convincing because it met the selection criteria and the background and experience of the participants promised valuable information from them (Yin, 2016).

### **3.9 Data collection**

The study used narratives, document analysis and semi-structured interviews on data collection.

#### **3.9.1 Narratives**

According to Kumar (2014, p. 194), “narratives have almost no predetermined content except that the researcher seeks to hear people’s accounts of an incident or happening in their lives.” A narratives is essentially a means by which a researcher can gain information about a group or an individual person’s experiences from the concerned people or person. Through narratives, one can understand the culture, social situation, or phenomenon being studied. Creswell (2012) says a narrative inquiry typically focuses on studying a single person, by gathering data through collecting stories which report the individual experiences, and then by discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individuals. “Narrative research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives” (Cresswell, 2014 ,p. 245). The technique has less structure since the participant tells his or her story about an incident or situation; the researcher has to actively listen.



The researcher is expected to take some detailed narrative notes which the respondents have to check for accuracy. These notes should be accounts made by the researcher from what he sees, hears or experiences in carrying out this research. Flick (2014) views that narrative inquiry entails the researcher asking participants to tell the story of their lives as a whole, without interrupting them with questions. For the purpose of this study, narrative inquiry was used with the parents as they told their stories concerning educare in Zimbabwe. According to Wang and Geale (2015, p. 196), "Inquiring narratively allows for a rich description of these experiences, and an exploration of the meanings that the participants derive from their experiences." It is important because it helps in studying individual experiences over time and in a specific context. In my research, the focus was on the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

Lindsay and Schwind (2016, p. 219) are of the view that "Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding people's experiences". In this study, the narratives of parents and district education officials on educare were the focal point. Mohajan (2018) postulates that through narratives, some unique insights regarding the views and lived experiences of the participants can be found. The choice of narrative inquiry is that it is critical for the researcher to understand the meaning of the lives of individuals from the stories they tell based on their life experiences. The use of narratives in this study means the research was rooted in the experiences of the parents (research participants). Narrative inquiry is a method that is synonymous with having an understanding of individuals and then making interpretations of their personal experiences based on their lived life.

Narrative inquiry was found to be more suitable in unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. According to Butina (2015), narratives are often collected through interviews. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015) state that "narrative interviews are a way of collecting people's stories about their experiences". In the study, instead of conducting face to face semi-structured interviews with the district education officials, an interview protocol to collect the data was employed. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak in 2019, travelling was restricted, so after the parents volunteered and consented, I strategised and sent interview protocols electronically to the participants. Allen (2017) echoes that "Narrative inquiry is a



qualitative data collection strategy whereby a story is generated through the interview.” The expectation was for them to read through the sets of questions and respond accordingly. The first two questions focused on the biographical data of the participants. Questions 3-5 sought to collect information relating to perceptions of parents regarding birth to three educare provisions. Questions 6-8 focused on attachment issues associated with birth to three educare provisions. Questions 9-11 sought to explore the overlapping relationships between home and school.

### **3.9.2 Qualitative questionnaire**

The use of questionnaires is widely accepted as one of the common means of data collection. In this research study, a qualitative questionnaire was employed in this study. Abawi (2017) says “a questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from participants.” A qualitative questionnaire is designed using open ended questions, these can make it easy for the participants to complete it. Since the aim of the research was to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe, a qualitative questionnaire was found relevant in this study. There are many ways in which a questionnaire can be delivered to the participants, for instance, one may send them through post, e-mail, WhatsApp or face to face by hand. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the qualitative questionnaire was electronically sent to the parents and district education officials via emailing and WhatsApp platforms. The aim for this was to minimise direct contact in the most possible ways. The qualitative questionnaire attempted to elicit for detailed information regarding educare policy and practice in Zimbabwe.

The use of qualitative questionnaire is crucial in this study because it can generate rich data that can help shape the future of educare in Zimbabwe. The main strength of a qualitative questionnaire is that there is complete freedom with regards to how the participants respond to them. The participants will not be under pressure from the researcher, hence they have time to formulate their answers before sending back the questionnaire. Eckerdal and Hagstrom (2016), state that “The answers to a qualitative questionnaire have much in common with other qualitative methods for example diary entries. Both consist of memories, opinions and experiences.” In this study, opinions and experiences of parents and district education officials regarding educare in

Zimbabwe was of utmost importance. Their knowledge on educare provisions can provide some insights on the nature of the programme and their opinions could lead to improvements in the future.

In this study, the qualitative questionnaire was sent to six district education officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Mutoko and Murewa districts respectively. The questionnaire sought to collect information relevant to educare policy and practice in Zimbabwe. The use of the questionnaire was ideal in this research because the questions guided the participants on the nature of information required to answer the research questions. The questionnaire had a provision for participants to communicate whenever there were challenges in answering the questions through emailing and WhatsApp. After the participants completed and returned the qualitative questionnaire, the researcher printed hard copies so that the data could be comprehensively be captured.

### 3.9.3 Rationale for the selection of methodology

Table 3.2 outlines the methods that were used to collect data in this research study and the rationale for their selection.

**Table 3.2: Selection of data collection instruments**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCES AND INSTRUMENTS	JUSTIFICATION
<p>Main Research Question:</p> <p>What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?</p>	<p><b>Primary Sources of Data.</b></p> <p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years.</b>            Akinsanya and Bach (2014,p.1) say that “narrative can be written or spoken”. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, instead of having oral narratives the researcher resorted to using written narratives. These were electronically sent to the participants to avoid any physical conduct.</p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire with District education officials</b>            A qualitative questionnaire was developed and electronically send to the education officials. They filled in response to the given set of questions.</p>	<p>The narratives are important because the participants share information basing on their lived experiences. The choice of narratives was influenced by the need to find out on what parents know and think about educare provisions.</p> <p>A qualitative questionnaire was developed and electronically send to the district education officials with the intention to elicit their views and opinions regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>The education officials were targeted by virtue of them being at policy implementation level, their insights</p>

	<p>Literature related and relevant to educare in Zimbabwe from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>on educare provisions would impact greatly on its success or failure.</p> <p>Literature was consulted in an effort to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Findings were to be evaluated against the existing body of knowledge on educare provisions.</p>
<p>Sub-research Questions:  What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?</p>	<p><b>Primary Sources of Data.</b></p> <p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years.</b></p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire with District education officials</b></p> <p>Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a qualitative questionnaire was developed and electronically send to the parents and education officials. They filled in response to the given set of questions.</p> <p>Literature related and relevant educare in Zimbabwe from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>Through narratives, the participants are expected to share their life experiences focusing on a specific subject or area the researcher will be interested in (Flick, 2014,p.265)</p> <p>Qualiatative questionnaires have the potential to elicit for rich data from the participants.</p> <p>Relevant and related literature was consulted in an effort to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Findings were evaluated against existing body of knowledge on educare provisions world-wide.</p>
<p>What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?</p>	<p><b>Primary Sources of Data</b></p> <p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years.</b></p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire with District education officials</b></p> <p>Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a qualitative questionnaire developed and electronically send to the parents and education officials. They filled in response to the given set of questions. Literature related and relevant to birth to three educare policy and practice from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>Data gathered through the narratives is rich because the participants will be in the natural environment and directly contribute basing on their experiences. The data brought about the parents' insights on the attachment theory's relevance during the first three years of educare.</p> <p>Qualitative questionnaire was chosen due to the fact that data generated will be authentic and rich. Literature was consulted in an effort to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on educare in Zimbabwe.</p>
<p>What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the overlapping</p>	<p><b>Primary and Secondary Sources of Data</b></p> <p><b>Narrative inquiry with parents of children birth to three years.</b></p>	<p>Akinsanya and Bach (2014) echo that narrative stories focus on the things that would have happened or that are in current practice. Through narratives, data relating to overlapping relationships between</p>

<p>relationships between school/educare and home?</p>	<p>“The written narratives used in the study employed the written language which is used to decipher and transfer information (Akinsanya and Bach, 2014,p.1). Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, instead of having oral narratives, the research utilised the written where some parents with children birth to three were engaged as participants.</p> <p><b>Qualitative questionnaire with District education officials</b></p> <p>The researcher developed an interview protocol that had a set of questions participants responded to regarding educare in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Literature related and relevant to educare from varied sources was used.</p>	<p>the school and the home regarding educare provisions can be shared.</p> <p>Through qualitative questionnaire district education officials shared with me critical information regarding educare and the element of parental involvement from a policy and practice point of view.</p> <p>Literature was consulted in an effort to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on educare in Zimbabwe.</p>
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### 3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis is a method in which data is organised so that one can derive helpful information from it (Whiting, 2017). Data analysis is a way of summarising and describing your findings, and then seeing if you can identify some common patterns or themes (Roberts-Holmes, 2005, cited in Mukherji and Albon, 2010). The purpose of this is to reduce the large body of collected information into smaller segments which the researcher can interpret and answer the research questions (Bryman, 2016). This makes it possible for the researcher to interpret the data. In this research study, thematic analysis strategy was used.

#### 3.10.1 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 175) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a data set in relation to a research question.” Thematic analysis enables the researcher to analyse data according to the frequency of a theme in the collected data. Bryman and Bell (2014, p. 350) say “The goal of

thematic analysis is to identify, analyse and describe patterns, or themes, across the data set.” Transcription of data obtained through parents’ narratives, document analysis and face-to-face interviews requires the researcher to make sense of the collected data. Emerging themes from each data set are going to be presented separately. Thematic analysis means that the data is going to be scrutinised in an effort to identify recurring and core themes emerging from the collected data (Bryman, 2016). To begin with, data from parents’ narratives was analysed and organised into themes and categories, and the same was done for the data collected through interviews and document analysis. Data analysis is an important process in a research study, it includes a number of stages and elements.

To easily identify the themes, coding is very necessary and key. Bryman (2016, p. 11) propounds that “Coding is a process whereby the data are broken into their component parts and those parts are then given labels.” Through coding, the researcher tries to understand the position of each participant in relation to the phenomenon investigated. Sutton and Austin (2015) view that “Coding refers to the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed through the participants’ narratives and interpreted by the researcher.” It is the first step taken when analysing the collected data. Flick (2014) further states that coding first is mainly oriented on developing concepts which can be used for labelling, sorting and comparing extracts of the data and later for allocating further excerpts to the developing coding system.

My research used thematic analysis. Sutton and Austin (2015), highlighted that thematic analysis denotes the identification of codes basing on the transcriptions of the collected data by the researcher. The essence of this is to come up with meaningful interpretations that are coherent with the research focus. Thematic analysis requires that the researcher follow specific steps to come up with the themes. For instance, the common aspects from the narratives of parents and district education officials participants can be formulated into themes that will guide the and interpretation of data. The following is a summary of the six steps to be followed in thematic analysis as proposed by (Cresswell, 2014, p. 197);

Step 1. Organise and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing narratives, interviews, scanning through documents, and categorisation of the data.

Step 2. Read or relook at all the data. This is critical because the researcher has to make sure of similar and recurring information. The researcher has to go over the hordes of information at least twice or more so the overall meaning of the data can be deduced.

Step 3. Coding the data. This is a process of organising the data. Coding involves gathering all the data in its various forms, be it text data, audios, observations or pictures. The data has to be put into different segments and categories. Labelling of the data using common terms that relates to the participants is key. The coding can fall under three categories;

- Codes on some obvious topics as anticipated by the readers. These could be influenced by literature, similar past research findings as well as common sense. For instance, what other information is available regarding education provisions in Zimbabwe and the general development of early childhood development of Zimbabwe?
- Surprising codes – this entails the emergence of some unanticipated coding patterns from the collected data.
- Codes that are uncommon, and that are, in and of themselves, of conceptual interest to the readers.

Step 4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Use the coding as well for generating a small number of themes or categories - perhaps five to seven themes for a research study.

Step 5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. This might be a discussion that mentions a chronology of events, the detailed discussion of several themes or a discussion of interconnecting themes.

Step 6. Making interpretations is the last stage in qualitative research. Meaning has to be given to the research findings at all costs. The researcher has to carefully analyse and interpret the collected data and give it meaning.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

Educational researchers need to be alert to various constraints around their research and to bear in mind ethical implications of any decisions they make (Punch and Oancea, 2014). The rights of participants should be respected at all costs. Flick (2014, p. 51) echoes that “Principles of research ethics require that researchers avoid harming participants involved in the process by respecting and taking into account their needs and interests.” Participants in this research were briefed on the purpose of the research study and were provided with relevant and adequate information pertaining to the research focus. They were made aware of the expectations of the researcher. Guidance was consistently given to the participants so that they became aware of the possible benefits and challenges in the research process. The people who were involved in this research participated willingly and this shows that their rights and needs were upheld. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) highlighted that participants have to volunteer to take part in a study. The data will be stored in the archives of the University of Pretoria for fifteen years. The following ethical considerations were selected in this study; informed consent and confidentiality.

#### **3.11.1 Informed consent**

The researcher has an obligation to seek for consent from the parents with children in the age ranges birth to three-years-old for the narratives and face-to-face interviews. This is critical as they will have to voluntarily participate in the research. Mukherji and Albon (2010) view that a key term in research is ‘informed consent’. This implies that the participants should be made aware of the nature of research and information expected from them. The purpose of the research should be clearly explained to the participants so that they can make informed decisions with regards to their participation in the research (Kumar, 2014). This means that the participants in research give their consent to the research. They should fully understand the research purpose, why they have been asked to take part in the research and how their involvement fits into the research as a whole. Informed consent implies that the parents who participated in this research needed to have made their choices freely with no coercion applied. They reserved the right to discontinue. Participants in a research should sign a consent form designed by the researcher before they take part in this research.



### **3.11.2 Confidentiality**

The researcher must respect privacy and confidentiality of the participants in the research. “Privacy involves ensuring that no one except the primary research team sees identifiable data or personal records and all reports are anonymised” (Clark, Flewitt, Hammersley and Robb, 2014, p. 94). It is of paramount importance for the researcher to maintain privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants to all those not involved in the research work. Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend the use of pseudonyms (fake names). This is considered one of the best ways in which the identity of the participants can be concealed, thereby guaranteeing their protection. In this research, I ensured that all identifying data remained with me and my supervisors. This was essential to protect the identity of the persons from whom I collected the information.

### **3.12 Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of research findings is crucial in qualitative research. “Trustworthiness is a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research” (Bryman, 2016, p. 551). It is critical in judging the accuracy of qualitative research. Creswell (2014) states that it entails the step that is undertaken to check the accuracy of the findings of qualitative research. Qualitative research trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

#### **3.12.1 Transferability**

Lichtman (2013, p. 299) states that “Transferability is the extent to which the results can be transferred to other settings.” Creswell (2014) states that transferability is the extent to which research findings can be shifted to related settings elsewhere. Transferability relates to how the findings of a particular research can be generalised. In this research, thick descriptions of research findings were made. Through thick descriptions, the readers are enabled to make decisions with regards the findings applicability in other settings (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Transferability has been ensured through the provision of relevant and sufficient details of the participants as well as the context in the research. Findings relating to narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe included thick descriptions



made on data collection methods as well as the procedures that were followed. Data was collected through the narratives of parents who had a child birth to three child and interviews of district education officials who happen to be at the policy implementation stage.

### **3.12.2 Dependability**

According to Devault (2018) dependability refers to the degree to which the research study can be repeated and whether the findings would be consistent. Dependability relates to the consistency levels at which the ever-changing contexts can continue to produce similar findings. To achieve dependability, an audit trail was used. According to Anney (2014) an audit trail involves an examination of the inquiry process. In this research, the raw data, interview recordings and documents analysed were kept for cross-checking purposes. Copies of the narratives and interview responses were kept and this ensures that data collected remained in its original state with no alterations.

Another strategy that was used to improve dependability was the code-recode strategy. This involved the coding of data twice so as to compare the results of the first and second coding. In qualitative research, dependability entails the evaluation of the truthfulness of the study findings (Bryman, 2016). To increase dependability, it is crucial that member-checking of the participants is thoroughly conducted. In this study, it was crucial to cross-check and be satisfied that only parents who had a child in the birth to three-year-old age category were considered.

### **3.12.3 Confirmability**

According to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) say confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. Confirmability can be realised through a reflexive journal and an audit trail. Bowen (2009) cited in Anney (2014) says a reflexive journal refers to documents the researcher keeps for the purposes of reflecting on key events or issues. The researcher followed some laid down procedures in the process of data collection. For instance, the researcher sought permission to carry out the research study from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and there are letters that allowed me to enter the research settings. These were kept as evidence to

conduct the study within the indicated settings. This enabled data collected to be traced to its original source.

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher acted in good faith in the process of carrying out the study (Bryman, 2016). Audit trail is another strategy that helps to improve confirmability of the findings. Confirmability in this study was enhanced through re-checking the data collected in the study. The data collection instruments such as the recordings, interview guide and policy documents can be used to ensure confirmability.

#### **3.12.4 Credibility**

Trustworthiness is all about credibility of the data. Credibility encompasses the endorsement the research findings as truthful. I collected the data using semi-interviews and some recordings were made in an effort to improve on the credibility of the collected data. Nowell et al. (2017) say to promote the credibility of research findings, the researcher has to procedurally follow all the necessary steps in data collection. All the details of the methodologies used should be highlighted, like in this case narratives of parents, interviews of district education officials and analysis of some identified documents (reports and policies) was made. The processes followed should enable readers to determine the credibility of the findings.

To improve on credibility, reflection is critical. Bryman (2016) echoes that credibility requires the researcher to reflect on the processes of data collection and make personal judgements. During the process of data collection, strict attention was paid to the details that addressed the research questions. “Triangulation is another strategy that is used to ascertain credibility. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to collect and interpret data about a phenomenon to converge on the truthful illustration of reality” (Polit and Beck, 2012, p. 745). The use of multiple data collection strategies is of paramount importance since collected data will be very rich in detail. Data in this research was collected through narratives, interviews and document analysis and this formed the basis for triangulation of the methodologies.

### **3.13 Concluding remarks**

Chapter three outlined the research methodology that was used in this research study. The chapter presented a detailed description of the methodologies used to explore the narratives of parents regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The study followed a qualitative research design and interpretivism paradigm. In this study, the participants were purposively sampled using specific criteria. Data in this research was collected through narrative inquiry, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Chapter four looks at data presentation, interpretation and analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research methodology that was used in the collection of data on the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. In this chapter, narratives of parents and district education officials as well as document analysis of reports and policies on ECD are presented, interpreted and analysed thematically. The chapter starts by highlighting the biographical data, codes of parents, and education officials. After that, a comprehensive presentation of the collected data in tabular form will follow. An inductive approach, where the research questions are used to narrow the study's scope followed. The emerging themes will be looked at and presented in a tabular form at the end of each data set presentation. The data will then be analysed and interpreted simultaneously.

#### 4.2 Biographical data of parents

Ten parents participated in this research. The parents had a baby within the birth to three years range. The majority of the participants were women and only three males participated. Their ages ranged from 22 to 40 years. The composition of the participants included five parents each from Mutoko and Murewa districts. The marital status of the participants varied as well, seven married and three single. The educational qualifications show that the majority reached Ordinary Level (*a subject based qualification conferred as part of the General Education Certificate beginning in form 3 to form 4*), and some have professional qualifications. The biographical data of the participants is presented in the table below.

**Table 4.1: Biographical data and codes for parents participants**

Participant	Age	Gender	Marital status	Educational Background	Child's age
P1	28 years	F	Married	Diploma	2 years
P2	40 years	M	Married	O-level	7 months
P3	24 years	F	Single	O-level	2 years 2 months
P4	36 years	F	Married	O-level	10 months
P5	25 years	F	Married	O-level	6 months
P6	22 years	F	Single	O-Level	2 years 4 months
P7	39 years	M	Married	Certificate	2 years 8 months
P8	25 years	F	Single	Form 3	1 year 6 months
P9	30 years	M	Married	Degree	2 years 9 months
P10	33 years	F	Married	Diploma	1 year 2 months

The table above shows the biographical data of the parents who participated in the study. All the participants in this research study, had a child in the birth to three years category, hence they were ideal in providing credible and trustworthy data regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

#### 4.3 Biographical data of district education officials

**Table 4.2: Biographical data and codes for education officials**

Participant	Code	Gender	Qualifications	Experience
District Schools Inspectors	DSI 1	M	M.Ed (Educational Management)	28 years
	DSI 2	F	M.Ed (Psychology)	30 years
Schools Inspectors	SI 1	M	B.Ed (English)	20 years
	SI 2	F	M.Ed (History)	27 years
	SI 3	M	M.Ed (Educational Management)	24 years
	SI 4	M	B.Ed (Special Needs)	23 years

Table 4.2 shows the biographical data of the education officials who participated in study from the two districts. Early childhood development is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, hence the participation of education officials in the study was key in providing relevant information regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

#### 4.4 Parents' narratives regarding educare in Zimbabwe

The study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Parents, as the key stakeholders in early childhood development, participated in the study through narratives. Data that answered the three research questions was generated through the narratives of parents. The parents, as custodians of children, provided first hand data on their perceptions regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

**Table 4.3: Themes and categories from parents' narratives**

Research Question	Themes	Categories
What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?	Opportunities in educare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic development               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cognitive development</li> <li>○ Social and emotional development</li> <li>○ Physical development</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Solid foundation for future development</li> <li>• Early identification and intervention</li> </ul>
	Challenges identified by parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of educare services</li> <li>• Ineffectiveness of educare</li> <li>• Unaffordable fees</li> <li>• Educare not good for attachment</li> <li>• Lack of policy specifications</li> </ul>

##### 4.4.1 Data analysis and interpretation: Parents' narratives

My research focused on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The findings revealed that parents have varied perceptions regarding educare provisions. The data indicated that most of the participating parents, except one, were happy to have their children involved in educare. The parent who expressed ignorance on educare apparently had the

youngest child (seven months) and was skeptical about the welfare of her child in an educare setting. Rather, she thought that, as a fulltime house wife, she had ample time to take care of her child. The other nine parents cited the opportunities that children can benefit from if they were to participate in educare programmes. Although parents exhibited a positive attitude on educare provisions, data collected also shows that there are some misconceptions surrounding it. Results from the narratives of parents on their perceptions regarding educare in Zimbabwe had the following theme; opportunities and challenges of educare in Zimbabwe. The theme has two sub-themes, the first one is opportunities identified by parents and this has the following categories; holistic development, a solid foundation for future development and early identification and interventions. The second sub-theme is challenges identified by parents and the categories included are lack of educare services, lack of a relevant educare curriculum and misconceptions about educare.

#### **4.4.2 Theme 1: Opportunities and challenges of educare in Zimbabwe:**

##### **Narratives of parents**

The data collected and presented includes the views of parents regarding their children's participation in educare. They identified some opportunities and challenges that are found in educare provision. These are interpreted and analysed below.

##### **4.4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Opportunities identified by parents**

###### **4.4.2.1.1 Holistic development**

The findings show that there are opportunities in educare. One of the key findings that emerged is that educare enhances holistic growth and development of young children. Presented below are some of the participants' narratives in relation to their perceptions regarding educare in Zimbabwe.

P1 stated that;

*“Educare is a fundamental programme that brings a variety of benefits on how to educate and take care of the little ones. Children’s participation in this programme, helps them to develop physical, cognitive, emotional and social skills.”*

P4 echoed that;

*“Educare is a very important programme that takes care of children between birth and three years so that holistic development is promoted. This encompasses education and care activities.”*

In agreement with the above narratives, P9 was of the view that;

*“Educare is quite a crucial step towards holistic development through early stimulation of different domains for example cognitive, social, emotional, moral and physical.”*

The findings from parents narratives indicate that they are aware of educare and the benefits it has for their children. Holistic development entails the all-round development of young children that is physical, social, emotional and cognitive. According to Voco, Duci and Tahsini (2014, p. 8), “The early childhood experiences may encourage or hinder their holistic development, depending on the access to and quality of nutrition and health services, care practices of the family and community, opportunities to learn and their protection.” Educare services have to be of a higher quality if children are to be developed holistically. Crowley and Wheeler (2014) echo that a supportive environment, where the caregivers effectively engage with their young children, greatly impact on holistic development outcomes. Educare environments should be safe, accommodative and conducive so that the cognitive, physical and socio-emotional domains of children can be promoted. Each and every educare setting, therefore, should aspire to develop the whole child. The categories under holistic development are discussed below.

- **Cognitive development**

The benefits of high quality educare practices include enhancing the cognitive development of young children. The parents highlighted that educare provision is significant in the development of cognition in young children.

P3 explained that;

*“Early learning settings are very benefitting to children three years and under since they will be given activities that develop them cognitively.”*

P7 expressed that;

*“Educare settings offers a rich environment where children play and manipulate materials. Activities that children engage with, in these settings help children to develop cognitively.”*



P10 further stated that;

*“Children’s participation in educare settings has the potential to enhance their cognitive development. This is so because the environment will have suitable and appropriate materials for use by the children. Everything the child touches, tastes, smells or hears helps to shape the child’s thinking.”*

The findings revealed that participation in educare helped children to develop their cognitive skills. Parents mentioned the “environment” especially. Educare settings or environments should have adequate play materials which are suitable to help children develop better understanding different concepts including colour, shape and size through exploring their environments. Cognitive development refers to the human beings’ capabilities of receiving, processing, integrating and responding to information (see section 2.2.1.1). An educare environment should aim at encouraging young children to initiate, explore their environment and solve problems (Voko et al. 2014). Through educare participation, children gain knowledge and understand the world better in their own ways. Educare programmes and services play a significant role in developing cognition in birth to three-year-old children. The data gathered suggests that educare is a fertile ground that influences cognitive development greatly.

- **Socio-emotional development**

The collected data show that the views of parents regarding holistic development of young children gives emphasis to socio-emotional development. Through narratives, the views of the parents were presented in the following extracts;

P2 highlighted that;

*“Educare provisions is important in terms of the child’s emotional and social skills development. The child is exposed to a variety of opportunities where interactions can take place between the child and his or her peers.”*

In addition, P3 concurred that;

*“The interaction and exposure with other people involve multiple emotions and improve the social and emotional skills of the child. The child engages with peers and caregivers unlike at home and this is important in the development of social and emotional skills.”*

P4, P8, and P10 similarly shared the same view that;

*“Participation in birth to three educare settings is where the child develops holistically (physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively).”*

P6 echoed that;

*“The child’s socio-emotional skills are enhanced through playing and interacting with different people in educare environments.”*

The results show that educare practices enhance young children’s socio-emotional skills development. It refers to the ability of a child to form relationships and interact with peers, caregivers and adults (see section 2.2.1.3). Children are exposed to multiple social and emotional related components that are important in shaping the development of these skills. Socio-emotional development refers to the nature of the relationships children develop with caregivers and within their environments. The National Academies of Sciences. Engineering Medicine (n.d) emphasises on children’s development of close and interactive relationships with adults, be it in the home or other outside environments like educare settings. Socio-emotional development in educare settings is further promoted by the calibre of the caregivers available. These caregivers should be knowledgeable and well versed in child development issues.

- **Physical development**

Physical development essentially means the development of gross motor skills, psychomotor abilities, coordination of body parts as well as balance. Educare environments should be full of equipment and materials which children can use to jump, climb, pull or push. They should have large open spaces for walking, running, pulling or riding of tricycles. The parents narrated that the opportunities in educare include physical development.

P4 highlighted that;

*“Sending my child to an educare learning centre promote his physical development because there would be age-appropriate materials and equipment suitable for that.”*

In addition, participant P6 stated that;

*“The physical development and growth of children do well when they are taken care by specialists in child development that may be found in educare settings.”*

P9 explained that;

*“One of the major reasons for sending my child to birth to three educare is that there are vast opportunities for the enhancement of all domains i.e physical development.”*

Another participant, P10 shared the same view by stating that;

*“I will send my child to an early childhood learning centre because that is where the child develops physically. However, this can only be possible if the caregivers have the requisite knowledge to create conducive environments for young children to develop this domain.”*

The information collected clearly shows that physical development is crucial in children’s daily interactions and life functions. Educare settings should strive to help children positively develop physical skills. New Jersey Council for Young Children, (2013) presented that children’s physical development has an influence on their connections with things and how they will interact with the environment. It therefore calls for a holistic approach to be employed in educare environments. Physical development enables young children to exercise their bodies as well as the mind through exploring their environment in educare settings (see section 2.2.1.3). Participation in educare helps to promote physical development in young children. The findings also revealed that caregivers needed to be knowledgeable of child development issues so they could provide a conducive environment for physical development. Parents are therefore encouraged to embrace educare provisions and fully support their practices.

#### **4.4.2.1.2 Foundation for future developments**

The perceptions of parents show that they would be comfortable to have their children participate in educare settings since there are a lot of opportunities for their children’s development. Of note is that educare participation is important in laying a solid foundation for future developments. The participants presented that a solid base laid early in children’s life is key to them reaching their full potential. For example, Participant P1 expressed that;

*“In educare, the child will be introduced to teaching and learning at a tender age which would prepare his/her learning and development life journey.”*

In agreement, P8 voiced that;

*“A strong foundation that may lead to better performance later in life is laid in the early years.”*

P9 added that;

*“Educare provisions lays a solid base from which all future developments anchor on.”*

Participation in educare lays a solid foundation for later life successes. The experiences that children encounter during their participation in educare programmes have the potential to shape their future. In educare settings, the foundation for future developments is laid when children “feel accepted, develop attachments and trust their caregivers” (Australian Government: Department of Education and Training, 2018, p. 23). Through participation in educare, the probability is that young children develop positive attitudes towards life. Yoshikawa and Kabay (2015) put forward that the experiences of children in ECD programmes such as educare, the home, nursery schools, preschools and in the communities interact with the genes to shape their development. In educare, children engage with peers and caregivers, something that is key in developing positive relationships which are critically important in helping them to acclimatise and get used to scheduled and organised experiences later in life.

#### **4.4.2.1.3 Early identification and intervention of challenges identified by knowledgeable caregivers**

Another key benefit of educare is that there are possibilities for early identification and intervention in cases where some children may have some defects like speech and language. While analysing data from the parents’ narratives, I came across statements which show that parents believe that to a certain extent educare provisions can impact on the development of young children in positive or negative ways. The narratives of parents highlighted the following statements regarding educare provisions;

P3 stated that;

*“When the child is taken care of by experts who specialised in the learning and development of young children, growth and development defects can be identified early.”*

P5 in agreement added that;

*“In educare environments, there are chances of early detection of language and behavioural defects which may call for early intervention strategies.”*

The data stipulates that a knowledgeable caregiver can be handy in helping parents and authorities to identify learning and developmental problems earlier in the child’s life. The results revealed that this is very important as this can help to determine appropriate measures which can correct or minimise on the effects of identified defects. According to Pei-Ying and Yu-Cheng (2019, p. 75), “providing quality and equitable learning opportunities to exceptional learners, or children with special needs, can benefit both education systems and societies themselves.” The first three years provide a window through which different developmental defects can be identified and this calls for early intervention measures. Educare has the capacity for parents and caregivers to share information regarding resources and support systems that can ultimately help in alleviating a noted defect in young children. Early identification is very critical in the early years and can result in preventive intervention measures being taken (see section 2.2.1.5). It is therefore crucial for educare settings to be well designed and provide a holistic approach to early childhood development so that effective mitigatory measures can be provided.

Whenever a caregiver has concerns about a child’s behaviour, progress and general development in educare settings, he/she should not delay in making a report in line with the laid down protocols and procedures. Early identification and intervention mean that a child can be helped and supported early. According Billingham and Barnes (2014, p. 164), “All practitioners working with young children and their families, whether or not they have a health title or role, have a responsibility to proactively protect and promote children’s health and to know what to do when a child is unwell.” Caregivers in educare settings should have the requisite knowledge and a good understanding of child development issues. Early identification and intervention help caregivers and other key stakeholders to quickly take note of the needs of individual children under their care as well as the difficulties they may be facing daily. “Indeed, poor and neglected children benefit disproportionately from early childhood development programmes, making these interventions among the more compelling policy tools for fighting and reducing inequality” (Atinc and Gustafsson-Wright, 2013). A quality early childhood development service that is nurturing, caring and supportive

will go a long way in making early identification and intervention possible, thus the sooner a defect is detected, the better (see section 2.2.5). Early identification is key in mitigating the negative effects of delayed intervention, hence educare can serve as a platform where helpful guidelines on preventive measures and support can be found. This highlights the importance of having specific policies on educare so that they guide practices, notably on procedures to report identified defects in young children.

#### **4.4.2.1.4 Women empowerment**

Findings from the parents' narratives indicate that educare can benefit woman empowerment. The participation of children in educare facilities can free up more women to partake in other economic and developmental roles. Data collected from parental narratives show that;

P2 stated that;

*“Having children in educare centres gives parents, particularly women the room further their education or to do other businesses without much disturbances.”*

In addition, P5 highlighted that;

*“My child’s attendance in educare, paves the way for me to have adequate time to do other business and household chores more freely.”*

P6 added that;

*“I will be able to engage in other developmental activities knowing that my child is in a safe educare centre.”*

P8 presented that;

*“Educare participation helps parents economically. For instance, I rely on buying and selling, hence I can achieve my goals without being disturbed by my child as I fend for the family.”*

The findings indicate that the establishment of educare facilities will play an important role towards empowering women. MacEwan (2013, p. 3) echoes that “Early childhood development service is an essential component of economic development since quality child care for children whose parents are in the paid labour force is guaranteed.” The Department of Health and Human Services (2016) seems to support educare provision by stating that, in America, child care support is meant to “enable parents to maintain employment or complete education programs, and supports both family financial stability and the relationship between children and their caregivers.” In

addition, Glynn, Farrell and Wu (2013) pointed out that young children's access to educare facilities essentially means the mothers have more opportunities to join the workforce. Participation of children in educare potentially exposes the guardians to more opportunities, which can help them to realise their career paths and improve on their economic and family status. Instead of spending much of their time caring for the baby, educare services relieve the mothers and they can access their own educational opportunities fully knowing that their children are in safe hands at the centre. The World Bank, (2018, p. 5) states that "Access to quality childcare and family-friendly ECD policies are key to reducing the gender imbalance and to promoting greater co-responsibility between mothers and fathers." Nandhini and Prakasam (2017, p. 189) put forward that women empowerment helps them to be confident and independent in decision making. Through women empowerment, they will also be self-reliant. Once a woman is educated, the whole family benefits, and this includes the baby as his or her nutritional needs will be met.

#### **4.4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Challenges identified by parents**

Through narratives, parents identified the challenges they have with educare in Zimbabwe. These include the lack of educare services within their vicinities. The parents also claim that, because services are not readily available, it means their children will not be able to access the services, hence they miss out on the benefits that can be drawn from participation in such programmes. The results that came up from the narratives of parents show that there is lack of educare services and there are some misconceptions as well. The following are some of the statements shared by the parents.

##### **4.4.2.2.1 Lack of educare services**

Lack of educare services has been identified as one of the challenges that were drawn from the narratives of parents. In the districts of Mutoko and Murewa, it has been found that there are no educare centres where children can access quality services. The findings indicate that the lack of educare centres impact on accessibility as well. Excerpts from the narratives of parents are hereby presented.

P3 stated that;



*“In our locality, there is nothing to talk about with regards to availability of educare services. This is a disadvantage to us all because we cannot freely participate in the workforce and attend to other family issues. On top of that, our children are missing out on the many benefits that can be realized through educare provisions.”*

To add on, P5 highlighted that;

*“Our children are not accessing educare services, not because we don’t want, the issue is that in our area there are no such centers. It is therefore a disadvantage to the whole community because our children will only access early childhood development services at 3 years.”*

On the same note, P6 added that;

*“The fact that as a community, their children are missing out on educare services means they are at a disadvantage. The lack of educare centers means our children will always lag behind in terms of development”.*

In agreement, P9 echoed that indeed their children are disadvantaged because of the lack of educare centres in their communities. She said;

*“If we had educare services in our community, I am sure the majority of working parents would be sending their children there because they will be assured of the safety of their children as compared to leaving them in the hands of sometimes very young house helpers who have limited knowledge on child caring. The lack of services is one thing that is troubling us as a community and we call upon the government at least establish an educare centre here.”*

Findings indicated that the parents are not very happy with the current scenario where educare services are very limited and not readily available in most areas. They acknowledged that the lack of educare services in their communities is a challenge to them and their children. For instance, the parents cannot freely participate in the workforce and other developmental projects. On the same note, their children lose out on the many benefits available in educare settings. The United States government in 2014 proposed a package that was meant to expand the public child care services. The package sought to support children’s well-being by expanding the public childcare services. This was aimed at helping parents to better balance their work and caregiving responsibilities (Glynn et al., 2013, p. 1). Unfortunately, these are efforts



by the United States government which do not apply in Zimbabwe. It therefore means that Zimbabwean children will continue to miss out on the opportunities of educare.

The findings show that lack of educare services for children birth to three years essentially means accessibility is impacted as well. Thus, the communities and their children are already at a disadvantage. They will miss out on the benefits of high-quality ECD programmes like educare. Mathers and Ereky-Stevens (2018) suggested that from infancy, educare may give children a boost in their development. That ensures that young children will probably realise their potential later in life. Now that this is not the case, it means the children will not receive quality and good care that potentially leads to full development and future successes.

#### **4.4.2.2.2 Educare is not good for attachment**

Young children in the birth to three year age category are primarily taken care of by the primary caregiver (usually the mother) and other close relatives or baby minders. As such, some parents were concerned that educare provision can negatively impact on children's attachment development. They cited the possibility of a child getting in contact with more than one adult caregiver as the source of their fear. This is a misconception that should be corrected because research has proved that young children can have attachment relationships with more than one adult caregiver. The parents' narratives are presented below.

P3 opined that;

*“The bond between the parents and the child can be broken or disturbed if a child participates in educare.”*

In agreement, P4 stated that;

*“My child can develop stress because she will be thinking about me. She will be bondless with me because most of her times she will be at the centre. The care of a caregiver cannot be adequate like the care that I give to my child.”*

P8 added that;

*“Attachment pattern is disturbed as the child tries to adapt to a new environment and a new caregiver.”*

P9 and P10 echoed the same sentiments when they said;

*“There will be attachment challenges with parents. Children from birth to three need motherly love and that is disturbed once a child participates in an educare learning centre.”*

The educare programme is one of the many non-parental child care provisions available the world over. The parents were concerned that educare exposes young children to multiple caregivers. The parents fear that if a child is taken care of by multiple caregivers, consistency in caregiving practices will not be possible and this has ripple effects on the development of attachment. However, this is not true since research evidence shows that children are capable of having secure attachment patterns with more than one caregiving figure. According to Multnomah County Family Court Services (2014, p. 7), “Children can have more than one attachment figure. Some experts now believe infants can bond with other caregivers as early as two to three months of age.” What is important in the development of attachment is the availability of loving and responsive caregivers who can timeously respond and address the needs of children in their care. In this regard, educare exposes children to more opportunities where they can develop secure attachment relationships with other caregivers outside the home environment. It therefore implies that it is just a misconception to believe that educare provisions affect attachment development.

#### **4.4.2.2.3 Ineffectiveness of educare**

Results of this research study revealed some notable misconceptions associated with educare provision. Judging by the findings from the parents’ narratives, there is a misconception that early childhood development is ineffective. Some of the participants were not convinced that educare provision holds the key to future successes; rather, they see children not really learning anything at early childhood development level. For instance, P8 stated that;

*“Infants and toddlers should be taken care of by their mothers or baby minders. Having them in educare settings is stressful and not quite effective.”*

P10 expressed that;

*“Children birth to three years are too young and they require parental care by their parents or close relatives because they do not benefit much from educare provisions, apart from playing in dirty environments.”*

P2 also suggested that;

*“Most of the activities are not developmentally appropriate and children are exposed to some dangerous content which does not help them to develop.”*

P6 said that;

*“I am contented with the old system where children birth to three were the prerogative of the mothers, siblings, grandparents and the extended family. They will be abused if they are taken into educare settings.”*

Evidence from the collected data indicated that some parents view educare practices as ineffective. They were not convinced that the varied experiences that children encounter on daily basis in educare settings makes an impact on their growth and development. According to Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2003) cited in Ahmed and Elrazek (2020), the myths and misconceptions about early childhood development are generally held by word of mouth which are sometimes misleading. Parents who still believe in the traditional way, where it is the sole responsibility of the mother to take care of her child during the first three years, are very misinformed. Research carried out in Ghana found that some ECD teachers complained that parents have negative attitudes towards early childhood development provisions. The research by Ntumi (2016) found that the parents lacked knowledge of ECD, hence they see it as time wasting and a playing ground and not a serious place of learning. Parents who think like this surely do not help much in increasing accessibility to educare. Thus, the acceptance or rejection of educare is greatly affected by societal beliefs, norms and values.

#### **4.4.2.2.4 Unaffordable fees for educare services**

Educare is greatly affected by the misconceptions that exist regarding educare provisions. The other misconception concerning educare is that it is unaffordable to have a child enrolled in these programmes. The excerpts such as the following create about the myopic thinking exhibited by some of the parents with regards to educare in Zimbabwe.

P7 explained that;

*“They are expensive, hence majority do not access the services.”*

P3 added that;

*“Some of the parents cannot afford to send their children to these early learning settings since most of them are privately owned and very expensive.”*

P4 also agreed with P7 and P3, she indicated that;

*“Educare is expensive for nothing because young children only go there to play.”*

The misconception that educare practice is too “expensive for nothing” (P4) is not true. These beliefs hinder the successful implementation of educare programmes. This has great impact on educare access by some of the eligible children. Gould, Whitebook, Mokhiber and Austin (2019) added that families are heavily burdened by the cost of child care. The expensive nature of ECD service could be the reason educare provision seems to be invisible publicly. Because of these misconceptions, the growth and development of educare provision is slow. The probability of young children missing out on benefits associated with educare is very high. A change in the mindset is therefore needed if significant increases and changes on birth to three participation is going to be realised.

#### **4.4.3 Theme 2: Opportunities and challenges on educare in Zimbabwe:**

##### **Narratives of district education officials**

The Early Childhood Development programme in Zimbabwe is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). The involvement of education officials in this study is due to the fact that they are at the policy development level. Their involvement with other education stakeholders may potentially improve the researched setting. As rich informants in this study, six district education officials completed qualitative questionnaires in an effort to find out about educare in Zimbabwe. The themes, sub-themes and categories are indicated in the table below;

**Table 4.4: Themes and categories from district education officials**

Research Question	Theme	Categories
What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?	Opportunities in educare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic development               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cognitive development</li> <li>○ Social and emotional development</li> <li>○ Physical development</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Early literacy skills development</li> <li>• Brain development</li> <li>• Solid foundation for future developments</li> </ul>
	Challenges identified by district education officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of educare centres</li> <li>• No comprehensive early childhood development Policy</li> <li>• Lack of an approved educare curriculum</li> <li>• Lack of monitoring systems</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>

#### **4.4.3.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Opportunities identified by district education officials**

Evidence from the collected data revealed that education officials have no qualms about having their children or grandchildren participate in educare settings. Opportunities that could benefit young children were cited as the main reasons for their stance. Therefore, when education officials have a positive attitude towards educare provision, then this is a boost for the sector as they are at the policy development level.

##### **4.4.3.1.1 Holistic development**

Findings from the qualitative questionnaire by district education officials revealed that there are opportunities for holistic development abundant in educare provision. The

participants agreed that they would have their children or grandchildren in educare centres for the benefits it has for young children's development. For instance;

EO4 explained that;

*“Educare is a special programme that takes children three years and below aboard and it has a component of education and care in it. Participation in educare promotes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.”*

EO5 added that;

*“I regard the provisions of educare to be a step in the right direction since children will be given a good footing in their early life. There are opportunities for holistic development to take place.”*

EO2 weighed in by stating that;

*“Educare is a very important programme that is meant for the holistic development and proper care of children birth to three years.”*

Holistic development entails the total development of a child in all domains. As such, the following sub categories were looked at; cognitive development, socio-emotional and physical development.

### **Cognitive development**

Educare settings should aim at providing children with opportunities and experiences that will enhance the development of their cognitive domain fully.

EO3 stated that;

*“Educare is an initiative that provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children in the birth to three age range categories and is crucial for children's cognitive development.”*

In agreement, EO4 explained that;

*“Educare is a special programme that takes children three years and below aboard and it has a component of education and care in it. Participation in educare promotes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.”*

The early childhood years are a sensitive period where children's exposure to quality services is important. World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) believes that it is a human right and essential requisite that young children should achieve their

developmental potential (see section 2.2.1). As such, it would be prudent for all young children to have access to educare settings so they could benefit from the opportunities available there towards their cognitive development. Educare environments should be designed in ways that enhance cognitive development. Maduewesi (1999) and Ogunyemi (2002) cited in Sakineh (2012) highlighted that “It is highly desirable that young children are given the opportunity to spend some hours in pre-school settings with many facilities and qualified staff to enrich and stimulate them socially and intellectually.” It therefore means that educare centres should have developmentally appropriate materials. These should lead young children to solve problems, be creative and discover things by themselves. Opportunities availed to young children with regards to cognitive development warrants increased participation in educare by more children(see section 2.2.1.1). Therefore, investments in educare should be prioritised.

- **Social and emotional development**

The educare programmes have been found to be ideal for the development of social and emotional skills. This emerged from the analysed data collected through qualitative questionnaire of the district education officials. It was found that even though there is very limited activity pertaining to educare in Zimbabwe, the programme has great opportunities that can enhance the development children’s social and emotional skills. Below are some of the excerpts from the education officials’ interviews.

EO1 elucidated that;

*“Educare is a fundamental programme that brings a variety of benefits to young children. It helps parents to understand the crucial needs of children from birth to three years. It can play a part in the development of social and emotional skills in young children.”*

In addition, EO2 clarified that;

*“In educare programmes, children interact with both the physical and social environments. Educare provision has the potential to help children develop their socio-emotional skills as children can interact and share experiences.”*

EO4 expounded that;

*“Educare participation can promote socio-emotional development in young children. Children develop independence, cooperation, sympathy, empathy and other important skills.”*

EO5 and EO6 agreed that surely there are opportunities to develop socio-emotional skills in young children. They forwarded that;

*“In educare, the development of all domains is enhanced. Children develop socio-emotional skills through interacting with their environment in educare settings.”*

The findings indicate that participation in educare settings has the potential to aid social and emotional development in young children. By having a materially rich environment where young children can freely engage and interact, social and emotional skills can be developed. Educare settings can engage young children in play activities as pairs or groups with other children. This exposes young children to many play opportunities, something that is important in their development. The availability of knowledgeable caregivers who can create positive relationships with children in educare settings is very crucial then. Gonzalez-Mena (2014) put forward that young children need plenty of warm interactions that are respectful, sensitive and responsive. Caregivers should be able to build healthy relationships with children so they can develop healthy social and emotional skills (see section 2.2.1.3). Through participation in educare, young children develop the ability to communicate as well as regulate their emotional dispositions. Crowley and Wheeler (2014) assert that children who participate in quality early childhood development environments are more socially well off than their counterparts who do not have such opportunities. In these environments, they interact with their age mates as well as adults who takes good care of them. Such conditions are rich and vital for social and emotional skills development. Thus, educare provision can be supportive in young children’s development of social and emotional competencies. The findings call for caregivers who can create positive environments that are conducive for children to share and express their feelings freely.

- **Physical development**

Educare enhances children’s physical development. The data from the education officials’ qualitative questionnaires revealed that educare provision can play a significant role in young children’s physical development. The interviewees highlighted the following.



EO2 explained that;

*“Educare is a very important programme that can enhance holistic development and proper care of children birth to three years. Opportunities for physical development are evident through the provision of adequate equipment and materials for use by young children.”*

Participant EO3 added that;

*“The child benefit immensely in educare, for example cognitive and physical skills development are enhanced”.*

EO5 was of the view that;

*“Physical development is enhanced in through interactions made by the child in his or her environment.”*

EO6 put forward that;

*“Educare presents learning opportunities to children early in their life. Children develop physical skills as they engage in running, jumping, building blocks or pushing and pulling materials abundant in educare settings.”*

My analysis of the questionnaire data clearly shows that education officials were convinced that educare provision plays a major role on physical development. According to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ghana) (2018), physical development entails how young children’s bodies grow, change and develop. The suggested activities by EO6 are ideal for physical skills development. As such, educare settings should strive to provide age-appropriate materials and equipment suitable for physical skills development of young children. Educare settings should have relevant and suitable play materials and equipment that will be used by children frequently. These are crucial in the development of the physical domain as children push, pull, or climb on some of them. These activities thereby enhances the development of physical skills (see section 2.2.1.2). In educare settings, the environment should be well organised and stimulating so that infants and toddlers can freely play and interact in a way that enhances their physical development.

#### **4.4.3.1.2 Brain development**

The results of this study show that education officials believe that there are opportunities for brain development in educare settings. During the first five years, brain development is more rapid than at any other time, hence there is need for a safe

and stimulating environment. Some of the excerpts from the interviews are highlighted below.

EO1 stipulates that;

*“Children’s participation in educare environments is crucial for brain development.”*

In the same vein, EO3 put forward that;

*“The child benefit immensely, for example brain development is most rapid during the early years of life. Care provided by qualified and sensitive practitioners addresses the needs and interests of the children.”*

EO6 agreed that;

*“Quality ECD programmes give room for children’s brain development. Educare presents opportunities for young children to interact in a safe and secure environment with peers and their caregivers, all of which play a role in brain development.”*

The findings here indicate that early childhood environments are full of opportunities for young children to interact with humans and objects, all of which greatly influence brain development. Lally and Mangione (2017) opine that “As babies experience responses from their caregivers, their brains start to form expectations for how they will be treated and how they should respond.” Young children who spent their early childhood years attending educare programmes, encounter better opportunities for brain development. There is need for caregivers to create nurturing environments, be loving, caring and responsive to children. The WHO (2020) states that young children should be afforded nurturing care during the early childhood years since they play a significant role in brain development (see section.2.2.1.4). Young children’s exposure to a safe and stimulating environment influences their brain development. The interactions that young children likely experience in educare settings can influence brain development as well as providing a strong base for future developments. This therefore means that opportunities available in educare services should be enjoyed by an increased number of children. Thus, findings call for increased visibility and accessibility of educare services.

#### 4.4.3.1.3 Early literacy development

The presented qualitative questionnaire data shows early literacy skills development emerging as a sub-theme under opportunities of educare provision. The participants concurred that educare environments can greatly influence literacy skills development in young children. A quality educare environment presents a rich ground where children have opportunities to acquire and develop literacy skills.

EO1 opines that;

*“In educare settings, the child can develop a variety of skills which include literacy, creativity among others.”*

EO4 explained that;

*“Children develop important skills like literacy, numeracy and turn taking.”*

EO5 chipped in by stating that;

*“Literacy skills development is enhanced through interactions with children of same age.”*

EO6 added that;

*“Quality ECD programmes give room for children to discover new experiences. Children develop problem solving and literacy skills early in their life.”*

Emergent literacy relates to the reading and writing actions that are exhibited by young children very early in their life. Young children from birth require exposure to settings with conducive conditions that enhance emergent literacy skills development. Research carried out by Muguwe (2013, p. 111) in Gweru urban pre-schools revealed that emergent literacy “is constructive in that it develops internally as the child, from birth builds concepts about the environment and culture on the basis of active explorations and meaningful language.” Therefore, educare environments should be nurturing and aim to provide the right conditions that stimulate early literacy development.

According to Save the Children (2014, p. 4), children’s exposure to books and language-rich environments has a positive effect throughout their lives. Educare settings should have a variety of relevant picture books, writing materials, colours and paints, among others, things which aid the emergent of early literacy skills development in young children. Save the Children (2014, p. 6) further stated that “Participation in early childhood development can also bridge the gap between

children coming from literacy-rich and literacy-poor households.” Educare programmes should therefore be of a high quality and manned by knowledgeable caregivers who can engage young children in developmentally appropriate activities that can stimulate their literacy skills development. Advocacy works to lobby for increased access to educare so these services should therefore be promoted and supported.

#### **4.4.3.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Challenges identified by district education officials**

It has been found that there is generally a shortage of educare centres in Zimbabwe, and this means accessibility is very limited.

##### **4.4.3.2.1 Shortage of educare centres**

Findings of the study show that in Mutoko and Murewa districts there are basically no recognised educare service providers. The participants highlighted that the lack of such centres is a disadvantage to would be beneficiaries of the programme. It means that children would be missing out on the many opportunities that can influence their growth and development. The participants had this to say;

EO3 presented that;

*“There is generally a lack of educare service providers in our district. If there is any one operating, it means it is doing so illegally because in our records we don’t have such.”*

EO4 explained that;

*“There is no specific educare centre here. What we have observed is that some ECD centers are taking on board children three years and under and they use the same facilities as the 3–5-year-olds. This is unacceptable, they should just come clean and establish a proper educare facility.”*

Additionally, EO5 stated that;

*“There is a shortage of service providers for birth to three educare and this disadvantages local children as they miss out on the opportunities for development available there. This is contributing to lack of accessibility for the service even if parents and stakeholder like them are positive about developments in this sector.”*

The data indicate that the shortage of educare centres is impacting on improved access by the majority of would-be beneficiaries. The education officials advocated for improvements in the ECD sector, notably on educare, which is not readily available. Lack of educare centres in a community is a disadvantage to the young children growing up there. The children miss out on opportunities that can aid their development. According to Atinc and Gustafsson-Wright (2013) “the effects are cumulative and the absence of appropriate childcare and education can exacerbate further the poor outcomes expected for children who suffer from inadequate nurturing during the first 1000 days.” The shortage of educare centres has a bearing on accessibility which obviously becomes very low. The shortage of educare centres in Zimbabwe is a massive gap that can only be fully filled through the development of relevant policy frameworks. The results are indicative that district education officials were not happy with the shenanigans of some unscrupulous ECD players who were not following due procedures to establish their centres. The implication therefore is that deserving children can miss out greatly on the benefits abundant in educare programmes.

#### **4.4.3.2.2 Lack of a comprehensive early childhood development policy**

The findings show that in Zimbabwe, there is no comprehensive early childhood development policy that encompasses all the age groups and this could be hampering educare provisions. The issues surrounding policy include lack of clear and specific educare guidelines and inconsistencies. Data collected from the education officials indicate that, in the absence of clear policies, it would be difficult to establish and register such centres. Notably, EO4 presented that;

*“Current policies do not clearly specify issues on educare provisions.”*

EO2 explained that;

*“Increasing accessibility to educare services requires policy provisions that clearly lay out procedures for establishment, registration, methodology, curriculum, teacher qualifications among other aspects. Unfortunately, this is currently lacking.”*

The education official EO3 highlighted that;

*“There is need for relevant policy formulation and monitoring of implementation.”*

EO4 and EO5 indicated that;

*“There is need for specific policy provisions that guide establishment and implementation of educare services.”*

Early childhood development programmes the world over are continuously affected by the lack of properly constituted policy framework. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ghana) (2018, p. 2) states that “Early childhood development policies play a very important role in the provision of development opportunities for children and in providing knowledge on what young children need from caregivers.” Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe there are no policies that specify educare practices, hence there are challenges in the promotion of services for this age group. For instance, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 is a regulatory policy framework which sought to provide guidelines for ECD centres’ operations, mainly focusing on 3-5 year provisions. The findings call for Zimbabwean authorities to develop early childhood development policy frameworks that are comprehensive and more focused on all the age groups classified as ECD. Policies are important because they are the ones that guide and make improvements on practices. What is prevailing in Zimbabwe is in contrast to what exists in other countries. For example, in South Africa there is a specific policy that focus on the birth to four years ECD provisions. Thus, the lack of policy specifications for educare practices can contribute to the lack of availability and accessibility of the service in both public and private settings.

The findings also show that there are policy inconsistencies, and this could be having a negative impact on educare provisions in Zimbabwe. For instance, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 specifies that the age of attendance in ECD is three years. Those younger than this should be in nursery centres, yet there is no policy that specifies what the nursery centres should do nor how they need to be effectively run. Zinyama and Takavarasha (2014, p. 105) “Iterated that stakeholder have raised concern regarding national policy inconsistencies, that is to say there has been discord or shifting of goal posts by cabinet ministers with regard to public pronouncements and interpretation leading to lack of permanency in our enacted laws”. The results indicate that there are some policy inconsistencies and these could be influencing educare provisions and accessibility which is very low.

Black, Walker, Fernald and Andersen (2016, p. 3) say “children reach developmental potential when they acquire developmental competencies for academic, behavioural, socio-emotional, and economic accomplishments.” However, in the face of policy inconsistency, there could be ineffective service delivery due to lack of clarity and coordination or lack of due diligence on implementation. It can also result in massive confusion and a lot of blunders can be committed with regards to educare provisions. Zimbabwe, unlike in other countries, still has a policy gap that needs to be fulfilled and this calls for a paradigm shift on policy development, hence there is need to prioritise all early childhood development age levels.

The findings revealed that there are inconsistencies regarding educare in Zimbabwe. For instance Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 in section 9 highlights that children under three years should not be enrolled in early childhood development centres. SI 106 of 2005 further states that schools and most private ECD centres do not have the facilities required by children below three years of age. Even though Director’s circular number 48 of 2007 on the age issue seems to agree with Statutory Instrument 1 of 2005, they differ in that the later proposes that these children should be enrolled in drop in centres which is silent in the other. In essence, the policy frameworks highlighted above show some inconsistencies that could be affecting educare provisions in Zimbabwe (see section 2.2.2.4). Inconsistencies evident in some of the policies show gaps that need to be plugged if educare in Zimbabwe is to grow in leaps and bounds.

Policy consistency is very important as the services provided can be of a quality standard. For instance, “In 2010, the Ethiopian government adopted a new policy framework to provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to the development of children from the prenatal period to seven years of age” (Neuman and Devercelli, 2015). Policy inconsistencies noted from the analysed documents mean Zimbabwe needs to emulate Ethiopia. This can make it easy and possible for more players to take part in establishing birth to three educare centres and provide the much-needed service to an increased number of young children.



#### 4.4.3.2.3 Lack of a relevant curriculum

It has been found that there is no educare curriculum in Zimbabwe. The lack of a relevant and age-appropriate curriculum negatively impacts on standards since operations would not be properly guided. Responses from the qualitative questionnaires bear evidence to what some of the education officials said.

EO1 forwarded that;

*“There is generally a lack of a developmentally appropriate approved curriculum for birth to three services and this impact on standards.”*

In addition, EO2 also highlighted that;

*“For uniformity in educare settings, there is need to have a standard curriculum which is however lacking currently.”*

EO4 stated that;

*“Not having a curriculum can result in discrepancies in terms of content offered.”*

EO5 and EO 6 agreed that;

*“Currently there is no curriculum to be used in birth to three educare.”*

To have educare provisions in the absence of an approved curriculum would be a disaster in the making. A curriculum is there to help service providers on many aspects, notably suitable content for the different age groups, methodologies, likely activities, expected materials, caregiver qualifications, caregiver-child ratio and many others. The National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) (2012) cited in Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016, p. 34) states that “The early childhood development curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children’s development and learning.” South Africa for instance has The National Integrated Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) for Children Birth to Four years (see section 2.2.4.2). The Ministry of Women and Child Development: India (2014, p. 2) echoes that “To ensure optimal development for all children, there is a need to create a planned curriculum framework, encompassing developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills, with flexibility for contextualization and diverse needs of young children.” A suitable and relevant curriculum highlights the expected activities and experiences through which educare settings can achieve their goals. It should also



give guidance to staff and parents on what they are expected to do so children can be effectively assisted in achieving the curriculum goals.

Successes in the establishment and uptake of educare in Zimbabwe require the development of a curriculum from which service providers can base their provisions. A case in point is that of South Africa where a National Curriculum Framework Birth to Five is available (Department of Basic Education, 2015) (see section 2.2.4.2). This framework seeks to give service providers some guidance when working with young children from birth to four years. When there is a curriculum to be followed, the implication is that there would be uniformity on the programme offered across the board. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) added that the early childhood curriculum guides caregivers on the important learning areas and pedagogical approaches that should be utilised at a certain age level. Not having a proper curriculum entails that there is no quality to talk about in educare provisions in Zimbabwe since there are no guidelines to be adhered to. Inadvertently, this has created an unequal society where there are variations on curriculum aspects in educare provisions.

#### **4.4.3.2.4 Lack of monitoring systems**

The findings are indicative that there is generally lack of monitoring systems in ECD and this obviously translates to available educare settings. Education officials who participated through qualitative questionnaire highlighted that there are a lot of undesirable things happening in the ECD sector. This includes the mushrooming of unregistered centres, employment of unqualified caregivers and large classrooms. All these have been credited to a lack of a comprehensive monitoring systems. The participants shared the following excerpts.

EO6 explained that;

*“There is not much supervision and monitoring of activities taking place especially in private ECD settings. Some centers no longer follow laid down stipulations in SI 106 of 2005 on age of attendance and they are even enrolling children under three years.”*

EO5 also detailed that;

*“Out there, there are quite a number of ECD centres operating illegally. Centers that do not meet the minimum requirements for registration under stipulations*

*of SI 106 of 2005. Some centers, have been fraudulently registered though. All this is due to lack of a comprehensive monitoring system.”*

In addition, EO2 proposed that;

*“The lack of a strong monitoring system is leaving some corrupt and unscrupulous service providers scott free and making a killing out of sub-standard provisions to unsuspecting parents.”*

The findings of this research study show that there is a lack of a strong monitoring system for activities happening in ECD centres. According to Ibhaze (2016, p. 178), “The issue of supervision is vital in the process of implementing early childhood care education in Nigeria if success is to be attained.” Unfortunately, educational officials who participated in the study admitted that supervision is not routinely carried out due to shortage of functional vehicles and fuel. The findings revealed that there are some ECD centres that are operating illegally. Some, instead of focusing on 3-5 ECD services, have been found to be taking on board children under three years against stipulations laid down in SI 106 of 2005. OECD (2015, p. 5 ) cited in OECD (2018, p. 97) states that “Monitoring re provisions is understood as the process of systematically tracking aspects of ECEC services, staff, child development and curriculum implementation, with a view to data collection, accountability, enhancing effectiveness or quality.” The findings are indicative that there are poor monitoring systems available and that has resulted in children’s insecurity and exposure to poor and unhealthy conditions in some of the existing ECD centres. In addition, Sooter (2013) cited in Ibhaze (2016, p. 178) claims that “regular and appropriate supervision in early childhood care education will help in evaluating the programme as well as in decision-making processes.” Therefore, monitoring systems need to be upgraded and improved at all costs. All centres operating illegally should be closed as a matter of urgency to avoid corrupting young children’s minds.

#### **4.4.3.2.5 Lack of enough qualified personnel**

The education officials agreed that there is lack of enough and qualified personnel in the schools and ECD centres. Data collected through questionnaires show the concerns of these officials. For instance, participant EO4 explained that;

*“There is need to train and employ more early childhood development teachers. The government should work on modalities to deploy all qualified ECD teachers soon after finishing the training course. I am against the current scenario where some qualified ECD teachers are roaming the streets when schools and centers are in dire need of their service.”*

EO 6 highlighted that;

*“The government’s failure to employ ECD qualified teachers that are out there is a challenge that should be rectified urgently. This is creating an artificial shortage and resulting in high ratios in the schools and private ECD centers.”*

EO1 also added that;

*“The government ought to recruit enough qualified teachers.”*

The government’s reluctance to employ all qualified ECD teachers has been found to be a major contributor to the shortage that is evident in the schools currently (see sections 2.2.2.5; 2.2.3.1). The interview data clearly show that the district education officials were concerned with the current status in the country where there is a shortage of ECD teachers in the schools, yet there are some qualified ECD teachers not in employment. The supply of enough and qualified ECD teachers in the schools and centres is crucial for quality provision. According to Ntumi (2016), the shortage of qualified teachers has ripple effects on quality provisions as well as expansion of ECD services to also cover birth to three years children in educare settings. Considering the lack of enough and qualified teachers in ECD provisions for 3-5 years where there are policy guidelines, one wonders what would be the situation in educare with its lack of clear policy frameworks. The lack of enough and qualified teachers in ECD settings threatens the growth and development of educare services in the Zimbabwean ECD sector in its entirety.

The successful implementation of any programme lies in human resources available. (see section 2.2.2.5). Findings revealed that there is a shortage of human resources in the ECD sector. Evidence from the termly reports show that there were more than 60 vacancies in both districts. This shortage thus impact negatively on ECD practices, for example, the teacher-child ratio was reported to be big. Precisely, it was found that there were not enough teachers for the ECD sector commonly found in schools and private centres. Success in early childhood development cannot be realised in the

absence of enough and relevantly qualified teachers. It emerged from the findings that qualified personnel is not enough in the schools and private centres in the two districts studied. This impinges on the quality of services that can be offered. For example, due to lack of qualified facilitators, classes were becoming too big and difficult to manage. Some schools were hiring unqualified teachers who obviously lacked the requisite knowledge to help children develop. Research findings by Ntumi (2016) revealed that teachers greatly influence the implementation and success of a programme, hence educare cannot be successful without adequate and appropriate teaching staff. Not having enough teachers can demotivate the few available teachers because they would be overwhelmed (see section 2.2.3.1). The fact that some schools hired unqualified teachers or relied on volunteer parents means that they would not be able to appropriately engage children in relevant activities that can aid their development. The shortage of adequately qualified personnel in ECD services is harmful to the progress and development of children and ultimately to the education system of a country. I therefore argue that the failure by the government to timeously deploy newly qualified teachers in schools is a handicap in the development of early childhood development programmes.

#### **4.4.3.2.6 Lack of funding**

The establishment and successful implementation of educare is determined by the level of funding available. Unfortunately, findings of this study reveal that there is lack of government funding in ECD provisions in Zimbabwe. Data collected from the education officials bear testimony to this.

EO1 viewed that;

*“There is lack of funding to support ECD provisions, educare included.”*

EO2 also shared that;

*“Funding is one of the most common challenges the government is facing and this is evidenced by the poor infrastructure available in schools and some ECD centers for (3-5 years).”*

EO5 added that;

*“Parents are the chief financiers of the ECD programme and there is no way birth to three educare accessibility can be increased in the absence of enough funding by the government.”*

Lack of adequate funding of early childhood development programmes greatly affects provisions and standards. The interview findings indicate that parents are the chief financiers of early childhood development programme through levies and fees payment. Chikutuma (2013) says that limited funding of ECD services at all levels negatively impact on quality as well as implementation levels. Lack of funding, therefore, makes provisions to be expensive and beyond the reach of many. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016) states that, notwithstanding the case that investing in early childhood development is key, trends show, however, that funding in this sector is very minimal. Lack of proper funding interrupts educare provisions.

According to Ibhaze (2016) poor funding of early childhood programmes negatively impacts on infrastructural development, staffing issues and resources provision, all of which result in poor quality service provision. There is need for the government to come up with funding modalities that can help to promote the establishment of educare centres. If funding is availed, the probability is that more action can be seen on educare in terms of accessibility and participation (see section 2.2.3.2). Ntumi (2016) put forward that, in the absence of adequate resources, no meaningful practices can take place. Therefore, enough funding in ECD is crucial to improve the quality of service provision.

#### **4.4.3.2.7 Lack of information on educare**

Information pertaining to the establishment of educare is scarce in Zimbabwe. Lack of information on educare is one of the findings that came out from document analysis. The termly reports and policies that were analysed had no provisions for educare services. Instead, there is a bias towards 3-5 years, where there are clear guidelines on provision, methodology, length of sessions and curriculum among other aspects. The lack of information is not a problem peculiar to Zimbabwe. In Slovakia, for example, information on birth to three years programmes is not readily available and there is no government ministry that has been mandated with the supervision and monitoring of services of this nature (Kostrub, Severini and Mahrer-Milovcikova, 2016). A scenario like this makes it difficult for the establishment and operationalisation of

educare services. It also means there would be no standard guidelines that service providers could adhere to.

The lack of information in policies has effects on effective educare services. In the absence of clear guidelines, it would be difficult to establish educare operations because there would be no minimum set standards. This implies that quality would be compromised since there would be no guidelines on the expectations. Thus, lack of policy specifications is an obstacle that can be attributed to the current scenario where educare services are very limited and not easily accessible in Zimbabwe. A specific policy framework can guide service providers on curriculum issues, caregiver qualifications, and other critical aspects to help young children's healthy development. Landry (2014) says the importance of ECD implies that policy and practice decision-makers should develop frameworks with clear guidelines. It is not pleasing to note that the ECD policies in place currently lack sufficient information on educare. The lack of information is one of the reasons that is undermining the growth and development of educare in Zimbabwe. Lack of information regarding educare in Zimbabwe leads to challenges with structures, establishment and operations of the service. The current state where educare programmes are somehow invisible and not readily available will have to continue for some time until deliberate efforts are made to address existing gaps in the current policies. In the absence of relevant information, it would be difficult for parents to embrace educare provisions because they will not be well versed with them.

#### **4.6 Theme 4: The elements of the attachment theory on educare**

Attachment issues is another emerging theme in this research. It is a dream of each and every caregiver to have quality attachments with the children under their care. Attachment entails the nature of relationships formed between the child and his or her caregivers. The attachment type that can develop between the caregiver and the child depends on the nature of interactions that take place in educare environments. Since attachment is a lifelong issue, educare programmes should strive to build and maintain positive and secure attachments. The findings are presented in the following table.

**Table 4.5: Themes and categories: Parents and the attachment theory**

Research question	Themes	Categories
What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?	The elements of the attachment theory on educare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure attachment</li> <li>• Inconsistent caregiving practices</li> </ul>

#### **4.6.1 Sub- theme 4.1: Parents and the attachment theory**

Parents are key players in their children’s life from the time of birth into adulthood. How the parents would have taken care of their children, has a bearing in their life. Parents should be aware of the key elements of the attachment theory and their significance to child development. Discussed below are the results of the study regarding parents and the attachment theory.

##### **4.6.1.1 Secure attachment**

Attachment relationships gradually emerge between the child and his or her caregivers early in their life. This calls for caregivers who are responsive and sensitive to their needs if they are to develop secure attachment patterns. Caregivers must be always available so they could comfort them whenever they are distressed or have fears. Secure attachment is developed if the caregiver and the child relate and interact positively during the early years in a warm and encouraging environment. The development of secure attachment is a result of quality interactions the child may have with caregivers and the environment. Data collected from the parents’ narratives shows the possibility of young children developing secure attachments with caregivers in educare settings. Extracts presented below bear evidence to this.

P5 presented that;

*“A good attachment bond between the child and caregiver will provide room for positive growth and development. Children feel free to express their feelings to a caregiver who is loving and caring.”*

P4 added that;



*“Child-caregiver attachment relationship plays a pivotal role in the regulation of stress in time of distress, anxiety and illness. The caregiver should have a small number of children to take care of, so that attachment is build and maintained. It also helps children to build trust with the caregiver and the system.”*

P7 explained that;

*“There is need for quality caregiving practices from knowledgeable caregivers. Caregivers should be responsive to meet the needs and interests of children. They need to be relied on by the children under their care.”*

P8 added that;

*“A securely attached child has confidence, high self-esteem, independence and emotionally stable. There is need for educare centres to adhere to policy regulations if any, especially on ratio, which should be low. Centres should also minimise on high staff turnover as this impact secure attachment development.”*

P10 also highlighted that;

*“Child-caregiver attachment is very important because the child relies on the caregiver for protection. As such, early childhood learning centres should be closely monitored so that a low caregiver-child ratio is adhered to, this aids in the development of secure attachments.”*

The findings show that educare provision can lead to the development of secure attachment patterns mostly if there is a low child-caregiver ratio and avoidance of high staff turnover. It is important that educare settings maintain a low child-caregiver ratio (see sections 2.3.1.1; 2.4.2.3) and have conducive environments that allow for quality interactions to take place. “Secure attachment develops when the caregiver responses are consistently in tune with the child’s” (Multnomah County Family Court Services, 2014). A study by Mugweni (2017) that was looking at access, equity and quality issues in ECD in Zimbabwe, found that there were large classes which undermined quality in ECD environments. A low child-caregiver ratio allows for more individualised attention to be given to each child. Caregivers in educare settings should provide nurturing relationships that are inclusive of being readily available, consistent, responsive, loving and caring.



#### 4.6.1.2 Inconsistent caregiving

In educare, there are some children who fail to develop secure attachments with caregivers due to inconsistent caregiving practices. Findings in this research indicate that some children develop insecure-avoidant attachment patterns with their caregivers. For example,

P8 explained that;

*“Educare centres should also minimise on high staff turnover as this result in inconsistent caregiving practices which negatively impact on attachment development.”*

In addition, P9 highlighted that;

*“Attachment with parents and caregivers can somehow be affected if there is no consistency. The child may be confused.”*

P6 forwarded that;

*“The parents should not have a tendency of changing the child form one caregiver to another as the child may not have a trusted attachment figure. Educare centres should also have a stable staff compliment and avoid hiring and firing tendencies as children will have to develop new relationships all over again.”*

The presented data indicates that secure attachments between children and caregivers can be further promoted when there is a low staff turnover. In cases where there is a high staff turnover, young children can be confused and this impacts on their existing and new relationships. Rich and Roman (2019) state that lack of consistency negatively affects the child in the development of attachment relationships with caregivers. In cases where there is a high staff turnover, the caregivers' responsiveness and sensitivity will never be the same, hence the child ends up being confused. A high staff turnover makes it difficult for children to quickly forget about their experiences with previous caregivers. Rather, they will feel less connected to the new caregiver at first and then gradually develop new relationships depending on the responsiveness and sensitivity of the new caregiver on site. According to Newman (2017,p.2), “When children fail to develop positive attachments to their parents or caregivers during infancy, children often suffer in their socio-emotional growth” (see section 2.2.3.1.1). Inconsistent caregiving practices can be attributed to the

development of insecure-avoidant attachment patterns in young children. The implication here is that educare settings should be consistent in their services and they should try to maintain the same staff complement for as long as it is possible since this is crucial for secure attachment building.

#### 4.6.2 Sub theme 4.2: District education officials and the attachment theory

The data collected from the district education officials through qualitative questionnaire is presented in table 4.7. Attachment relationships in their various forms shapes the socio-emotional domains of young children. The categories discussed under this theme include responsive and consistent care as well as inconsistent caregiving practices. Verbatim quotes of the participants' responses are presented here as well.

**Table 4.6: Themes and categories: Education officials and the attachment theory**

Research Question	Theme	Categories
What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?	Attachment issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsive, loving, caring and friendly caregiving practices</li> <li>• Inconsistent caregiving practices</li> </ul>

##### 4.6.2.1 Responsive and consistent caregiving

Children from birth form attachment bonds with their caregivers. The attachment theory concerns the quality of interactions that may exist between children and their caregivers. Responsive caregiving practices are essential for children to develop secure attachment with their caregivers. Caregiver's responsiveness fosters trust and security, key attributes that enhances child development. This entails that the caregiver is always there for the child, responding and providing for every need. This leads to the development of a secure attachment pattern between the child and his or her caregiver. Education officials were of the view that responsive and consistent caregiving practices are crucial for the child's development. Below are some of the statements proffered by the education officials.

EO5 explained that;

*“Attachment concerns the relationship a child has with the caregiver. The key issue here is for the caregiver to be available and responsive to the children’s needs and interests timeously.”*

In addition, EO1 added that;

*“Attachment is a useful relationship that should be promoted at all costs for the benefit of the child. The caregiver should be responsive and consistent in his/her caregiving, as such there should be a reasonable and manageable number of children under each caregiver.”*

In agreement, participant EO3 forwards that;

*“Child-caregiver attachment is critical in laying a strong foundation for all future developments. Caregivers should strive to be sensitive and responsive to children’s needs and interests if they are to promote the emergency of secure attachments. Sensitivity to the needs of children is key in promoting and maintaining a positive relationship. Securely attached children are confident to explore their environment.”*

On the same note, EO5 also said;

*“Attachment concerns the relationship a child has with the caregiver. Personally, I regard responsive caregiving to take centre stage if the child is to develop positive attachment. Positive attachment is critical since the child can get used to the caregiver and this gives him or her a sense of trust, something that aid the development of the child.”*

The findings indicated that responsive and consistent caregiving practices are crucial on attachment development. The results reveals that consistency in positive caregiving practices is highly influential in building secure attachment between the caregiver and the child (Wilson-Ali, Barratt-Pugh and Knaus, 2019). This can also impact on families and the society at large. Responsive and consistent caregiving behaviours increases chances for secure attachment development ( see sections 2.3.1.1; 2.4.2.3. The findings suggest that caregivers who are responsive make a valuable impact on young children’s holistic development. Caregivers crucially nurture , support and promote positive relationships that leads to social skills development in young children (WHO and UNICEF, 2018). The consistency of caregivers’ responses

and level of sensitivity fosters young children's trust and a sense of security. Responsive and consistent caregiving practices can nurture relationships that are positive between children and their caregivers, thus laying a solid foundation for learning and development of a child.

#### **4.6.2.2 Inconsistent caregiving practices**

My analysis of the interview data shows that some caregivers are not consistent in their caregiving practices. Whenever caregiving practices are not consistent, there are high chances of children developing insecure attachment patterns. Inconsistent caregiving practices have been found to be caused by high staff turnover and a high caregiver-child ratio. The following are highlights from the questionnaires data collected.

EO1 presented that;

*“There should be a reasonable and manageable number of children under each caregiver. Frequent changes of caregivers cause challenges with children's development of attachment.”*

In addition, EO3 explained that;

*“A high caregiver-child ratio is a recipe for disaster. It usually results in inconsistent caregiving practices because the caregiver will not be able to closely interact with all the children.”*

EO6 said;

*“Lack of quality caregiving impact negatively on attachment building between the caregiver and the child. When the ratio is too high, there is lack of one on sessions and the caregiver may not be able to interact with the children in the same way consistently and this greatly affect attachment development.”*

Caregivers will be in a difficult situation when there is a high turnover ratio. Caregivers may find it difficult to consistently and positively give all the children in their care a reliable service if they are too many. The caregivers may not be sensitive to the children's needs and this stifles children's development. WHO and UNICEF (2018. p. 6) declare that “Children who do not experience the nurturing care necessary to enable their capacities to flourish are less healthy, grow poorly and are more likely to have difficulties relating confidently to others.” In cases where young children receive

inconsistent caregiving, the probability is that they may develop insecure attachment with their caregivers. The children will not be able to trust the caregivers and to predict their actions and responses. Inconsistent caregiving practices confuse the children. They may develop feelings of restlessness, and become fearful and sometimes teary because they have no one to trust and cling to.

In cases where there is high staff turnover, there would be chances of inconsistent caregiving practices. Caregiving practices that a young child may experience at the hands of multiple caregivers may hinder their development of secure attachment and lead to insecure and ambivalent attachment patterns (see section 2.3.1.1). Koch and Franzsen (2017, p. 50) agree that “Rotational shift work can contribute to caregivers failing to form relationships with the children they care for, and can result in an apathy towards children's developmental and emotional needs.” It means the children can meet some caregivers who are not familiar with them. Inconsistent caregiving practices end up confusing and putting children at risk of failing to build meaningful attachments.

#### **4.7 Theme 5: The overlapping relationships between parents, teachers and educare**

The data gathered highlighted that there are overlapping relationships between the school (ECD centre) and the home. Overlapping relationships are crucial in children's growth and development. There should be positive relationships of the home, school or educare centre. Successes that can be recorded in birth to three educare settings depend on the level of support and participation of the parents and the community at large. The sub-themes captured in table 4.8 and discussed include parents as decision makers, parents as volunteers in materials production and payment of fees and levies.

**Table 4.7: Themes and categories: Parents and Epstein model**

Research question	Theme	Sub-themes and categories
What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the overlapping relationships between school/educare and home?	Parents and Epstein's model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents as decision makers</li> <li>• Parents as volunteers in materials production</li> <li>• Payment of fees and levies</li> </ul>

#### 4.7.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Parents and Epstein model

Parents have what it takes for educare to succeed in Zimbabwe, hence they should be actively involved. Their participation is important in supporting children's growth and development. When parents understand the activities and experiences children are exposed to in educare, they will be better placed to assess the child's competencies even at home. Parental involvement is crucial to bridging the gap that may exist between the home and educare centres. The roles of parents include decision making, getting involved in materials production and payment of fees and levies.

##### 4.7.1.1 Parents as decision makers

Successful implementation and development of any early childhood development programme rests on the level of participation and support from the parents. Data gathered through the narratives of parents on overlapping relationships shows that parents have important roles to play in educare provisions.

P6 stated that;

*"Parents can be members of the centre or school Development Committee and participate in decision making for the good of the institution." Parents also play a role in decision making as some of them can be members of the school or centre parental board."*

The roles played by parents are many, in addition, P1 said;

*“Parents as key stakeholders in early childhood participate in varied ways. Parents make decisions regarding their children, for example as members of the centre development committee.”*

P3 intoned that;

*“Parents can also be selected as School Development Committee members a decision-making board.”*

P4 highlighted that;

*“Parents can participate in materials and toy production workshops; they pay levies and fees and can be volunteers to be assistant caregivers or they can use their skills to help the centre to develop.”*

The data from the narratives indicates that parents have many roles to play in the overlapping relationship between the home and the school or educare centre. The findings imply that the level of effectiveness of these roles reflect the value that is placed on young children’s future. If parents can diligently play their roles, accessibility to educare practices can be increased. According to Puhrova (2016), “Educational institutions have some formal home-school group, whether it is a parent board, a School Advisory Council, working to bridge the space between families and education.” It relates well to the results of this study that highlighted the parents’ role as School Development Committee members, a parental board that helps to make decisions for the institution to function effectively. A strong partnership between parents and educare centres is probably the best way in which positive changes can be realised in the lives of young children (Newchurch, 2017) (see section 2.3.2.5). The promotion of mutual relationships of parents and educare authorities has to be emphasised since it can lead to children benefitting more out of it. The results suggest that parents have many roles they play and they can be crucial if provision of educare is to be increased and become more accessible in Zimbabwe.

#### **4.7.1.2 Materials production**

The findings also show that parents can get involved in materials production. Parents can volunteer to engage themselves in material production so that the educare setting and children can benefit. Results collected through interviews of education officials show that parents participating in materials production can save the centre some money.



P1 said;

*“Parents can participate in the construction of outdoor or indoor play areas or materials.”*

P3 and P4 highlighted that;

*“Parents can participate in construction of learning centers and materials production.”*

Adding on, EO3 explained that;

*“Some parents can volunteer to use their qualifications and skills to provide services at an educare centre. Dress makers, Carpenters and welders can be handy when it comes to materials production.”*

EO4 put forward that;

*“Parents can come in as volunteers to use their skills to help develop the Centre. They can take part in teaching and learning materials production.”*

Results found in the study revealed that the partaking of parents in educare can save the centre a couple of dollars since parents can volunteer to use their skills and resources in materials production. If parents are motivated and consistently avail themselves for material production, educare settings can always have enough and relevant materials that can be beneficial to children’s development. The Australian Government: Department of Education and Training (2018), pointed out that the relationships between educare practitioners and children and their families has a bearing on their learning as well as development. OECD (2011, p. 1) pointed out that parents can “volunteer to help and support to plan and run centre events and fundraising activities, donating their time to improve facilities, or assisting in the centre and sharing their skills and expertise.” The reviews indicate that participation of parents in educare provisions is an ideal connection that is important for the positive child development to take place. Therefore, parents participation has to be effective if educare successes are to be realised in Zimbabwe.

#### **4.7.1.3 Payment of fees and levies.**

Responsible parents in educare should pay their children’s fees and consistently and early. This is an important role that makes it possible for the centres to function effectively. OECD (2011) states that parental support in during the early childhood years is significant in improving the academic and social competences of young

children. In this regard, data collected shows that payment of fees and levies is an important role that parents should consistently play. Responses from the narratives are therefore presented below.

P1 explained that;

*“Parents participate in educare through payment of fees and levies.”*

P2 further stated that;

*“Parents should demonstrate a positive view of educare by continuously paying fees and levies on time.”*

In addition, P6 explained that;

*“Parents are responsible for paying fees and levies for the centre to function well.”*

The overlapping relationships are important in ensuring that educare services could be of a high quality. Findings of the study show that parents can play a significant role in educare, that is payment of fees and levies, so that the centres would function smoothly with enough and appropriate resources. According to Pan World Education (2017), “Access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children.” This means payment of fees and levies ensures that children have the necessary support required for them to succeed in educare settings and in the future. This calls for parents to diligently play their roles effectively. Thus, I claim that parents are key stakeholders who can make things happen in early childhood development. The many roles that they play can effectively lead to the development of the sector.

#### 4.7.2 Sub-theme 4.2: District Education officials and Epstein’s model

**Table 4.8: Themes and categories: District education officials and Epstein’s model**

Research question	Theme	Sub-themes and categories
What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the overlapping relationships between school/educare and home?	The overlapping relationships between parents, teachers and educare	District education officials and Epstein’s model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of two-way communication</li> <li>• Supervision and monitoring of activities</li> </ul>

The foundation of all future developments is laid early, most probably during the first five years (The National Academies of Sciences. Engineering. Medicine, n.d). It is therefore significant that stakeholders exert more effort to promote educare services so that all children can benefit. Information gathered through interviews of education officials revealed that overlapping relationships are key in the successful implementation of educare. It was found that education officials have important roles to play in overlapping relationships between the home and the educare setting. The categories discussed are promotion of a two-way communication channel and promoting harmonious relationships.

##### 4.7.2.1 Promoting a two-way communication channel

Data gathered regarding the overlapping relationships between home and the educare centre show that there should be a two-way communication channel. The two parties have to consistently and effectively communication together on all matters.

EO 2 explained that;

*“The relationship should be characterised by mutual understanding and respect from home and the centre. The teacher can effectively communicate with the parents and other stakeholders.”*

EO3 added that;

*“The teachers and parents should create a two-way communication channel if a strong relationship is to be developed. Through effective communication, there should be no interference with each other’s work and this help to avoid tensions building.”*

To add on, EO5 had this to say;

*“Having a two-way communication channel in overlapping relationships, is key in sharing information that can help in both settings (home or educare)..*

Findings of this research show that it is of paramount importance for the teachers to have harmonious relationships with the families of their children. Teachers are crucial in the development of strong school-family relationships and this can be as a result of effective communication. The role of the teacher is to promote a two-way communication system. The existence of effective two-way communication between the teachers and the families is necessary in the implementation or operation of birth to three educare programmes. It ensures that the parents can provide the much-needed support and be actively involved in the activities in educare settings. Puhrova (2016) asserts that educators play significant roles to help children succeed in life. Positive and respectful relationships serve as the tool that keeps both settings abreast with each other. Through a two-way communication channel, caregivers and parents can freely share relevant and important information regarding the child’s development. Harmonious relationships that can be developed through effective communication makes both the teachers and the parents to be better equipped to work and deal with the young children.

Voco et al (2014) state that educare centres should consistently communicate with the families regarding their child’s progress in all facets of development. Two way communication is key in closing the gap between the home and an educare centre. The existence of a two way communication channel with parents leads to them having a better understanding of their children’s life outside of the home. Epstein (2013) views that constant communication with parents and keeping them abreast with policies influences attendance by learners. For educare to succeed, parents need to be in tune with what happens in such programmes for young children (see section 2.3.2.2). This is critical in creating and mantaining relationships which can be fully utilised in the home and in the centre environment. The existence of a harmonious relationship

between the home and educare means that parents and caregivers can freely engage in fruitful dialogue that can impact on children's growth and development.

#### **4.7.2.2 Promoting harmonious relationships between the home and the**

##### **educare centre**

Parental involvement in educare programmes is a welcome development and a widely accepted gesture. Findings show unanimous agreement by the participants that positive relationships between parents and the school or ECD centre are important. Participants in this study had the following views regarding relationships between parents and educare centres.

EO1 is convinced that;

*“The teacher/caregiver can share important information on child development issues with parents. His or Her ability to engage parents is crucial in the effective teaching and learning of the child. Parental involvement in ECD centers play a pivotal role so the centre and the community should work collaboratively.”*

EO2 agreed and added that;

*“There should be a good relationship between the ECD centre and the parents since home and school gap can be effectively be bridged. The teacher should develop harmonious working relationships with the parents since this can improve the quality-of-service provision in educare settings.”*

Adding on, EO4 said;

*“There should be a close relationship between the teachers and the parents so that the two parties can share information concerning the child's development. The school and the home can work together towards developing and improving accessibility to educare.”*

EO5 chipped in saying;

*“There should be a closer relationship between these key stakeholders. The working together of teachers and parents in educare service provision sector is key in helping it develop. Parents in turn will get knowledge on child development issues from the caregivers and they will develop their caregiving practices.”*

EO6 opined that;

*“An effective system should have a strong partnership between the teachers and the parents. A harmonious relationship is key in bridging the gap between home and the school.”*

Caregivers play crucial roles in creating positive relationships between parents and educare centre stakeholders. If parents get exposed to child development issues, they will be better placed to take improved care of their children and this is crucial for children’s development. Christina Weiland, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan, highlighted that “Research shows that home support for early learning complements learning at school” (Sheridan, 2018). The involvement of caregivers and families in educare settings has the potential to help children achieve their potential in future. Kurtulmus (2016) asserts that “Parental involvement in early childhood education has been accepted as a crucial element of early childhood development.” Through effective involvement, the caregivers and parents in ECD settings can freely share important information about children, for instance how they view their children and the goals they have for them.

It is important for caregivers and parents to consistently communicate with each other and have a collaborative partnership. The Center on Innovations in Learning (2019, p. 20) states that “Educate parents to support their children’s learning and teachers to work with parents.” This is tremendously important because the interconnectedness between the caregivers, the home and the early childhood development centre presents opportunities for children’s positive development. Effective partnerships between caregivers and parents in educare settings can ensure that children get opportunities that help to lay a solid foundation for future developments (see section 2.2.2.3; 2.3.2.6). The collaboration between caregivers and parents in educare provisions can even influence policy and curriculum development for the sector. Stakeholders therefore have to work on modalities that encourage parents to become more involved in the growth and development of their young children.

#### **4.8 Strategies to improve educare**

There are no set standards for educare in Zimbabwe. Currently policies lack specific information about what children can expect to encounter in educare settings. The policies have created a vacuum that I believe is making it difficult for relevant

stakeholders to establish educare settings, despite their ability to stimulate the developmental needs of young children. Zimbabwe need to borrow from countries such as Ghana that have developed ideal standards for children in 0-3 years age range. Ghana has a proper policy framework known as the “early childhood care and development (ECCD) that guides the establishment of programmes for these children and highlights the competences children should achieve at various stages of their development” (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana, 2018, p. 2). This means that service providers have clear guidance of what they are expected to do with regards to the establishment and development of programmes for young children in these age categories.

It is unfortunate, however, that educare practices in Zimbabwe are inaccessible in public schools and ECD centres as well as most privately owned early learning centres. I am of the opinion that a follow up on the recommendations made by the Presidential commission of inquiry into education and training of 1999 be made and comprehensive ECD policy frameworks be developed so they can include birth to three educare aspects. According to Panworld Education (2017), ensuring equality of opportunity in life will require addressing the causes of inequality of opportunity in early childhood which requires sustained, targeted, and complex policies. I propose that an almost similar stance such as that taken on 3-5 years ECD programmes attachment to existing primary schools be taken in an effort to promote and increase access to educare. New or improved policies should emphasise the establishment of educare facilities to accommodate the majority of young children so they can benefit from the many opportunities available.

#### **4.9 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, focus was on data presentation, interpretation and analysis. The study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. An inductive approach that made use of the research questions helped to narrow the scope and focus of the study. The data was analysed and interpreted simultaneously in line with the emerging themes.

The findings indicated that there are gaps regarding educare in Zimbabwe. There is need for stakeholders in government and ECD sectors to work towards developing



comprehensive policy framework that can be key in facilitating the establishment and implementation of educare services. Chapter five is going to look at empirical research findings related to the questions as well as scientific research findings related to the theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In chapter four, the findings of this research were presented. The experiences I have gone through in this research journey, made me to reflect on my findings and compare them with the findings of similar or related empirical studies done earlier. The essence was to identify whether there were any similarities and contradictions from the findings. The chapter presents new insights that were drawn from the research findings. The chapter also looks at how the research study would contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Also included in this concluding chapter are the recommendations for further research and the limitations to the study.

#### **5.2 Chapter Summaries**

In this section, a summary of the four previous chapters is given.

##### **5.2.1 Chapter 1**

This chapter, presented the background, where key indicators to the research study were discussed. It also describes the rationale of carrying out this research study and highlighted the problem in detail. The guiding research questions are also presented in this chapter. A brief presentation of the theoretical framework as guided by Bowlby's attachment theory and Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership model was given. There are also summaries of key components like research methodology and ethical considerations among others. The chapter has information about the delimitations and limitations as well. The chapter also contains a brief presentation of the research methodologies that were employed in the process of data collection.

##### **5.2.2 Chapter 2**

The chapter focussed on the review of literature and the theoretical framework used in the study. The literature review addressed perceptions, attachment issues and overlapping relationships regarding educare provisions in Zimbabwe. A comparison of policy frameworks from Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe on early childhood development practices was done in chapter 2. This brought some insights regarding

educare in the Zimbabwean context. It was noted that the above-mentioned countries are far better in terms of educare provisions than Zimbabwe because they have specific policies that guide the establishment and activities in the sector. Without clear policies, it is difficult to provide any meaningful services. The chapter also has a presentation on some impediments that the Zimbabwean government could be facing regarding educare provisions. Chief among them was the lack of funding, infrastructure and, of course, policy regulations. The theoretical framework rooted in Bowlby's attachment theory and Epstein's model was explained in detail in the chapter.

### **5.2.3 Chapter 3**

The research design and methodologies used in this study were focused on in chapter 3. My research followed the interpretivist paradigm embedded in qualitative research approach and these two items were explained fully in this chapter. Another aspect that was examined in the chapter is the narrative research design. Furthermore, the chapter presented the research methods used in the process of data generation. Issues regarding sampling, the participants, data collection methodologies and instruments with regards to educare unravelling from the perspectives of parents and district education officials were highlighted in this chapter. Focus was also made to roles played by the researcher as well as on trustworthiness issues among others. Ethical considerations are also part and parcel of the chapter.

### **5.2.4 Chapter 4**

In chapter 4, I discussed the qualitative data on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The data was collected through parents' narratives, district education officials interviews and document analysis where termly reports and policies were focused on. The data sought to answer the research questions formulated to guide the study. The thematic approach to data presentation, interpretation and analysis was followed. In this regard, a number of themes emerged from the presented data.

## **5.3 Overview of key literature findings**

An overview of the key literature findings is presented in this section. The reflections I have on literature are compared and contrasted with the findings of this study.

### **5.3.1 Findings related to perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe**

Literature findings have shown that educare is beneficial to children's development in many ways. Shonkoff (2009, p. 2) has proved that educare provision enhances the cognitive, emotional, and social domains in young children (see sections 2.21; 2.2.1.2; 2.2.1.3; 4.4.2.1; 4.4.2.1.1). It became clear that the opportunities that children encounter in educare settings have the potential to help with their holistic development. Therefore, there is need to increase investments in educare provisions so that the service becomes easily accessible to many deserving children.

Evidence from a number of researches show that brain development is most rapid between birth and five years, this means children in these age categories should be afforded the opportunities to attend high quality early years programmes. The finding resonates well with the ideals of Mathers and Erekly-Stevens (2018) concerning high-quality early care and education (ECE) starting in infancy which may give children a boost to ensure they start school on par with their peers who are more advantaged. Quality educare should have the necessary support mechanisms which enhance brain development. The educare environment has to be conducive, with enough and relevant materials that are safe and age appropriate. The appropriateness of the educare activities that young children engage in leads to the development of the brain (see section 2.2.1.4; 4.4.3.1.2).

Educare provisions have been found to enhance the development of cognition (see section 2.2.1.1; 4.4.2.1.1). The development of cognition means that young children can solve problems, and discover things by themselves among other crucial skills. Cognitive development in young children is widely influenced by Piaget, a cognitive development theorist. According to Owens (2008), the development of cognitive faculties rests on the appropriateness of activities as this can lead to information processing, comprehension and knowledge growth. A study by (Yazejian. et al. 2018, p. 435) found out that "Children who attended educare or other centre-based programs scored better than children who had little or no formal child care on measures of English language and math skills and had fewer parent-reported behavior problems." Educare services thus enhances the development of cognition in children. Therefore, young children who participate in early childhood development activities have a better

chance of developing problem solving and thinking skills which will have a bearing in their future endeavours.

The findings clearly show the benefits of having children participate in educare, their social and emotional skills are enhanced. The interactions children engage in with children of their age as well as the caregivers and a suitable environment expose them to more opportunities for social and emotional development. “Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that make up the foundation of human development” (Shonkoff, 2009, p. 2). Educare provision is critical in shaping children’s future developments. It is important as it provides a strong base on which young children can make friends, resolve conflicts, regulate their behaviours and be acceptable members of the society (see sections 2.2.1.3; 4.4.2.1.1). Yazejian et al. (2018) state that the engagement of children in educare can promote the regulation of emotions and conflict resolutions. It is therefore important for young children to receive nurturing and responsive interactions if they are to form strong relationships and be in a position to regulate their emotions.

Educare settings have been classified as fertile grounds that can lead to young children’s physical development (see section 2.2.1.2; 4.4.2.1.1). Healthy physical development is a result of a conducive environment in educare settings. In educare, there should be safe and clean environments where children are encouraged to explore and this is important in the development of physical skills (Catholic Relief Services). Educare settings also have to have equipment for climbing, pushing, pulling, rolling and an open space that can encourage running and team activities. Engagement of children with any of the equipment highlighted above enhances physical development. Effective educare provisions should expose children to learning opportunities that enhance balance, mobility, and coordination of the whole body.

Evidence shows that educare has the potential of having developmental defects in children identified early so that interventions can also be started sooner rather than later (see sections 2.2.1.5; 4.4.2.1.3). Teachers and caregivers have to be well trained and equipped with the necessary skills that enable them to identify defects in speech, language or articulation disorders in children under their care. They should be keen observers and listeners of young children. Catholic Relief Services (2016, p. 3) echoes

that “Children with disabilities and vulnerable children who are socially marginalized and discriminated against will have opportunities for early detection and intervention which ensures child’s survival, health, growth, and psycho-social and intellectual development.” Once a problem or defect is identified early, the probability of having some preventive and corrective measures can be taken to minimise the damage it can cause in later life. Thus, the sooner a defect is detected, the better (see section 2.2.1.5; 4.4.2.1.3).

In this study, some challenges that impede educare were found. It was found that policy issues impact greatly on educare provisions in Zimbabwe (2.2.4; 2.2.2.4; 2.2.4.3; 4.5.4; 4.5.4.1; 4.5.4.2). The available policies lack specifications regarding educare provisions. For example, Secretary’s Circular 14 of 2004 led to the expansion of ECD provisions for 3-5-year-olds (see section 2.3.4; 4.7.1.2) (The government of Zimbabwe, 2004). Regarding educare provisions, the policy is silent. Another policy document that was analysed was the Director’s Circular 12 of 2005 which sought to provide guidelines on ECD provisions in primary schools (The government of Zimbabwe, 2005) (see sections 2.3.4; 4.7.1.3). To some extent, aspects of birth to three educare are highlighted in Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 and the Director’s Circular 48 of 2007 (The government of Zimbabwe, 2006); The government of Zimbabwe, 2007) (see sections 2.2.4.3). Unfortunately, apart from the mere mentioning of drop-in centres, no other details are given regarding these centres. The policies analysed indicate that there is no readily available information on birth to three educare provisions and this could be contributing to the current status of the service which is very low.

Effective educare provision should have a relevant and suitable curriculum (see sections 2.2.2.2; 2.2.3.6; 4.4.3.2.3). The curriculum should aim at meeting the developmental needs of children birth to three. The finding shows that despite the importance of such a curriculum, Zimbabwe is lagging behind since it does not have a birth to three educare curriculum. Literature findings suggest that an educare curriculum is crucial in helping children reach their potential. Ministry of Women and Child Development: India (2014, p. 2) states that “A curriculum framework is required to ensure that important learning areas are covered, taking care of all the developmental needs of the young child.” The lack of a curriculum in the Zimbabwean

context entails that quality of educare provisions is compromised. In the absence of a curriculum, it means things could be happening in a haphazard manner, a dangerous thing since children can be exposed to content and activities above their comprehending level.

The provision of adequate resources is a challenge the government is failing to satisfy (see sections 2.2.3.3; 2.2.3.4). The Zimbabwe National Budget Statement presented on 7 December 2017 revealed some significant reduction in funds allocated towards ECD (Makokoro, 2018). The mere fact that there is poor funding of established ECD programmes for 3-5 years in the schools means funding for educare will be even worse. Poor funding of ECD programmes translates into inadequate resources provision in the sector. Lack of funding means there would be inadequate infrastructural development, not enough equipment and materials among others. There is no way early childhood development and educare can be of a high quality in the absence of proper and adequate funding.

There is generally a lack of enough professionally qualified caregivers in early childhood development. (see sections 2.2.2.5.; 2.2.3.1; 4.4.3.2.5; 4.5.4.5). The literature findings indicate that qualified caregivers play an important role in the successful implementation of an early childhood development programme such as educare (Ntumi, 2016). Caregivers in educare should be professionals in the early childhood development area. Qualified caregivers are knowledgeable and possess the required skills to work with birth to three children in educare settings (see section 2.2.2.5). Judging by the current levels, Zimbabwe does not have enough qualified personnel in ECD settings. The lack of qualified personnel impacts negatively on quality provisions of educare.

### **5.3.2 Findings related to attachment theory in educare**

The attachment theory entails that a child needs quality caregiving for him to emerge victorious in building secure relationships (see sections 2.3.1.1; 2.4.2.3; 4.6.1.1; 4.6.2.1). Infants develop distinct attachments with the caregivers who care for them during the early years. This is due to the quality of care they receive from each one of them. The attachment theory is key in educare settings by virtue of the ages that are taken care of there. The caregivers need to be well versed with attachment issues if



they are to succeed in educare settings with the infants and toddlers. Caregivers in educare environments are important persons who need to develop a culture of being available, responsive and consistent. This helps children they take care of to always feel safe and secure through their warm relationships. Positive attachment relationships built during the first three years make children to be confident and this enables them to freely explore their environment.

Positive attachment patterns are crucial in helping young children in educare to overcome emotions when they feel distressed or stressed (4.6.1.2; 4.6.2.2). Literature findings show that a secure attachment pattern is the dream of every caregiver. According to George (2014, p. 102), “The secure child is confident that the caregiver is accessible, sensitive, responsive, and will follow through as promptly and completely as possible.” Secure attachment is developed when the caregiver and the child relate and interact positively during the early years in a warm and encouraging environment. High quality care provided by the caregiver determines the development of secure attachment relationships. The caregiver has to be sensitive, responsive and loving (see sections 2.4.2.3).

### **5.3.3 Findings related to overlapping relationships in educare**

The overlapping relationships that may exist between parents and educare settings have to be harmonious. Overlapping relationships refer to the partnerships between parents and educare settings (see sections 2.2.2.3; 2.3.2.2; 2.3.2.5; 2.3.2.6; 4.7.2.1; 4.7.2.2). The quality of an educare programme is determined by the level of parents’ participation in its activities. Puhrova (2016) asserts that parents and educators play significant roles to help children be successful in life. Consequently, the relationship is built on trust and flourishes on the value placed on it by both stakeholders. Early childhood development settings that are safe, secure and stimulating are what the parents are interested in most (WHO and UNICEF, 2018). The overlapping relationships model is key in the provision of quality educare programmes. Through harmonious overlapping relationships, parents as key stakeholder in educare can enhance their knowledge and skills to provide appropriate learning environments in the home context. The relationships that are developed between parents and educare service providers have a bearing on their attitude, for example whether their children will participate or not.

Parents make decisions regarding their children's participation in educare settings (2.3.2.5;4.7.1.1). Data generated through parents' narratives and district education officials confirmed the decision-making roles of parents. One of the key decisions parents make regarding educare is their willingness to have their child enrolled. The finding bonds well with Epstein's ideas on decision making (OECD, 2011). Without positive decisions from the parents, educare will be a total failure. To make favourable decisions, parents should consider the quality of the service and how their children will benefit from it. As such, it calls for educare service providers to maintain high quality standards so as to attract the attention of more parents and encourage participation of them and their children.

The research findings also indicate the specific roles teachers play in educare settings (see section 2.2.2.3;4.7.2.2). Teachers or caregivers, for instance, prepare a conducive environment in educare settings. Children's development is also closely monitored by the caregivers. Observations made in educare by the caregivers are shared with the parents and a shared decision good for the child can be made.

#### **5.4 Summary of empirical findings**

My study sought to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, instead of listening to and recording oral narratives due to the Covid-19 outbreak, I developed a narrative interview protocol that parents completed in writing. The same strategies were employed in the interviews where face-to-face interviews were avoided. In addition, some documents notably ECD termly reports and policies, were analysed. The analysis aimed at finding whether there was related and relevant information on birth to three educare from the termly reports from Mutoko and Murewa districts as well as in the ECD policies. In this section, empirical findings drawn from the generated data are presented. These findings are critical with regards to unveiling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The findings are drawn from the themes and categories presented in chapter 4.

#### **5.4.1 Challenges about educare**

Findings of the study revealed that there are some misconceptions regarding educare provision. According to the findings, educare is ineffective (see section 4.4.2.2.3) and not good for attachment development. The participants felt that there is no room for the development of attachment in educare settings because children would be exposed to more than one caregiver. However, the claim is baseless since research has shown that children are capable of formulating positive attachment with more than one adult caregiver, as long as the necessary conditions of caregiver availability, loving, caring and responsiveness are evident. These are misconceptions which do not agree with the views of Multnomah County Family Court Services (2014) that children, apart from their primary caregivers, can develop other attachment relationships with other caregivers from as early as three months of age. Besides parents, children are capable of developing attachment relationships with other caregivers who care for them (George and West, 2012). The translation is that, through educare, children can develop attachment relationships with multiple caregivers early in their lives.

Participation in educare is influenced by a number of factors, chief among them is funding (see sections 2.2.2.2; 2.2.3.3; 4.4.3.2.6). Operations for educare services require some funding, hence the few service providers that are there survive on fees and levies payment from the parents. The amount of money paid to these centres is considered high by some and could be deterring other would-be participants. Findings show that a section of the participants does not think that birth to three is a crucial service, hence it is expensive for nothing. This kind of thinking requires a change in mind-set because research evidence indicates that there are immense benefits from educare provision. The lack of knowledge and insight some stakeholders have regarding educare provision hinders the development of the sector.

#### **5.4.2 Shortage of educare centres**

Early childhood development provisions in Zimbabwe greatly increased from 2005, when the Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 was propagated. Significant increase of public and private ECD centres for 3–5-year-olds was evidenced. However, one area that lagged behind in the ECD sector is the establishment of educare centres (see

section 4.4.3.2.1). It was found that there is a shortage of educare centres, hence accessibility to the service is limited. Educare provision is still very low in Zimbabwe. The lack of many educare centres negatively impact on accessibility. Empirical findings like this means even if participants have positive attitudes towards educare, as long as the service is not readily available, there is a problem.

### **5.4.3 Inconsistent caregiving**

The findings of the study indicate that in cases where there are inconsistent caregiving practices (see sections 4.6.1.2; 4.6.2.2), there are high chances of children developing insecure attachment patterns. Insecure attachment negatively affect proper development of children since they will feel distressed, are fearful and difficulty to comfort. The prevalence of a high caregiver-child ratio and high staff turnover in educare settings makes it difficult for caregivers to be consistent in providing warm and loving responses to all the children. High staff turnover means there is lack of stability and consistency, hence children will find it impossible to quickly forget about one caregiver and establish new, strong attachments with a new one. This leads to the formulation of meaningless and unwarranted relationships with new caregivers each time. High staff turnover and high ratio in educare could be a result of lack of adequate qualified personnel, hence the few that are available are in high demand. The lack of qualified personnel may make some parents dubious about sending their children to educare settings because they may lack confidence in the quality of service their children will get. However, despite the existence of inconsistent caregiving practices due to unforeseen challenges, naturally some children can still pull through and develop positive attachment relationships with varied caregivers due to their resilience and adaptability nature.

### **5.4.4 Materials and equipment production**

Parents in educare play crucial roles for the success of the programme (see section 4.7.1.2). Children in educare require a variety of play materials for their development. Due to lack of funding, educare settings are bound to have not enough play materials. Through overlapping relationships, it has been found that, as key stakeholders, sometimes parents volunteer to engage themselves in materials and equipment production for the benefit of the children. Through this gesture, educare settings can

function smoothly and ensure that children have adequate play materials which will in turn help in their total development. The effectiveness of the overlapping relationships is key in establishing a conducive environment, one parents, district education officials and the educare personnel will be satisfied with. A positive environment that can be established through overlapping relationships strengthens the partnership and benefits the children more.

#### **5.4.5 Lack of monitoring systems**

A programme's success depends on many factors. One such factor is a strong and effective monitoring system. In Zimbabwe, the continued mushrooming of unregistered ECD centres bear evidence of the lack of effective monitoring systems (see section 4.4.3.2.4) for activities happening in ECD centres. For example, some participants acknowledged that there were some ECD centres that were taking on board children in the birth to three age categories against their mandate of providing services to those in the 3-5 years categories. This entail that such young children were being exposed to facilities, equipment, content and activities that were above their age level. The absence of effective monitoring systems has ripple effects on the development and access to a quality service. Adequate supervision and monitoring of educare service are a must if quality is to be achieved. Resources such as qualified personnel and vehicles ensure that early childhood development centres as well as educare operate within the stipulated confines. If there is going to be any meaningful increase in the development of birth to three educare service provision, then there is need for effective monitoring systems to be developed and put in place.

#### **5.5 Research conclusions**

The first three years are crucial in the development of young children. This study focused on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. Whilst the study was basically on educare, it has the potential to make significant contributions to early childhood development in general. Quality, for example, is a cross-cutting theme which should be observed and maintained at all levels of the education system. Therefore, the responses that were given in the research questions are key in drawing conclusions of the study (see section 1.4.1).

### **5.5.1 Sub-research question 1: What are the perceptions of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?**

The perceptions of parents and district education officials on educare are varied as evidenced by the literature and empirical findings. Most of the participants were found to exhibit some know-how of educare programmes despite there being no such service in their communities. Both parents and district education officials agree to the fact that educare has many benefits which, if tapped into, the dormant potential of children will be a success. Even though educare was limited and not readily available in most parts in Zimbabwe, it was discovered that parents and district education officials have positive perceptions about it. They all agreed that it would be noble for the government to put measures to accelerate educare programmes accessibility. The many benefits that can be realised in educare settings have seen participants yearning for the establishment of such centres within their vicinities.

The positive views exhibited by parents and district education officials are welcome and should be taken advantage of to push the educare agenda forward. An increase in educare centres and activities has to be advocated so as to have more children benefiting from the service. For instance, the findings expose that through educare children are afforded equal opportunities from which they can kick-start their development. Furthermore, there is also a high probability of children benefitting immensely if defects are identified early in their life. Opportunities for early identification and intervention on developmental defects are high in educare as long as there are qualified and knowledgeable caregivers. Early identification helps to determine appropriate measures which can correct or minimise the effects of the identified problems. It therefore calls for the promotion of educare provisions and to put in place strategies that ensure the availability and employment of qualified staff.

Some misconceptions regarding educare have been found in the study. Findings show that a section of the participants viewed educare as a waste of time and expensive for nothing and not good for attachment. What these participants were not aware of was that educare benefits children in many ways, hence it is not a waste of time and expensive for nothing. Even in educare settings, children are still capable of developing positive and fruitful attachment relationships with their caregivers, so the claims are baseless.

The perceptions of parents also highlighted some challenges that are impacting on educare. Credit should be given to the Zimbabwean government for developing policies that have seen an increase on ECD provisions in both private and public centres and schools. Findings revealed, however, that currently the tide in ECD favours the 3-5 years and this contributed to the available policies that have made it mandatory for every primary school to have ECD classes of 3-5 years. Educare in Zimbabwe catered for in the current policies is not yet readily available and accessible.

A relevant and suitable educare curriculum informs staff on what needs to be done, how and when. The absence of an age-appropriate curriculum in the Zimbabwean context is negatively impacting on standards since operations are not properly guided. An anomaly such as this needs to be corrected urgently because children could be exposed to content and activities that are beyond their comprehension level. That has ripple effects on the holistic development of children.

The success of every programme rests on the ability of responsible authorities to closely supervise and monitor activities and progress at all times. There are some undesirable things happening in the ECD sector in Zimbabwe. For instance, there has been a proliferation of unregistered centres, rampant employment of unqualified caregivers and unsuitable infrastructure, and hence there is no quality and standard to talk about. The reason for this is lack of effective monitoring systems as found in the study. A strong monitoring system as alluded to by some district education officials is what is needed to root out unscrupulous ECD service providers. However, to achieve this, funding has to be significantly improved so that education officials who are mandated with monitoring and supervisory work will have adequate resources.

#### **5.5.2 Sub-research question 2: What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding the attachment theory in educare?**

Children in educare settings should experience responsive and consistent caregiving practices from their caregivers. Loving and caring caregivers in educare are capable of helping children to quickly adjust in educare settings. Findings from the narratives of parents and the interviews of district education officials revealed that responsive and caring caregivers play crucial roles on attachment development. The implication



for this finding is that educare staff have to be well versed with the principles of the attachment theory. The quality-of-care children receive from such caregivers will be high. They will be able to organise environments that are enticing to the children. The environment should see securely attached children exploring and discovering things by themselves. The development of positive attachment relationships is a prerogative of a quality programme where children are given the best care.

The availability and responsiveness of a caregiver is sufficient to support children's development of secure attachment patterns. When children are aware of the caregiver's presence within their vicinity, they become confident and explore their environment. Children who are supported can be independent and develop a sense of belonging. The findings suggest that caregivers who are responsive make a valuable impact on young children's social and emotional development. Inconsistent caregiving practices have to be avoided at all costs for they do not positively promote child development. Strategies have to be put in place by service providers to minimise the high child-caregiver ratios as well as high staff turnover.

### **5.5.3 Sub research question 3: What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding overlapping relationships between educare and home?**

The purpose of this research was to unravel the narratives of parents and district education officials with regards to educare. Parents and educare staff should prioritise the building of harmonious relationships. The establishment of reciprocal relationships helps to close the existing gaps usually found between home and the educare centre or school. The coming together of parents and educare authorities has immense benefits to families, the community and the educare setting. Some of the family members can get employed in various capacities in educare settings, which means they will be able to better provide for their families. This is a benefit that would change lives in the community.

Active engagement of parents and educare staff is crucial. The study concludes that overlapping relationships have to be encouraged and promoted. Parents come from diverse backgrounds, some of which can be successfully harnessed to promote quality of educare services. For instance, there could be carpenters, tailors or builders. These

can volunteer to offer their service to the educare centre and participate in equipment and materials production, a gesture that may save a lot of money. The interconnectedness of the educare centre (school) and the home presents opportunities for children's positive development.

#### **5.5.4 Main research question: What are the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe?**

The main research question sought to explore the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. It is unfortunate, however, that educare is not readily available and accessible as alluded to earlier. Despite varied views, the participants placed some great value on educare provisions as an important programme that is capable of unlocking the potential embedded in children. Educare has been found to lay a solid foundation for future development, hence stakeholders should come up with strategies to increase participation in the sector.

The nature of children in educare calls for well trained staff, which is well versed in child development issues. Attachment issues is one critical area that educare personnel need to master. The quality of care children experience at the hands of caregivers is influenced by how well the caregiver mastered the attachment theory. The findings of the study are indicative that caregiver-child ratio must be low and there be a minimum staff turnover, this is crucial in enhancing the development of positive attachment patterns.

The conclusions of the study reveal that overlapping relationships are key in the successful implementation of educare programmes. Strategies to strengthen relationships between the home and educare settings have to be formulated and utilised. Parents and educare staff need to be well versed with their roles so as to avoid conflicts. The working together of parents and educare centre staff can bridge the gap between home and the centre such that more success can be realised.

Increases in accessibility and availability of educare services is long over due. Yes, available policies have done wonders in increasing access to ECD services for 3-5 years children; however, a gap still exists where educare is not catered for. It is important to build on this success and advocate for the improvement of such. The

study concluded that there is need for a comprehensive and all-encompassing ECD policy in Zimbabwe. The policy should provide guidelines on educare provisions as well.

A unified early childhood development programme is hereby advocated. There is need for a well structured and coordinated multi-sectoral approach to ECD provisions, where services are not fragmented as in the current scenario. Line ministries should play complementary roles so that children's hollistic development is achieved. To achieve this, funding has to be available. The government and other developmental partners have to work together in sourcing funding and monitoring that it has been put to good use in developing educare service provision.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Drawing from the reviewed literature and the empirical findings, it is important that a concerted effort be made regarding educare availability and accessibility in Zimbabwe. The value of educare provision on children's development is so immense. It can therefore not be ignored so there is need for some strategies to be proffered to increase visibility and availability of and accessibility to these important services. Since the narratives of parents emphasise the need for educare facilities in Zimbabwe, it has become essential to have a framework to promote effective educare in Zimbabwe.

### **5.6.1 Recommendation 1: Stakeholder partnerships in ECD**

In order for success to be achieved in the educare, it is important to have stakeholder partnerships. UNICEF (2017) opines that stakeholder participation helps to develop a sense of ownership. Early childhood development provisions require people who share the same vision to come and work together to improve services. For instance, if stakeholders' partner in educare, issues of accessibility and quality can be addressed and improved. Duplication of roles can be minimised if stakeholders come and work together for the same cause. In this regard, line ministries like Health, Social Welfare, Youth and Woman's Affairs, Finance and Economic Development, Rural and Urban Councils as well as non-governmental organisations can come together and develop policy frameworks that seek to make improvements in the ECD sector in its entirety. In Zimbabwe stakeholder partnership with well described roles and responsibilities for

every stakeholder would assist in ensuring that the babies, and toddlers receive the care they deserve.

### **5.6.2 Recommendation 2: Awareness campaigns and assessment programmes for early detection and intervention**

The Schools Psychological Services should partner with other organisations and ministries like Health so they come up with strategies meant to promote early identification and intervention on problems that may impact on children if left undetected. They should engage in awareness campaigns so that parents become aware of the dangers of leaving it until too late for a child to be assessed and assisted accordingly. The programme should be made compulsory and routinely carried out. It should have provisions for monitoring and following up on all detected cases. It should comprise of people with the requisite skills and competencies like doctors, psychologists, counsellors and teachers among others. Wherever possible, the awareness campaigns and assessment programmes should be funded by the central government.

Zimbabwean radio and TV stations should also significantly contribute in the promotion of educare provisions. Broadcasting stations could have channels or programmes that feature babies and toddler development activities and education for parents in the importance of allowing children to develop optimally.

### **5.6.3 Recommendation 3: Develop a comprehensive early childhood development policy**

The fact that current ECD policies are fragmented, biased and incomplete imply that there is need for the development of new and comprehensive policies that takes on board all the ECD age groups. The absence of an all-encompassing policy means things in educare are not uniform and could be haphazardly done. To mitigate against inconsistencies in this sector, the findings indicate that there is need for the government, ECD practitioners and all stakeholders to come together and work towards addressing this gap. Policy development is crucial in educare because it gives guidelines for what is to be done, why it has to be done, how it is to be done and when it should be done. The presence of guidelines will have an effect on accessibility and quality issues. By using the excellent policies from countries that have already

designed them, a standardised comprehensive policy could be designed. All the responsible officials as well as the teachers need to be trained effectively. It is suggested universities be consulted as the lead developer and trainer for these policies.

#### **5.6.4 Recommendation 4: Development of a suitable and relevant curriculum**

A suitable, relevant and age-appropriate curriculum is key in guiding educare provisions. The curriculum determines the content, methodologies and activities that children will be exposed to. As such, in light of the current scenario where there is no curriculum to guide educare provisions, it is of paramount importance for the government to design and develop a relevant curriculum for educare provisions. A relevant curriculum helps to promote young children's development. Consequently, the presence of a curriculum means all service providers will be expected to abide by the dictates and provisions of available guidelines. Its availability means that monitoring and supervision will be more effective because there would be specific issues to be focused on. If ECD provisions are going to be beneficial to birth to three years children, curriculum development is a sure means of equitable and quality provisions. Once again, it is suggested that universities be roped in to design this curriculum and together with the ministries effective resources for the implementation of all developmental domains be packaged and provided to baby centres. Teachers need to be trained to use the resource package for optimal development of children through educare in Zimbabwe. The government should consider re-establishing the position of ECD district trainers. The district trainers would be valuable in strengthening supervision and monitoring systems. They will be tasked to guarantee quality provisions in all ECD establishments within their jurisdiction

#### **5.6.5 Recommendation 5: Inclusion of birth to three educare facilities to existing primary schools and ECD centres**

The government of Zimbabwe should employ a similar arrangement made on the 3–5-year-old ECD programme where it is attached to existing primary schools. It would be great if educare becomes attached to existing primary schools and ECD centres. This has the potential to increase availability and accessibility to educare services since most schools are within a 5 km radius. It would be tantamount to bringing the

service to the door step of many potential participants. There would be improved monitoring and supervision of services since the school heads would be tasked with the day-to-day affairs of educare settings, the same way they do with the other ECD programmes available.

#### **5.6.6 Recommendation 6: Funding for adequate training and infrastructure and resources at educare facilities**

Enough funding is key in addressing equity and quality issues in educare services. It is therefore incumbent upon the Zimbabwean government to avail more funding to education, particularly ECD programmes so that issues of equity and quality are addressed. In the face of increased funding, it implies that educare services would be affordable and currently disadvantaged children can benefit from it as well. Improved funding will automatically shift the burden off the shoulders of parents who are already struggling. The government should be the chief funder of ECD programmes. As such, they should come up with a specific budget for this sector if there is going to be an increased access to educare services.

#### **5.6.7 Recommendation 7: Training of caregivers**

The training of caregivers for educare should be prioritised by the government. Trained caregivers have the potential to engage in quality interactions with young children and this is crucial for their development. A policy for the upgrading of qualifications for teachers in this educare field will need to accompany the practices. The government should deliberately increase the training of ECD specialised personnel in greater numbers so they can satisfy demand in the sector.

#### **5.6.8 Recommendation 8: Establishment of model community-based educare centres within districts**

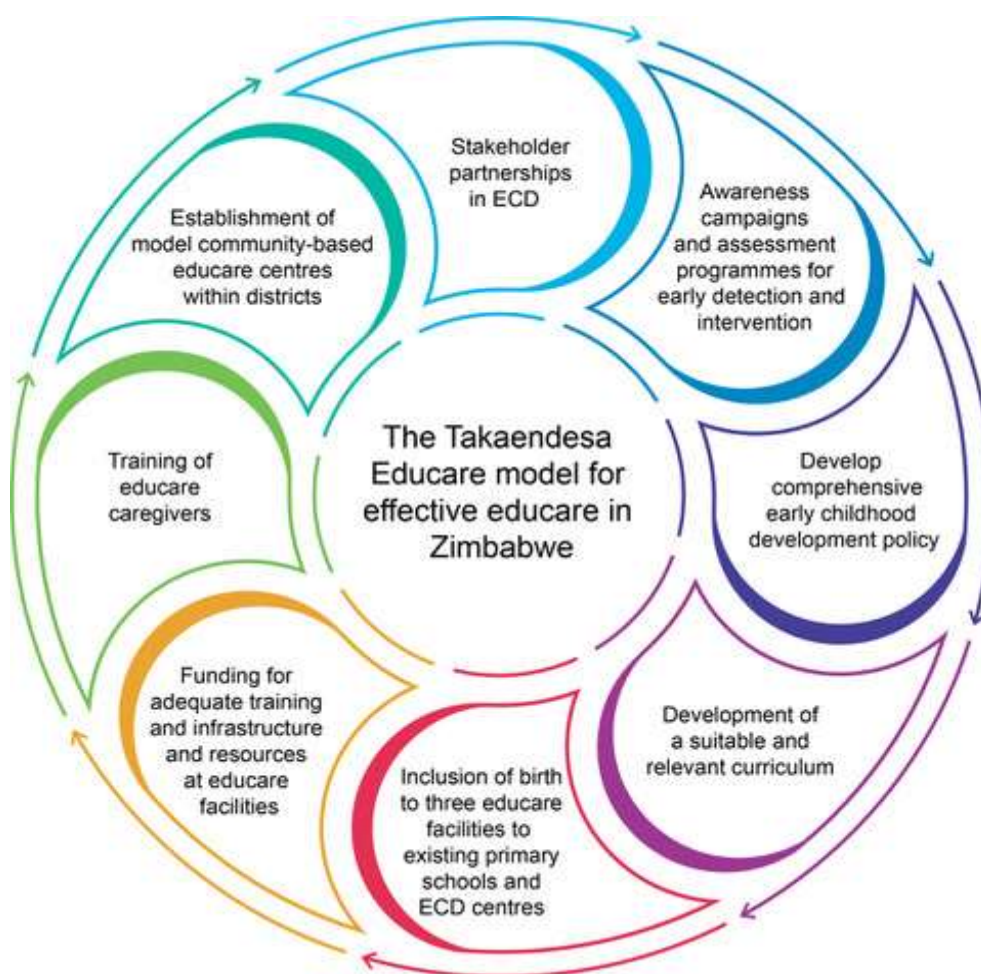
The government should collaborate with other stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations to set up model birth to three educare centres in every district. Such centres would set the quality standards expected and this will likely have a profound positive impact on new establishments.



## 5.7 The Takaendesa Educare model for effective educare in Zimbabwe

Educare provision in Zimbabwe is still in its infancy, hence there is need to come up with strategies to help birth to three children to realise their potential. A solid foundation for future endeavours is laid out early in children's life. Therefore, there is need to increase accessibility to quality educare service in Zimbabwe. Through unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials, I developed the Takaendesa Educare model that will allow for a change in educare provision in Zimbabwe.

**Figure 5.1: Takaendesa model for effective educare in Zimbabwe**



## 5.8 Concluding remarks

This study was on unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe. The chapter presented data gathered through narratives of parents, semi-structured interviews with district education officials and document analysis of reports as well as some ECD policies. The collected data was



rich and provided insights into educare policy and practice in Zimbabwe. Despite lack of accessibility to this important service, results show that there are significant opportunities for educare provisions to be increased in the near future. Findings reveal that parents have both positive and negative perceptions of educare. For instance, birth to three has been found to be crucial to the holistic development of young children, early identification and intervention, brain development among others, and it can impact on attachment development in young children.

The data gathered from the different participants implies that attachment issues are important in educare settings. As such, service providers should tirelessly work on ways and means that will be key to the development of positive attachment patterns between birth to three children and their caregivers in educare settings. In order for educare to succeed, there is need for overlapping relationships so that the same vision can be shared. This is of paramount importance because that is the only way in which these key stakeholders can be brought together and work on supporting the programme for the benefit of their children.

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## APPENDICES 1: PERMISSION LETTER: MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: HEAD OFFICE

All communications should be addressed to  
"The Secretary for Primary and Secondary  
Education"  
Telephone: 732006  
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"  
Fax: 794505



Reference: C/426/3 Mash East  
Ministry of Primary and  
Secondary Education  
P.O Box CY 121  
Causeway  
HARARE

3 March 2020

Masimba Takaendesa  
Nyadire Teacher's College  
P. O Box 210  
Mutoko

**Re: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN MASHONALAND EAST  
PROVINCE: MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION  
HEAD OFFICE.**

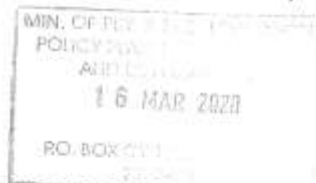
Reference is made to your application to collect data for research purposes at the above mentioned institution in Mashonaland East Province on the research title:

**"EXPLORING HOW THE NARRATIVES OF ZIMBABWEAN PARENTS'  
INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT OF A BIRTH TO THREE EDUCARE POLICY."**

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Director Mashonaland East Province, who is responsible for the institution which you want to involve in your research. You should ensure that your research work does not disrupt the normal operations of the institution. Where students are involved, parental consent is required.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education.

  
**T. Thabela**  
**SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**  
cc: PED – Mashonaland East Province



**APPENDICES 2: APPROVAL LETTER MASHONALAND EAST PROVINCE**

Reference: Masimbis Tsvanengesi  
E. C. No.: 0946490 W

All communications should be addressed to  
"The Provincial Education Director  
Mashonaland East Province"  
Telephone: 0279-24811/4 and 24792  
Telex :  
Fax: 079-24791  
E-mail: mopscoteped@lotmail.com



**Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education  
Mashonaland East Province  
P.O. Box 752  
Marondera  
Zimbabwe**

23 March 2020

Mr./Mrs./Miss Masimbis Tsvanengesi  
Mutoko District

**PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES: MR/MRS/MISS Masimbis Tsvanengesi E. C. NO. 0946490 W STUDENT I. D. 1118258200 TEACHER AT Nyanga SCHOOL**

Reference is made to your minute dated .....  
Please be advised that permission has been granted that you carry out research work in our schools. You are accordingly being asked to furnish the Ministry with information about your findings so that we share the knowledge for the benefit of the system as well as our nation at large.

We wish you all the best and hope to hear from you after completing your project work.

Valens Kumbi Phiso  
**HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER - DISCIPLINE  
FOR PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR  
MASHONALAND EAST PROVINCE**

### APPENDICES 3: APPROVAL LETTER: MUREWA DISTRRICT OFFICE

All communications should be  
Addressed to  
"The District Education Officer"  
Telephone: 0278-22250& 22232



Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education  
Murewa District Office  
P. Bag 611  
Murewa

20 October 2020

**Ref: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEACH IN MUREWA DISTRICT:MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION.**

**TOPIC:EXPLORING HOW THE NARRATIVES OF ZIMBABWEAN PARENTS INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT OF A BIRTH TO THREE EDUCARE POLICY.**

Reference is made to the above.

Please be advised that permission has been granted to carry out research work in Murewa District. You are accordingly being asked to furnish the Ministry with information about your findings so that we share knowledge for the benefit of the system as well as our nation at large. You will be required to submit 3 copies of your research to the District for onward submission to Provincial office and Head office. We wish you all the best and hope to hear from you after completing your project work.

Yours faithfully

  
TSODZO C

District Schools Inspector.

Murewa District



## APPENDICES 4: APPROVAL LETTER: MUTOKO DISTRICT OFFICE

S

*All communications should be addressed to:*  
*"The District Education Officer*  
*Mutoko District Office"*  
**Telephone: 0272-2427**  
**Mobile: 0783 602 56**  
**Email: mutokodst@gmail.com**



**Ministry of Primary and Secondary  
Education  
Mutoko District  
P.O. Box 20  
Mutoko  
Zimbabwe**

07 April 2020

**ATTENTION:**

**SCHOOL HEADS**

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATIONAL  
PURPOSE: MR MASIMBA TAKAENDESA; EC: 0940490W; STUDENT TEACHER;  
NYADIRE TEACHERS' COLLEGE; PIN: U18280804; MUTOKO DISTRICT:MASH-EAST**

**TOPIC:**

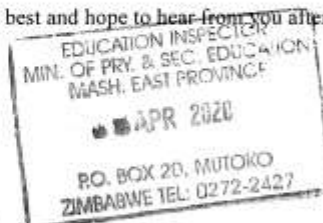
**EXPLORING HOW THE NARRATIVES OF ZIMBABWEAN PARENTS' INFLUENCE  
DEVELOPMENT OF A BIRTH TO THREE EDUCARE POLICY**

Reference is made to the above.

Please be advised that permission has been granted to carry out research work in our schools. You are accordingly being asked to furnish the Ministry with information about your findings so that we share for the benefit of the system as well as our nation at large. You will be required to submit 3 copies of your research to the District for onward submission to Province and Head office.

We wish you all the best and hope to hear from you after completing your project work.

Katuka H.  
(Acting DSI-Mutoko)





## APPENDICES 5: PARENTS LETTER OF CONSENT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

### Appendix B: Parents' consent for participation in research narratives

Dear: .....

Date: .....

I am Masimba Takaendesa, a Doctoral student in the Early Childhood Education department at the University of Pretoria. The title of my research is: ***“Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe”***.

The study will be carried under the watchful eyes of my two supervisors, Prof. Keshni Bipath and Dr. Susan Thuketana.

Data collection in this research study is going to involve narratives of parents, as such, this letter serves to kindly invite you to be a participant in this study. The narratives are going to be scheduled according to your availability and be conducted at a place and venue convenient to you. The narrative reports will be kept in print, be assured that only myself and the supervisors will have access to it.

The study sought to address a gap, where birth to three educare provisions are limited and do not have the same status as ECD provisions for 3-5 year olds which is easily accessible and readily available in schools and ECD centres. This is unlike the educare programme which is not readily available. This research hopes to bring an upsurge in terms of expanding educare provisions in Zimbabwe for birth to three-year-old children. Birth to three being a critical age, where future developments are built upon, it is vital that majority of children should access it. The narratives of parents are important in that they could be the missing link towards the development of a comprehensive ECD policy framework in Zimbabwe.

A number of benefits are going to be drawn from participating in this research. As a participant you are going to gain insightful knowledge on ECD, notably on child development issues. You are also going to gain knowledge of current policies and

stipulations on ECD issues. A better understanding of the ECD programme can also be realised. Benefits of educare provisions focusing on the birth to three will help participants to self-introspect and possibly change their ways of caring for their young children in birth to three years category

Your participation will be on voluntary basis. Please note, I am going to use pseudo names to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity during the transcription of the data. As a participant, you have the right not answer any of the questions if you feel uncomfortable in any way during the narrative interview session.

May you kindly complete and sign a consent form as a volunteer participant in this research.

All communications and discussions are confidential. If case you have some concerns, feel free to engage me or my supervisors.

Yours sincerely

Takaendesa Masimba

.....

Email: [mtakaendesa07@gmail.com](mailto:mtakaendesa07@gmail.com)

Cell number: 0773396607

Supervisor: Prof. Keshni Bipath

[keshni.bipath@up.ac.za](mailto:keshni.bipath@up.ac.za)

Co-supervisor: Dr. Susan Thuketana

[Susan.thuketana@up.ac.za](mailto:Susan.thuketana@up.ac.za)

## APPENDICES 6: PARENTS CONSENT FORM



Dear: ..... Date: .....

### Consent for participation

I....., agree to participate in a research study by Masimba Takaendesa from the University of Pretoria, department of Early Childhood Education. I have been given sufficient information pertaining to the study, which is titled ***“Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe”***. My participation is voluntary and I am allowing the researcher access to some of my documents for the purposes of this research only.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

## APPENDICES 7: PARENTS NARRATIVES PROTOCOL



### Interview Protocol (Parents)

**Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding  
educare in Zimbabwe**

**Interviewer:** Masimba Takaendesa

**Interviewee:** .....

**Place:**.....

**Time:**.....

**Position:** .....

**Dear Parent**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Your honest responses will  
be really appreciated.**

What is the age of your baby?

What is your view on educare?

Will you send your child to an early learning centre? Why?

What are the advantages of having your child in an educare early learning centre?  
Please write why you feel that this has advantages.

What are the disadvantages of having your child in an educare early learning centre?  
Please write why you feel that this may have disadvantages.

What challenges are faced by the government on educare provision for birth to 3?

Why is child- caregiver attachment important?

What are your views regarding the attachment theory and educare?

How do parents participate in ECD/ Educare?



How do you regard the relationship between school/ECD centre and the home on the provision of educare?

Thank you for your time and effort.

Masimba Takaendesa

## APPENDICES 8: DISTRICT SCHOOLS OFFICIALS LETTER OF CONSENT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Dear.....

Date.....

### The District Schools officials letter of consent

I am Masimba Takaendesa, a Doctoral student in the Early Childhood Education department at the University of Pretoria. The title of my research is: ***“Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe”***

The study will be carried under the watchful eyes of my two supervisors, Prof. Keshni Bipath and Dr. Susan Thuketana.

Data collection in this research study is going to involve interviews with district education officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, as such, I am requesting for permission to interview some education officials from your ministry. The interviews are going to be semi-structured and shall be scheduled according to availability and be conducted at a place and venue convenient to the officials. The interviews will be audio taped and be assured that only myself and the supervisors will have access to it.

Your participation will be on voluntary basis. Please note, I am going to use pseudo names to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity during the transcription of the data. It is also the right of the officials to withdraw their participation in this study and their choice shall be respected.

The study sought to address a gap, where birth to three educare provisions are limited and do not have the same status as ECD provisions for 3-5 year olds which is easily accessible and readily available in schools and ECD centres. This is unlike the birth

to three educare which is not readily available. This research hopes to bring an upsurge in terms of expanding educare provisions in Zimbabwe for birth to three-year-old children. Birth to three being a critical age, where future developments are built upon, it is vital that majority of children should access it. The narratives of parents and district education officials are important in that they could be the missing link in the development of a comprehensive ECD policy framework in Zimbabwe.

A number of benefits are going to be drawn from participating in this research. The participants are going to gain insightful knowledge on ECD, notably on child development issues. Knowledge of current policies and stipulations is also going to be realised through participating in this research. Benefits of educare provisions focusing on the birth to three will help participants to self-introspect and possibly change their ways of doing things regarding children in birth to three years category

Your Schools Inspectors will be made to complete and sign a consent form to show their willingness to participate in this research as volunteers.

All communications and discussions are confidential. If case you have some concerns, feel free to engage me or my supervisors.

Yours sincerely

Takaendesa Masimba



Email: [mtakaendesa07@gmail.com](mailto:mtakaendesa07@gmail.com)

Cell number: 0773396607

Supervisor: Prof. Keshni Bipath : [keshni.bipath@up.ac.za](mailto:keshni.bipath@up.ac.za)

Co-supervisor: Dr. Susan Thuketana: [Susan.thuketana@up.ac.za](mailto:Susan.thuketana@up.ac.za)

## APPENDICES 9: DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICIALS CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Dear: .....

Date: .....

### Consent for participation in a research interview

I....., agree to participate in a research study by Masimba Takaendesa from the University of Pretoria, department of Early Childhood Education. I have been given sufficient information pertaining to this study, which is titled ***“Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe”***. My participation is voluntary and I am allowing the researcher to take some field notes and also to audio record the interview.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

## APPENDICES 10: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE: DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICIALS



### Interview Protocol (Ministry of Education)

**Unravelling the narratives of parents and district education officials regarding educare in Zimbabwe**

**Interviewer:** Masimba Takaendesa

**Interviewee:** .....

**Place:**.....

**Time:**.....

**Position:** .....

**Dear Sir/Madam.**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Your honest responses will be really appreciated.**

What is your view on educare?

What are the advantages of having children in educare early learning centres?  
Please write why you feel that this has advantages.

What are the disadvantages of having children in educare early learning centres?  
Please write why you feel that this may have disadvantages.

What challenges are faced by the government on educare provision for birth to 3?



What are your views regarding the attachment theory and educare?

In your view, how can parents participate in ECD/educare?

How do you regard the relationship between school/ECD centre and the home on the provision of birth to three educare?

Thank you for your time and effort.

Masimba Takaendesa

## APPENDICES 11: DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICIALS: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

### DATA



#### **Question 1. What is your view on educare?**

EO1	It is a very fundamental program that brings a variety of benefits on how to educate and take care of the little ones. It helps one to understand the crucial needs of the young children.
EO2	Educare is a very important programme that is meant for the holistic development and proper care of children birth to three years.
EO3	Educare is an initiative that provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children in the birth to three age range categories and is crucial for children's holistic development. It is an initiative that provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children who are in the birth to three age range categories.
EO4	Educare is a special programme that takes children three years and below aboard and it has a component of education and care in it. Participation in educare promotes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.
EO5	I regard the provisions of birth to three educare to be a step in the right direction since children will be given a good footing in their early life. There are opportunities for holistic development to take place.
EO6	Personally, I view educare as a programme that support and take care of children as young as three years. It is an early childhood system that offers services to young children and enhance their growth and development.

#### **Question 2: What are the advantages of having children in educare early learning centres? Please write why you feel that this may have advantages.**

EO1	In birth to three educare settings, the child can develop a variety of skills which include literacy, creativity among others.
EO2	Children will learn to interact with both the physical and social environments early in their lives. Children under the guidance of specialists ECD caregiver can have a strong foundation for later developments. Provision of developmentally appropriate activities. Educare provision has the potential for early identification and interventions. It paves a way for the primary caregiver to have adequate time to do other business and household chores.
EO3	It helps caregivers to fully concentrate on other activities knowing their children are being taken care of in a safe and healthy environment. The child's social

	skills, cognitive skills, physical skills and emotional skills are enhanced. Holistic development of all developmental domains. A foundation for future developments is laid early. Children's participation in educare environments is crucial for brain development. The child benefit immensely, for example brain development is most rapid during the early years of life. Care provided by qualified and sensitive practitioners addresses the needs and interests of the children"
EO4	Educare participation promotes physical health, socio-emotional, language and cognitive development in young children Children are prepared for future schooling. Children develop important skills like literacy, numeracy and turn taking.
EO5	Literacy skills development is enhanced through interactions with children of same age. Language and numeracy development is enhanced through interactions with other children of same age. Child develops holistically. Professional caregiving. Healthy and safety of children is prioritised.
EO6	Quality ECD programmes give room for children's brain development. Educare presents opportunities for young children to interact in a safe and secure environment with peers and their caregivers, all of which play a role in brain development. Children develop problem solving and literacy skills early in their life. Children develop problem solving skills early in life. Early learning has long term benefits, for example readiness for school.

**Question 3: What are the disadvantages of having children in educare early learning centres? Please write why you feel that this may have disadvantages.**

EO1	Some centres do not provide or abide to the ministry rules and regulations thereby providing poor quality education, the child may suffer abuse from the caregivers if they are not acting as loco parentis, poor feeding programs, insecurity and exposure to health hazards as well as diseases.
EO2	Some early learning centres are of poor quality such that the conditions children are exposed to stifle their development. Caregivers with little or no training may give children content that is not cognisant with their developmental level. Attachment pattern is disturbed as the child tries to adapt to a new environment and a new caregiver.
EO3	The attachment bond of the primary caregiver and the child is disturbed and this may cause confusion in the child. Exposure to multiple caregivers may confuse the child and ultimately affect attachment patterns. Not having a standard curriculum has dangers of exposing children to irrelevant content that is not developmentally appropriate. Children can be exposed to formal education which may hinder their development. There is generally a lack of educare service providers in our district. If there is any one operating, it means it is doing so illegally because in our records we don't have such.

EO4	Attachment of the child and the primary caregiver is disturbed. There is no specific educare centre. What we have observed is that some ECD centers are taking on board children three years and under and they use the same facilities as the 3–5-year-olds. This is unacceptable, they should just come clean and establish a proper educare facility. Learning some subjects and content too early especially in the absents of a standard curriculum, this cause children to lose interest in school in later years. Lack of enough and relevant materials can stifle creativity in children.
EO5	Attachment patterns can be disturbed. If caregivers are not trained, children can be exposed to content that is not age appropriate. There is a shortage of service providers for birth to three educare and this disadvantages local children as they miss out on the opportunities for development available there. This is contributing to lack of accessibility for the service even if parents and stakeholder like them are positive about developments in this sector.
EO6	Attachment is disturbed. Children can be exposed to unhealthy conditions like exposure to poorly ventilated buildings or overcrowded. Children may also be exposed to content ant activities that is above their comprehension level.

**Question 4: What challenges are faced by the government on educare provision?**

EO1	Dealing with the mushrooming of unregistered ECD centers. Lack of funds to support the educare programme. lack of enough and appropriate infrastructure. Lack of a curriculum impact on standards. Current policies do not clearly specify issues on birth to three educare provisions. Not having a specific educare policy targeting birth to three children or establishments. There is generally a lack of a developmentally appropriate approved curriculum for birth to three services and this impact on standards. There is lack of funding to support ECD provisions, birth to three educare included.
EO2	Increasing accessibility to birth to three educare services requires policy provisions that clearly lay out procedures for establishment, registration, methodology, curriculum, teacher qualifications among other aspects. Unfortunately, this is currently lacking. Provision of quality services. Funding. Lack of resources. For uniformity in educare settings, there is need to have a standard curriculum which is however lacking currently. The lack of a strong monitoring system is leaving some corrupt and unscrupulous service providers scot free and making a killing out of sub-standard provisions to unsuspecting parents. Lack of enough qualified personnel. There is no policy guideline for birth to three educare provisions. There is no uniformity in terms of service provisions due to there being no standard curriculum. Funding is one of the most common challenges the government is facing and this is evidenced by the poor infrastructure available in schools and some ECD centers for (3-5 years).

EO3	Funding. Lack of a standard curriculum causes inconsistencies on service provision between providers. There are no policy specifications on birth to three from the existing policies and this needs to be addressed if significant changes on birth to three educare can be achieved. Employment of qualified teachers/caregivers is a challenge since currently there are many who are qualified, yet they are unemployed due to the economic meltdown in the country. There is need for relevant policy formulation and monitoring of implementation.
EO4	Lack of resources. Educare is not readily available in all communities. Not having a curriculum is resulting in discrepancies in terms of content being offered. Policies do not clearly specify issues on birth to three provisions.
EO5	Lack of specific policy provision. Provision of relevant and enough resources. Currently there is no curriculum to be used. Out there, there are quite a number of ECD centres operating illegally. Centers that do not meet the minimum requirements for registration under stipulations of SI 106 of 2005. Some centers, have been fraudulently registered though. All this is due to lack of a comprehensive monitoring system. Parents are the chief financiers of the ECD programme and there is no way birth to three educare accessibility can be increased in the absence of enough funding by the government.
EO6	Accessibility is a challenge that need to be addressed. Funding is inadequate. Relevant policy formulation and monitoring of implementation. Currently there is no curriculum to be used in birth to three educare. There is not much supervision and monitoring of activities taking place especially in private ECD settings. Some centers no longer follow laid down stipulations in SI 106 of 2005 on age of attendance and they are even enrolling children under three years.

**Question 5: What are your views regarding the attachment theory and educare?**

EO1	There is need for caregivers to be readily available and responsive so that secure attachments can be formed. For this to happen, educare settings should have a reasonable child- caregiver ratio. Changing of caregivers frequently may also cause a challenge to the child, therefore, there is need for educare centers to avoid the hire and fire practice since attachments of children and their caregivers can be negatively impacted on.
EO2	If the attachment is positive, children feel free to express their feelings and explore their environment. A good bond between the child and the caregiver will provide room for growth and development of the child
EO3	Child-caregiver attachment is critical in laying a strong foundation for future development. Caregivers should strive to be sensitive and responsive to children's needs and interests if they are to promote the emergency of secure attachments Securely attached children are confident to explore their environment.

EO4	There is need for responsive caregiving practices from all the staff available. This is important in building positive attachments between the children and their caregivers. It is also of paramount importance to have staff compliment that is enough for the children enrolled at the centre. There is need for consistency regarding the staff and centres should avoid having a high staff turnover as this has adverse effects on attachment.
EO5	Responsive caregiving should take centre stage if the child is to develop positive attachments. Attachment is critical if the child is to get used to the caregiver, this gives him or her a sense trust, something that aid development of the child.
EO6	Caregivers that work with young children should aim at providing quality care. There is need to maintain a low caregiver-child ration so there is close supervision of the children. Caregivers need to be alert and respond to children's needs quickly

**Question 6: How can attachment be promoted and maintained in educare settings?**

EO1	There should be a reasonable and manageable number of children under each caregiver. No to changing of caregivers frequently, this may cause a challenge to the child. Employment of qualified and knowledgeable ECD practitioners should be a priority
EO2	Educare service providers should employ knowledgeable caregiver so they can positively impact on attachment building. Knowledge of child development issues is a must for all caregivers in educare settings. A relatively low caregiver child ratio should be maintained to allow for interactive relationships between child and the caregiver.
EO3	Sensitivity to the needs of children is key to promoting and maintaining attachment. Having a low caregiver-child ration is also important in promoting attachment. Quality caregiving is critical in enhancing and promoting attachment in educare service provision. Caregivers' friendliness is very important in promoting attachment.
EO4	Through employing qualified teachers who have knowledge on child development issues. Following policy regulations on teacher-child ratio. Staff development of employees at an ECD centre. Effective parental involvement is key.
EO5	The key issue here is for the caregiver to be available and responsive to the children's needs and interests timeously. Engage parents in the activities at the centre
EO6	Employment of qualified caregivers who have knowledge of child development is one way of helping the promotion and maintenance of attachment. Having a low caregiver- child ratio is key in promoting attachment



### Question 7: How can parents participate in ECD/ educare?

EO1	Parents can participate in decision making processes as members of the ECD centre committee. Participation in construction of learning centers. Parents can participate in decision making processes as members of the committee the oversee the running of the centre. They also play advocacy roles towards the promotion of educare services. Some parents volunteer to use their qualifications and skills to provide services to an educare centre. Parents can participate in construction of learning centers and materials production. One critical role that parents play is paying fees and levies.
EO2	Parents can be consultants in educare service provisions. Paying levies. They can participate as resource persons. They can participate in materials production. Some parents are advocates of young children’s welfare. Parents should demonstrate a positive view of educare by continuously paying fees and levies on time.
EO3	Parents as key stakeholders in early childhood participate in varied ways, for example they can participate in materials production. They can also play advocacy roles towards the promotion of educare services. Parents as key stakeholders in early childhood participate in varied ways. Parents make decisions regarding their children, for example as members of the centre development committee. Some parents can volunteer to use their qualifications and skills to provide services at an educare centre. Dress makers, Carpenters and welders can be handy when it comes to materials production.
EO4	They can be volunteers and use their skills to develop and improve educare settings. They can be members of the centre development committee and participate in decision making at the centre. They can play advisory roles to the centre directors and staff. They can take part or initiate teaching and learning materials production. Parents can be members of the centre or school Development Committee and participate in decision making for the good of the institution. Parents can come in as volunteers to use their skills to help develop the centre. They can take part in teaching and learning materials production.
EO5	Parents should be consulted whenever policies are being formulated and should be involved when they are implemented. Parents should demonstrate a positive view of educare policy and practice at home. Attending to school events is one way of participating in educare practices
EO6	Parents can come in as volunteers to use their skills to help develop the centre. Parents can also be consulted on issues pertaining to educare policy and practice. Parents can be members of the parents’ board that oversee the development at an ECD Centre. Participating in early childhood events, like attending meetings, sports days etc is another way in which parents participate in ECD. They can be members of the parents committee that oversee development at an ECD centre

**Question 8: How do you regard the relationship between school/ECD centre and the home on the provision of educare?**

EO1	There should be a harmonious relationship between the home and the centre, they all aim to develop the child. Good relations help to bridge the gap between the home and the centre setting. Parents and caregivers work hand in hand for the effective teaching and learning of the child. Parental involvement in ECD centers play a pivotal role so the centre and the community should work collaboratively.
EO2	There should be a good relationship between the ECD centre and the parents since home and school gap can be effectively be bridged. Where there are harmonious working relationships between school and parents, quality of service provision can be greatly improved. This helps to bridge the home and school gap. Where there is a harmonious working relationship between school and parents, quality of service provision can be greatly improved. The home can be an extension of the school
EO3	There should be a mutual understanding between the school and the parents. When parents and caregivers work together, there are chances that the home-school bridge gap is closed. There should be mutual respect from both settings as this is good for the development of the children. Parents should be responsive to all the supplications which matter in the holistic development of children. There should be a mutual understanding between the school and the parents. This is good for the development of the children.
EO4	There should be a close relationship so that the two parties share information concerning the child's development. There should be a positive view of education at home so that children are motivated to attend school. There should be a close relationship so that the two parties can share information concerning the child's development. The school and the home can work together towards developing and improving accessibility to birth to three educare.
EO5	There should be a closer relationship between these key stakeholders. Parents in turn will get knowledge on child development issues from the teachers and they will develop in their caregiving practices. There should be a closer relationship between these key stakeholders. The working together of parents and caregivers in educare service provision sector is key in helping it develop. Parents in turn will get knowledge on child development issues from the caregivers and they will develop their caregiving practices.
EO6	An effective system should have a strong partnership of parents, the centre/school and the community. An effective system should have a strong partnership between the parents and the centre/school. A harmonious relationship helps to close the gap between home and the school.