

Assessing the Benefits and Challenges of the Introduction of Early Childhood Development Education to the Infant Grade in the Zimbabwean Education System

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Abstract

This study aimed at assessing the benefits and challenges of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) education programme in Zimbabwean primary schools. In an attempt to gather data to enable the researchers to answer the research problem, the present study adopted the descriptive survey design since it was all about people's perceptions on successes and problems in ECD. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data from the respondents. Document analysis was used as a source of evidence to substantiate the claims on the statistics on drop out and retention rates. The population of the study consisted of all grade one teachers in Chegutu District, Mashonaland West Region. In all a total of 200 respondents made it into the sampling frame. Of these 200, only 50 were chosen into the sample through simple random sampling. Benefits accruing to the ECD programme were unearthed. These included among others, a reduction of time needed to explain concepts due to the pupils attending the ECD centres. Results also show that teachers felt relieved to teach the pupils who had gone through the ECD programme because they were already exposed to some class work. The classes experienced an improved pass rate in subsequent grades as a result of attending ECD programmes. Children who have gone through the ECD programme are well disciplined as a result of attending the centres. In spite of these successes, challenges are affecting the smooth flow of the ECD programme in Zimbabwe. There are inadequate and inappropriate classrooms for use by the ECD pupils. Para-professionals are being hired to teach the ECD classes and there are no Education Officers available for effective supervision. There is no adequate equipment and the standard of available equipment at the play centres is poor.

Keywords: *Early childhood development education, Infant grade, Education system*