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ARTICLES

Full Length Research Paper

The mediating role of job satisfaction on the relationship between teachers' perceptions of supervisor support and job performances

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The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between teachers' perceptions of supervisor support and job performances and the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship. The study group consists of 206 teachers working in the public high schools in the Giresun province centre during the 2016-2017 academic year. The study group has been determined by simple randomized sampling method. In the study, the effect of teachers' supervisor support perceptions on job performance and the mediating role of job satisfaction have been tested by forming a structural equation model. According to the results, there is a positive linear relationship between supervisor support, job performance and job satisfaction and job satisfaction has a full mediating role between supervisor support and job performance.

Key words: Supervisor support, teacher, job satisfaction, performance.

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes and behaviours of the teacher towards the work may affect both the individual and the school-related job outputs. Attitudes and behaviours displayed by the teacher, on the other hand, may be affected by the internal and external stakeholders of the school. In this effect, the support of the school administrators to the teachers has an important part. Supervisor support means the evaluation of the subordinates and their contributions to the organization by the supervisors and supervisors' interest in their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 2002). In other words, it refers to support offered to the subordinates by supervisors in the organizational

sense and a positive work relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate (Bhanthumnavin, 2003). Supervisor support is a general idea developed by supervisors by considering the well-being of their subordinates, offering them solid assistance and emotional support (Kossek et al., 2011). In this regard, support of the school administrator means dignification of teachers, evaluation of their work, offering help and development of positive relationships with teachers by school administarators. There is significant relationship between teacher's perception of supervisor support and certain variables. Klusmann et al. (2008) note that

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support of the school administrator influence teachers' level of taking responsibility. Kahn et al. (2006) also points out that negative relationships between the emotional-social support of school administrators and emotional exhaustion of teachers. Özdemir (2010) also states that supervisor support perceived by teachers at elementary schools is related to organizational citizenship behaviour.

One of the variables with which supervisor support is positively associated is job satisfaction (Babin and Boles, 1996; Baloyil et al., 2014; Demirhan et al., 2014; Griffin et al., 2001; Ng and Sorenson, 2008). Job satisfaction refers to the happiness, pleasure, or satisfaction that employees take from their work. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the concepts of job satisfaction, job pleasure or job contentedness are generally used interchangeably. Job satisfaction (job pleasure) is defined as the pleasurable feeling about the resulting job after the evaluation of one's job "(Robbins and Judge, 2012, p. 77). According to Güney (2011, p. 12), job satisfaction is "the happiness and peacefulness of employees feel when what they gain at the workplace meet their material and spiritual needs". If teacher's job satisfaction means pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction, happiness and positive feelings the teacher has towards his/her work. In the literature, teachers 'perception of supervisor support seems to be related to teachers' job performance. Tickle et al. (2011) points out that perceptions of teachers' supervisor support greatly influence their job satisfaction and intention to stay in the educational environment and that it mediates student behaviours and educational experiences. Brackett et al. (2010) also states that there is positive relationships between secondary school teacher's perception of supervisor support and their job satisfaction, positive emotions, personal accomplishments and social affiliation and negative relationships between negative feelings and depersonalization (burnout).

One of the variables where supervisor support is positively related to is job performance (Azman et al., 2009; Bhanthumnavin, 2003; Demirhan et al., 2014; Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006; Saleem and Amin, 2013; Pazy and Ganzach, 2009). Job performance means work accomplishment, or the degree of success demonstrated in any job (Demirtaş and Güneş, 2002). The concept of work performance is a concept that expresses to what degree a goal has been achieved at a job and at what level goals have been accomplished. The teacher's job performance is related to how successfully the teacher fulfils his/her duties and responsibilities. A high performing teacher fulfils his/her duties and responsibilities successfully and provides important contributions to the success of the school. Studies have shown that negative physical conditions and intra-institutional tensions increase the complaints of teachers and cause the performance of the work to decrease; high

levels of wages, good communication at school and sincere relationships with managers increase job performance (Akbaba and Kipici, 2015). There is also a significant relationship between teacher perception of supervisor support and job performance. The teacher, supported by the school administrator, experiences the feelings of happiness, peace, determination, effort, confidence, self-importance and trust towards school, power, success and displays higher performance (Argon, 2014).

There is also a positive relationship between job satisfaction, which indicates the general attitude of employees to their work, and job performance (Aydemir and Erdogan, 2013; Demirhan et al., 2014; Harrison et al., 2006; Judge et al., 2001; Schleicher et al., 2004). In addition, it is observed in the literature that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and job performance of teachers (Arifin, 2015; Koç et al., 2009).

The following hypotheses have been developed upon reviewing the studies in the literature on supervisor support, job satisfaction and job performance:

H1: There is a positive linear relationship between teachers' supervisor support perceptions and job performance.
H2: There is a positive linear relationship between teachers' perception of supervisor support and job satisfaction.
H3: There is a positive linear relationship between teacher job satisfaction and job performance.
H4: Job satisfaction of teachers has a mediating effect on the relationship between supervisor support perceptions and job performance.

The following conceptual model can be developed from hypotheses developed by drawing upon the literature (Figure 1). According to this, there is a positive linear relationship between supervisor support, job satisfaction and job performance.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to reveal the linear relationship between teachers' perceptions of supervisor support and job performances and to test the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship.

Study group

The study group of this study consists of 206 primary school teachers that work in 20 different high schools located in the provincial center of Giresun. The study group was determined by simple randomized sampling method. The forms including the

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

scales used were randomly distributed among 250 teachers working at the determined schools; 234 forms were returned, and 9 forms were excluded from analysis due to missing information; while 19 forms were excluded during normality and linearity tests. Thus, a total of 206 forms was used for the analyzes. 96 (46.6%) of the teachers involved in the research are female, 110 (53.4%) are male, 33 (16.0%) are between the ages of 22-31; 89 (43.2%) are between the ages of 32-41; 57 (27.7%) are between the ages of 42-51; 26 (12.6%) are between the ages of 52-61 and 1 (0.5%) of them was older than 65. 168 (81.6) of the teachers are married and 38 (18.4%) are single. 180 (87.4%) of the teachers have a bachelor's degree, 23 (11.2%) have a master's degree and 3 (1.5%) have an associate degree.

Data collection tools

Supervisor support scale

The scale developed by Kottke and Sharafinski (1988) has been adapted into Turkish by Özdemir (2010). The 14-item scale is of 5-point Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). As a result of the factor analysis made by Özdemir (2010), it has been understood that 14 items are collected under one factor and the total variance is 0.71. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the items is 0.96 and the factor loadings are between 0.58 and 0.90. In this study, one dimensional structure was verified by applying confirmatory factor analysis to the scale. The fit indexes of the model according to the DFA result have been calculated as; χ^2/df=2.14, p<0.001; RMSEA= 0.07, GFI=0.90; AGFI= 0.86, CFI= 0.96, IFI= 0.96, RFI=0.93, NFI=94, RMR= 0.02. In this study, the Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is determined as 0.96.

Job satisfaction scale

The scale developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) has been adapted into Turkish by Gödelek (1988). The 14-item scale is of 5-point likert type (1 = does not satisfy me at all, 5 = satisfies me very much). This scale was applied on teachers by Tasdan (2008) and validity and reliability analyses were conducted. According to the results of the study conducted on teachers by Taşdan (2008), the scale is one dimensional. Factor load values of the items included in the scale varies in between 0.69 and 0.86. The total variance

expressed by the scale was 64%. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.95. In this study, DFA analysis was done for this research by researcher and one dimensional structure was verified by applying confirmatory factor analysis to the scale. The fit indexes of the model according to the DFA result have been calculated as; χ^2/df =2.19, p<0.001; RMSEA= 0.07, GFI=0.90; AGFI= 0.85, CFI= 0.90, IFI= 0.91, RMR= 0.06 In this study, the Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is determined as 0.83.

Job performance scale

The scale developed by Kirkman and Rosen (1999) has been adapted into Turkish by Çöl (2008). In the factor analysis by Çöl (2008); it has been found out that the scale has a one-factor structure and the factor loadings vary between 0.781 and 0.807. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.82. In this study, DFA analysis was done for this research by researcher and one-dimensional structure was verified by applying confirmatory factor analysis to the scale. The fit indexes of the model according to the DFA result have been calculated as; χ^2/df= 4.79, p<0.001; GFI=0.97; AGFI= 0.87, CFI= 0.96, IFI= 0.96, NFI=95. In this study, the Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is determined as 0.80.

Mediation effect

Baron and Kenny (1986) method was followed to analyze the mediation effect. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), some conditions need to be met in order to prove the mediation effect. In the first condition, the independent variable (supervisor support) should have a significant effect on the dependent variable (job performance). In the second condition, the independent variable (supervisor support) should have a significant effect on the mediator variable (job satisfaction). In the third condition, mediating variable (job satisfaction) should have a significant effect on the dependent variable (job performance). In the fourth condition, effects of both independent (supervisor support) and the mediator (job satisfaction) variables on a dependent variable (job performance) are calculated. In such case, the mediation effect may be considered only when the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable becomes meaningless (Full medium) or decreases (partial medium).

Table 1. Relationships between mean and standard deviation values and variables.

Variables	$\overline{X}$	SD	1	2	3
1. Supervisor Support	3.68	0.74	-		
2. Job Satisfaction	3.24	0.54	0.45**	-	
3. Job Performance	3.96	0.57	0.26**	0.41**	-

** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Goodness of fit values.

Goodness of fit values	Perfect	Acceptable
P	$0.05 \leq p \leq 1.00$	$0.01 \leq p \leq 0.05$
χ^2/df	0-2	2-3
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08
RMR	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08
CFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90
IFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90
GFI	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.85
AGFI	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.85

Source: Adapted from Çokluk et al. (2014), Kline (2005), Seçer (2015), Tabacknick and Fidell (2001).

Analysis of the data

The statistical analysis of the data obtained in the study was performed on the computer environment with the statistical package programs. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0 statistical program was used in the evaluation of the data. In the analysis of the obtained data, Structural Equation Model method was used with Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 18.0 program.

FINDINGS

A correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between teachers' supervisor support perceptions, job satisfaction and performance. Relationships between mean and standard deviation values and the variables in the study are shown in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, general average of teachers' supervisor support perceptions is calculated as $\overline{X}$ = 3.68, general average of job satisfaction is calculated as $\overline{X}$ = 3.24, general average of job performance is calculated as $\overline{X}$ = 3.96. According to Table 1, there is a significant positive relationship between supervisor support and teachers' job satisfaction (r = 0.45, p <0.01) and job performance (r = 0.26, p <0.01). In addition, there is a significant positive

relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and job performance (r = 0.41, p <0.01).

The range of goodness-of-fit values for fitness evaluation of the model are shown in Table 2.

Mediation test with structural equation modelling

Mediating role of job satisfaction in the effect of supervisor support on teacher's job performance has been determined by two different path analyses. Baron and Kenny (1986) method mentioned above has been used as basis to prove the effect of mediation. According to this; in the first model, it has been tested whether supervisor support has a significant effect on job performance. When the first model is examined, it is observed that supervisor support has a significant effect on teachers' job performance (standardized β = 0.28, p <0.05). Thus, the first hypothesis has been accepted. The first model is given in Figure 2.

The goodness-of-fit indexes of the model show that the model is in between acceptable limits (χ^2/df =1.7, p<0.001; RMSEA= 0.059, GFI=0.90; CFI= 0.97, IFI= 0.97, RMR= 0.052). Standardized beta (β), standard error and significance value of the path from supervisor support to job performance are shown in Table 3.

According to the findings, first condition has been met in the first model.
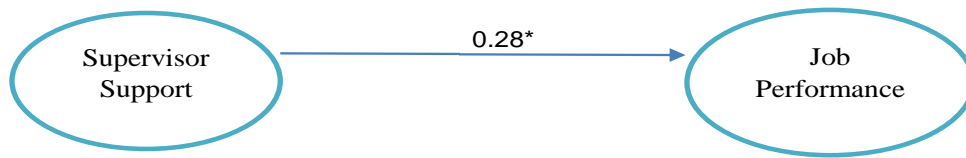
Figure 2. Mediation tests with structural equation modelling.

Table 3. Path coefficients of Model 1.

Path	Standardized β	Standard Error	p
Supervisor support → Job performance	0.28	0.52	0.00

Figure 3. Mediation tests with structural equation modelling.

Table 4. Path coefficients of Model 2.

Path	Standardized β	Standard Error	p
Supervisor Support → Job Satisfaction	0.41	0.06	0.00
Job Satisfaction → Job Performance	0.47	0.11	0.00
Supervisor Support → Job Performance	0.08	0.05	0.27

The relationships between job satisfaction and supervisor support and job satisfaction and job performance have been tested in the second model according to the Baron and Kenny (1986) method. In this model, supervisor support is considered as independent, job performance is considered as dependent and job satisfaction is considered as mediator variable. The second model is shown in Figure 3.

The goodness-of-fit indexes of the model show that the model is in between acceptable limits ($χ^2$/df =1.9, p<0.001; RMSEA= 0.068, CFI= 0.90, IFI= 0.90). Path analysis values of model 2 is shown in Table 4.

When the second model is examined, it is observed that supervisor support has a significant effect on teachers' job satisfaction (standardized β= 0.43; p< 0.05); and job satisfaction has significant effect on job performance (standardized β= 0.52; p< 0.05). Thus, second and third hypotheses have been accepted. According to this, 2nd and 3rd conditions of Baron and Kenny (1986) have been met as well. In addition to all these, by the inclusion of job satisfaction in the model, the effect of supervisor support (standardized β = 0.08; p>0.05) on job performance of teachers has become meaningless. Thus, 4th condition of Baron and Kenny (1986) has been met as well. According to this, job satisfaction of the teachers has a full mediator variable

role within the relationship between supervisor support and job performance. Thus, fourth hypothesis has been accepted, too.

DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the relationship between teachers' perceptions of supervisor support, job performance and job satisfaction and to analyze the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship. As a result of the study, it has been revealed that there are positive relationships between teachers' supervisor support perceptions, job performance and job satisfaction.

According to the results, there is a positive relationship between teachers' supervisor support perceptions and their job performance and their supervisor support perceptions influence their job performance positively. This result supports the research findings of Akbaba and Kipici (2015), which show that the job performances of the teachers who have intimate relations with their supervisors increase. This is parallel to the research findings of Argon (2014), who has found out that the teacher supported by the school supervisor exhibits a higher performance. In addition, this finding supports the findings of Azman et al. (2009), Bhanthumnavin (2003), Demirhan et al. (2014), Saleem and Amin (2013), Shanock and Eisenberger (2006), and Pazy and Ganzach (2009) revealing that there are positive relationships between supervisor support and employee performance.

According to the results, there is a positive relationship between teachers' supervisor support perceptions and their job satisfaction and their supervisor support perceptions influence their job satisfaction positively. This result overlaps with the findinds of Tickle et al. (2011) pointing out that perceptions of teachers' supervisor support greatly influence their job satisfaction and intention to stay in the educational environment. The findings of Brackett et al. (2010) revealing that there are positive relationships between secondary school teacher's perception of supervisor support and their job satisfaction, positive emotions, personal accomplishments and social appeals also supports this results. This result supports the findings of Babin and Boles (1996), Baloyil et al. (2014), Demirhan et al. (2014), Griffin et al. (2001), and Ng and Sorenson (2008) revealing that there is a positive correlation between job satisfaction and supervisor support.

According to the results, there is a positive relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and their job performance and their job satisfaction influences their job performance positively. This result supports the findings of Arifin (2015), and Koç et al. (2009) revealing that there are significant positive relationships between teachers' job satisfaction and job performances and teachers'

job satisfaction influence their job performance. In addition, this result overlaps with the findings of Aydemir and Erdogan (2013), Demirhan et al. (2014), Harrison et al. (2006), Judge et al. (2001), and Schleicher et al. (2004) revealing that there are positive relationships between employees' job satisfaction and job performances.

Another result of this study, job satisfaction plays a full mediating role in the relationship between teachers' supervisor support perceptions and job performances. There are not many studies in the literature focusing on the relationship between supervisor support and job performance (Azman et al., 2009; Bhanthumnavin, 2003; Demirhan et al., 2014; Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006; Pazy and Ganzach, 2009; Saleem and Amin, 2013). Most of these studies focus on the linear relation between the two variables. However, the lack of any studies on the relationship between the two variables is considered as a major deficiency. It is clear that a variable such as job satisfaction, that is closely related to both supervisor support and job performance, may have an effect on the relationship between these two factors. The results of the mediation test conducted to test this idea also show that while teachers' perceptions of supervisor support influence their performances; job satisfaction plays a variable role in this relationship. When job satisfaction is included in the model, supervisor support has no effect on job performance. In a sense, the job satisfactions of teachers participating in the study are shaped by their perceptions of supervisor support in the school; and thus the relationship between supervisor support and teachers' job performances occurs in the context of job satisfaction. This result supports the findings of Judge et al. (2001) examining more than three hundred studies and revealing that there is medium strength correlation between job satisfaction and job performance.

These findings have an important implication for school administrators. Today, improvement of teachers' success, productivity and effectiveness is considered very crucial for all schools. However, if managers do not pay attention to managerial practices, this may negatively affect job satisfaction of the employees, and then may lead to poor performance. Job satisfaction level of the teachers in the study is moderate. Considering that job satisfaction is related to supervisor support, it is necessary for the supervisors to behave thoughtfully and friendly towards the teachers, to show personal interest, to value them, to empathize with them, to listen to and to support their opinions. Teachers having the perception that they are supported by the school managers will have more job satisfaction and this will be reflected in the job performance positively. This will serve to improve of the success and efficiency of schools. This research examines the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between teachers' perceptions of supervisor support and their job performances. In future studies,

researchers may examine the influence of variables such as organizational commitment, justice, and organizational citizenship behaviour as mediating variables on the relationship between supervisor support and job performance.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Challenges and gaps in children's transition from early childhood development to grade one in Zimbabwe

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The study focused on challenges and gaps faced by children during the transition period from early childhood development (ECD) to primary education and possible solutions to them. It adopted the qualitative methodological approach through the use of Focus Group Discussions with councillors, education officials, child care workers, chiefs, parents and teachers. Document analysis provided an additional layer of transition practices in the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education through the analysis of various circulars, ECD syllabus and the Early Reading Initiative Modules for ECD A and B. Data analysis was done according to emerging themes and descriptive statistics. The study covered two districts of Zimbabwe, namely, Goromonzi and Marondera. Participants were purposively sampled on the basis of characteristics relevant to transitioning of children from early childhood to formal education. Participants included councillors, education officials, child care workers, chiefs, parents and teachers. A total of fifteen schools from each district were randomly selected. Findings from the study showed that participants were not aware of the policy on transition and as such are likely not to follow the demands of the policy when teaching children. It was also very clear from the responses that the participants are aware of the importance of the transitioning period to the child. Lack of qualified teachers and expertise were cited as a challenge by participants. The study also found out that lack of resources (material) is another challenge which affects successful transitions. Participants also cited anxiety and withdrawal, difficulty in working independently and following instructions, difficulty with behaviour regulation (such as the ability to delay gratification) and reluctance or refusal to attend school as challenges. Distance travelled by children posed problems for children. Lack of commitment by some parents in the transition process was also found by the study to be a challenge. Findings also revealed that a number of stakeholders are important for effective transitioning of children which include teachers, parents, community, government through its different ministries, health workers and non-governmental organisations.

Key words: Transition, early childhood learning, gaps, challenges, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Dunlop and Fabian (2002: 148) define transition as "the passage from one place, stage, state, style or subject to another over time". The definition encompasses the development of all the domains which include physical,

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social, emotional, cognitive, language and spiritual. The early years of a child are critical as they lay the foundation for children's cognitive, personal, social, emotional and physical development. As they develop, children transition from one stage of learning to another. Transitions offer opportunities for children to learn how to manage change in a positive way. Docket and Perry (2007) see transition from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to primary school as an important challenge for children and that their successful passage will bring with it an opportunity for children to grow, learn and equip them to be more resilient in the future. Children experience many big and small transitions in life. However, their transition from ECD to formal education is a major event in the lives of families and children. It can be a time for excitement for everyone involved. For some children, it can be a time to master new skills. At the same time, for some children it can be a time for uncertainty and concern about the unknown as one leaves old friends and teachers, meaning it is a time for separation from safe, familiar and loving setting and venturing into the unfamiliar. While this may be exciting for some, this unfamiliarity may also bring with it a number of challenges such as anxiety and fear. Such challenges may have far reaching impacts on the way the child progresses with formal education. It is important to give attention to children's transition because this is the time when systems can make or break children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Zimbabwe, the transition period for an ECD child was not regarded as critical from independence up to 1988. The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs housed the ECD programme which was known as Early Childhood Education and Care or ECEC. Parents volunteered and took turns to take care of children while mothers engaged in income generating projects like sewing school uniforms, baking bread, growing vegetables among others. The settings were treated as play groups and later on evolved into feeding points where children only assembled to get food prepared by mothers. Given the aforementioned scenario in Zimbabwe, there was continuity from the ECD settings to primary schools in terms of only the social and physical development of the child. The child learnt to interact and mix with others. However, there was a gap in terms of development in the other domains which included emotional, intellectual and spiritual development, thus transition from the ECD settings to primary schools lacked continuity and development of school readiness on the side of the child. In 1988, the programme moved to the then Ministry of Education because an educational component had been added. The transition period was again not recognized as very critical at this point because

semi-skilled teachers would man the classes (Nziramasanga, 1999; Dyanda et al., 2005).

In 2004, a policy pronouncement was made that required primary schools to attach an ECD class in 2005 that would graduate into Grade One in 2006. The Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 was developed which required the ECD classes to be manned by appropriately qualified teachers. The Director's Circulars 12 of 2005, 48 of 2007 and the Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 were developed which gave guidelines on the implementation of the ECD programme. In light of these policy pronouncements, there was a yawning gap between policy and practice. Generally, primary schools were not ready for the ECD children with respect to classrooms, toilets, furniture and appropriately qualified teachers. The environment was unfriendly to ECD children and this affected the smooth transition from ECD to Grade One. As a way of commitment to transitioning of ECD children, the government started training ECD teachers at Primary Teachers Colleges. The government wanted teachers who were skilled and equipped to handle ECD children so that they could transition from ECD to Grade One successfully. In 2010, an ECD curriculum was developed which combined ECD A and B. The combination of the ECD A and B curriculum created a gap for a smooth transition because most ECD teachers failed to interpret the curriculum. They could not grade the activities according to ECDA and B classes. The activities taught to ECD A were the same activities taught to ECD B children and this resulted in children's learning becoming redundant and boring.

Children's development and readiness for school are determined and influenced by a number of factors at the level of the child and in the surrounding environment which may include socioeconomic status, home learning environment and schools' readiness for children. The socioeconomic status of the family affects children's health, intellectual capabilities, academic achievement and behavior positively or negatively. For example, family poverty may result in children being malnourished and such children are less engaged in their environments, less active and have shorter attention span than their well-nourished counterparts (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). UNESCO (2007) posits that many poor children never enter school while on the other hand, other children enroll but are unable to successfully transition into the school environment as they are likely to perform poorly, repeat grades or drop out of school at high rates (Arnold et al., 2008). Such children have disadvantaged learning environments in their homes and generally begin school with less language than peers from higher income backgrounds (Pikulski and Templeton, 2004). Studies have shown that support from a caregiver during the early years results in children's greater social competence, fewer behavioural issues and enhanced cognitive skills in schools (World Health Organization,

2004). This suggests that even in contexts of poverty, parents can find ways to give their children a healthy and good start in their early years. Schools that are ready for children provide an environment in which all children are able to learn. Research has suggested that children's initial academic and social success at school can lay the foundation for their long-term adjustment and progress, leading to a cycle of achievement success (Fabian, 2007). However, schools are not often ready for children, in that they fail to provide an environment which enables all children to learn effectively which include teacher capacity among others.

Theoretical framework

This study draws from Dewey's theory on continuity of experience in education and the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition. According to Dewey, what the child has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. He also claims that every experience takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. The theory implies that what has been acquired by the child at one level of education will be carried over to the next level of education. Thus, it is the task of the teacher to give children work founded in their earlier experience and to create connections to the new one. This suggests that the curricular for early learning and Grade One should have a link so that there is continuity in learning by the child and this can ensure smooth transition from one level to another. Only then will new experiences become educational. This theory is relevant because it emphasizes on the links and relationships between school levels.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's model, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) proposed the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition as a theoretical framework in which Early Childhood Development can be framed in order to understand and analyse the interactions and relationships occurring during the transition period (Stormshark and Goodman, 2002). The model is based upon a complex set of elements and variables involved in the transition period and further highlights the importance of this idea by arguing that the development of this ecology itself is a key focus for understanding transition processes and outcomes. Dockett and Perry (2001) posit that in an ecological model, a child's transition to school is understood in terms of the influence of contexts (for example the family, school, community) and the connections among these contexts (e.g. family-school relationships) at any given time. Early Childhood Development children experience a physical change when entering the first grade of the primary school. This represents a major challenge, not only because they are

no longer in a familiar environment/setting and have to adapt to a new one, but because the interrelations they used to have completely change. Children's relationships change when they leave the social connections they used to have (for example group of friends and teachers) in preschool. In addition, by the end of the Early Childhood Development year, they have already established a close relationship with the teacher who has become a significant figure. Moreover, a home-school link already established may be strained. Thus, in this model, it is implied that there is discontinuity in learning by the child and this is likely to negatively affect the child's transition. In such a situation, there exists a gap that may affect the smooth transition of the child from one level to another that needs to be addressed by the curricular that are linked and overlapping. This theory was chosen because it emphasizes on the importance of links and relationships within contexts and their impact on the transition of the child.

Essentially, the two theories do appreciate that knowledge and skills cannot be acquired in a social vacuum but through a web of relationships or context in which the child finds him/herself in. Given this understanding, it can therefore be safely argued that the said theoretical frameworks meaningfully inform this study.

During the transition period, children can face new challenges. They need to adapt not only to a new physical environment but also make new friends and establish a new relationship with the new teacher and adults involved. In addition, they no longer have the opportunity to play. Instead, they have to show and use their academic skills to fulfill the requirements of an outcome-based pedagogy (Docket and Perry, 2007). In addition, a new parent-teacher relationship will have to be established because parents are the first and natural teachers of their children. A parent and a teacher in the transition of a child from ECD to primary school, by way of an analogy should be like the left and right hand, both need to know what is happening. These are not easy tasks (arguably they are not easy for parents and teachers either) and require a set of cognitive, social and emotional skills that children may or may not have depending on a number of variables such as early educational experiences and family background. A number of studies have highlighted a range of physical, cognitive, social and emotional elements to consider during this shift. One of the key elements of this model are the links and interconnections that need to be established among the child, school, teachers, parents and neighbourhood in order to tackle the challenges that transition represents (Arnold et al., 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. The qualitative approach was adopted

Table 1. Target groups and the number of meetings.

Target group	Number of meetings
10 School Development Committee members	One
20 ECD teachers	Two meetings, each with 10 participants
8 Ward Councillors and 2 chiefs	One
10 Child Care Workers	One
10 Officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education	One
Total	Six

to elicit the views, perceptions, opinions and knowledge of key informants on the challenges that are encountered during the transitioning period. The quantitative approach facilitated access to a wider number of participants in order to get diverse views on issues under investigation.

Sample and sampling procedure

The sample for the study comprised of 80 participants broken down as follows: 20 ECD teachers, 10 officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 8 ward councilors, 10 child care workers, 2 chiefs and 10 School Development Committee members (community). The councilors, chiefs, parents and education officials were purposively chosen because these were the key informants who could give information required on the challenges faced by children during the transition period. All the School Development Committee members were involved in the study. Their views and opinions represented those of parents in their respective communities. The teachers were randomly chosen.

Data collection methods

In this study, data generation was through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), questionnaires and document analysis. FGDs were held with councilors, education officials, child care workers, chiefs, parents and teachers in order to elicit in-depth information on achievements expected from children during the transition period, support rendered to teachers during this period, how the children's transition is monitored and the environment that promotes positive transition data for the FGDs was tape recorded. Field notes were also taken down to augment the tape recorded data. A total of six Focus Group Discussion meetings were held with the following groups: Focus Group Discussions were held with each group separately. These were held at various schools in the two districts which were involved in the study. Each Focus Group Discussion was held for 90 minutes. The FGDs were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussions were free-flowing (Table 1).

A structured questionnaire was used to gather participants' view on the importance of the transitioning period to the child, transition policy, challenges encountered during the transition period and how they are overcome. The questionnaire was administered to 30 participants, these are 20 ECD teachers and 10 officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Document analysis was used to generate data from the ECD and Grade One curricular as well as various circulars such as: Director's Circular 48 of 2007, Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 as well as Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005.

Data presentation and analysis procedures

Data gathered from the study were presented through descriptions of lived experiences of the research participants. The analysis of data was done according to emerging themes and descriptive statistics that were also used to unpack the identified gaps and different thematic areas. Data therefore, were unpacked according to thematic areas which were grounded in and informed by FGDs and document analysis. Data collected from questionnaires was presented using percentages through a graph and pie chart.

Main aim of the study

The study was undertaken within the framework to analyze the challenges and gaps faced by children when they transition from early childhood development to primary school.

FINDINGS

Understanding of transitioning

The respondents defined 'transitioning' in a similar way, although stated in different words. The following are the responses given by the participants:

(1) As one moves from one step to another, there are changes which require adaptability;
(2) Gradual shift from one stage to another;
(3) Moving from one stage of development to another;
(4) Moving from one environment to another;
(5) Element of adjusting and adapting to the next stage;
(6) Smooth gradual change from one stage to another;
(7) Moving or shifting from one level to another;
(8) Gradual shifting from one level to another; and
(9) Period which takes place between two stages.

The variety of responses indicated that the participants viewed transitioning as a concept which includes a range of behaviours that relate to physical movement from one level or stage to another. The responses also indicated that transition embraces aspects of development (intellectual aspect), adjustment and adaptability (social

and emotional aspects) to new environments. Their responses are silent on the relationships/connections among family, school and community contexts. Parents know their children far better than teachers and there is need for a dialogue between the school and home for smooth transition. The school is a new environment to the child and the child is faced with a task of forming new web of relationships with teachers, non-academic staff and other children. Hence, their responses indicate a significant gap on the child's capacity to quickly adjust to the new environment during transition.

Importance of the transitioning period to the child

The participants pointed out that the transitioning period has numerous benefits for the child. Respondents 35.5% (11) said transition lays foundation for future learning, 28.7% (9) of the participants said transition introduces children to formal learning, 20.3% (5) of the respondents said transition promotes brain maturity, 12% (4) of the respondents said transition helps children grow physically, while 3.5% (1) of the respondents said transition avoids regression, and some of the responses are as indicated as follows: prepares the child for formal education; helps the child to adapt better to a new learning environment; psychologically it prepares a child for movement from one stage to another; and allows a child to adjust before going to grade 1 (that is, from home to school).

It is very clear from the responses that the participants are aware of the importance of the transitioning period to the child although they are limited to formal education and yet education goes beyond formal education or the four walls of the classroom. Issues of lifelong success, improvement of economic and social development of a society have been left out. Thus, it prepares the child for lifelong success, cuts down on high school dropout rates, substance abuse, and high teenage pregnancy.

The transition policy

Participants 80% (24) indicated that there was a policy on transition, 13.4% (4) said that there was no policy on transition, and 6.6% (2) of the participants were not sure as to whether there was policy on transition. When probed further, the participants who said there was a policy on transition could not name and explain the policy and such participants were likely not to follow the demands of the policy when teaching children. The responses clearly indicate that there is a policy gap. The inability by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to enunciate a clearly defined policy on transition becomes a challenge to the transitioning of children. The policies that are there do not specifically

speak to issues of transition although they give guidelines to teachers on the implementation of the ECD programme (Secretary's circulars 14 of 2004; 2 of 2014; Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005; Director' circulars 12 of 2005 and 48 of 2007). Lack of a focused specific policy on transition leads to inadequacies in effective transitions including weak accountability mechanisms by teachers. There is no reference point for the teachers. Policy always informs practice; hence, the absence of a clear and specific policy leads to the development of a laissez-faire attitude by teachers towards their work. Arguably, lack of policy on transition affects the smooth transitioning of children (Figure 1).

Achievements expected from children during the transition period

The participants pointed out that parents expected their children to name shapes, identify and read pictures given to them. Parents also expected their children to respect their teachers and the classroom rules. As children are expected to respect parents and other elders as well as rules at home, the same is expected of them when they go to school. Parents also pointed out that they expected their children to hold a pencil or crayons correctly and organize their lunch boxes. The parents stated that they expected their children to identify letters of the alphabet. Children were expected by parents to repeat a statement said by their teacher. Children were also expected to greet people appropriately in accordance with times of the day. When probed further on the difference between a child who has been to ECD and one who has not, the participants acknowledged that there is a difference between the two children in that the one who attended ECD education displayed some of the following: sings, holds a crayon/pencil properly, has confidence, can relate well with the teacher and other children, does not soil oneself, is ahead academically, is ready for school and is well prepared, and has adjusted to the school environment.

The responses given are limited to academic and social skills and yet expectations should also focus on initiating and sustaining relationships and development of self-help skills. Such a child may not be a complete being in the society or may be a misfit in the society.

Assistance given to children during transition

The teachers gave their own perspectives based on classroom practice. The teachers stated that a child could be assisted by: making positive remarks whenever he/she does something good; loving him/her without any discrimination; operating at the level of his/her through the use of child-centered methods such as play that allow
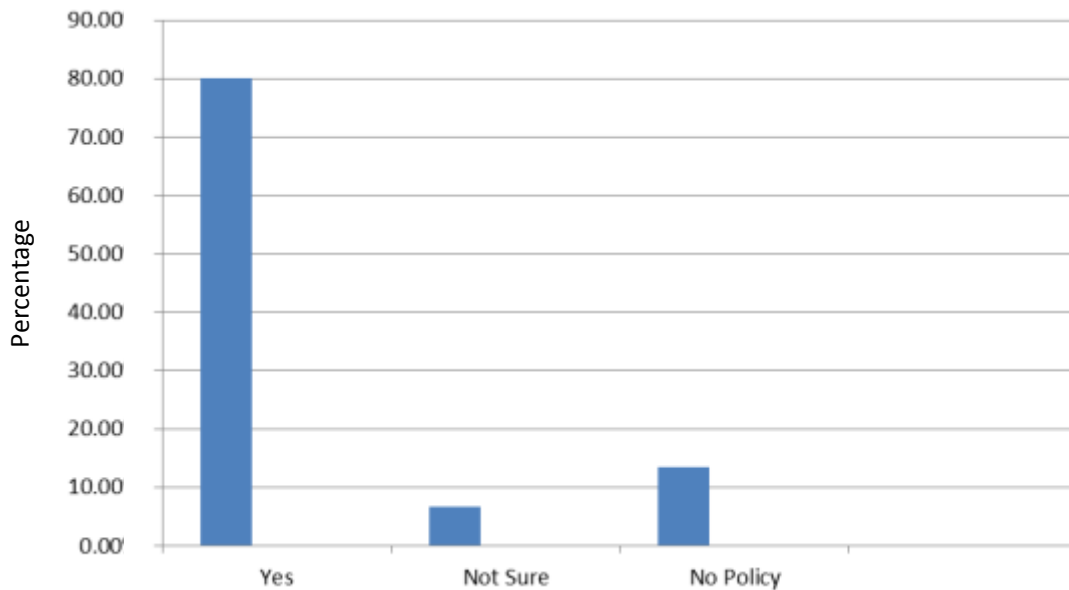
Figure 1. Policy on transition.

them to participate actively; making use of concrete media which he/she can see and touch; making him/her repeat tasks because repetition helps children to master concepts; and being friendly to him her among others.

The aforementioned responses mainly focus on classroom practice and none on the development of social skills. They have only focused on the development of the cognitive domain and yet transition should focus on the holistic development of the child which includes physical, social, emotional, intellectual, language, moral and health development.

Stakeholders who are crucial in the transitioning of the child

Respondents 32% (10) said the community is a stakeholder, 25.4% (8) of the respondents said the government is a stakeholder, 23% (6) of the respondents said parents are a stakeholder, 8% (2) of the respondents said teachers were a stakeholder, 5.8% (2) of the respondents said health officials were a stakeholder and 5.8% (2) of the respondents said NGOs were a stakeholder. From the aforementioned response of ECD children to primary school, the different stakeholders play different roles in the transition.

The responses indicated that for transition to be smooth, there is need for a multi-sectoral approach. Children themselves are a stakeholder. They too deserve a voice which gives recognition to their important contribution to the development of school transition programmes. Listening to children and spending time

conversing with them about what is happening, what will happen and why, to help orient children to the school environment, relationships and interactions they may encounter will support their adjustment to the school setting. It can also help to reveal ideas and issues that do not necessarily occur to adults.

Support needed during the transition of the child

The participants stated that during transition, children need support in the form of food, toys, qualified teachers, well-equipped classrooms, psychosocial support, transport to and from school and being accompanied to and from school. This implies that if children are afforded, the listed support, quality provision of services is afforded thus yielding positive effects on young children's cognitive and academic skills. Stronger partnerships between the home and school environments must be encouraged since family functioning has an enduring effect on children's academic performance as they embark on their educational journey.

Support rendered to teachers during the transition period

The teachers highlighted that they got material support from parents in terms of stationery in the form of art exercise books and crayons. From the school administration, teachers got support in the form of stationery (glue, manila sheets, and mighty markers) and food for children since they are some children who came

to school without having eaten anything. From colleagues, they got assistance in the area, one is not good at and from the District Education Offices, teachers got the Infant School Early Reading Initiative (ERI) Teacher's Module which helped them with information on activities to teach to children. The districts also mounted workshops to assist teachers with the interpretation and implementation of the ECD curriculum. The afore-mentioned responses are an indication that teachers are getting the maximum support possible during the transition of children from ECD to Grade One. In such a scenario, one would assume that smooth transition is taking place.

How the transition of the child is monitored

The participants indicated that there was need to monitor children during the transition period and this could be done in different ways. The participants pointed out that a developmental skills checklist could be used to monitor children's development during the transition period as it reflects the skills which the child is expected to master at certain stages of development such as saying his/her name in full, identifying different shapes and colours to name a few. The teachers concurred with the other participants when they highlighted that the checklist helps them check if the child has mastered all the skills that include pre-reading and pre-writing. The teachers added that portfolios were also used for monitoring and were meant for storing children's work (what children have drawn or coloured). Anecdotal records were also used to monitor children during the transition period and these contained incidences that will have occurred. The participants also pointed out that immunization or vaccination of children could be another way of monitoring children in the transitioning period and the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare is highly involved in this exercise. The participants pointed out that monitoring of children needed a multi-sectoral approach, where parents, teachers and other service providers were involved. Community health workers, child workers and local authorities are also part of the monitoring team. For example the headman or the chief encourages parents to feed, take care of children hygienically and pay fees for their children. This common understanding of the need for monitoring of children in the transition period would facilitate smooth progression from ECD to Grade One as it would flag areas that need attention.

Attitude of parents towards ECD children during the transition period

The participants stated that parents seemed to be ignorant of the importance of ECD because they thought children were playing at school and not learning. The participants assumed children were going to ECD just to play and some parents felt it was a waste of money to pay fees for ECD children for two years and to buy items such as books for children. Some parents preferred to take their children away from school when they are travelling for religious or funeral purposes. They did not seem to take the ECD programme seriously. When asked on who should convince parents on the importance of ECD, the participants pointed out that the ECD teachers had the mandate to convince parents by explaining to them during workshop meetings. The participants stated that the school played a big role in convening meetings with parents and then afford teachers an opportunity to explain the importance of ECD to parents. The participants also required teachers to make follow ups on children who were absent from school as a way of showing that ECD is important to children. Generally, the parents seem to be ignorant of the importance of ECD as reflected by their responses. Hence, there is knowledge gap on the part of parents on the importance of ECD.

The environment that promotes positive transition

The teachers described the environment that promotes positive transition as one that is age appropriate (in terms toilets, furniture). The environment should be child friendly and everything found in and outside the room should be user friendly. The surroundings needed to be safe and clean. Children are adventurous and if there are sharp and harmful objects around, it means children would hurt themselves. Children are also prone to diseases, so if the surroundings are dirty, children are likely to catch diseases. Teachers went on to say a good environment should have safe and clean water for children to drink. Dirty water would cause children to catch diseases such as typhoid and dysentery. The responses were limited to physical aspects of an environment to the exclusion of the social environment. An environment that has both the physical and social aspects is conducive to the smooth transition of children.

What teachers are expected to do in the transitioning period

The participants listed the following points as what they expected the teachers to do in the transition of children:

(1) Instill good morals in their children (hunhu/ubuntu)
(2) Teach the child school expectations
(3) Discipline children without beating them
(4) Be friendly to children
(5) Identify strengths and weaknesses of children
(6) Teach children about abuse
(7) Be non-discriminatory

(8) Avoid using vulgar language because children will imitate them
(9) Be good role models.

Challenges encountered during the transitioning period

Responses 48.8% (14) indicated that parents had challenges during the transition period. The challenges included lack of commitment by parents who did not want to pay fees for their children and were not keen to be involved in the school activities such as attending school meetings. This means parents lacked knowledge on the role they should play during the transition period. They were ignorant of the benefits of their involvement in the transition of children from ECD to primary school. Unfortunately, very few schools in Zimbabwe offer programmes that systematically target supporting parents during transition to primary school

Responses 40% (11) showed that resources (human) were also another challenge. Lack of qualified teachers and expertise were cited as another challenge. The current situation in Zimbabwe is that most ECD classes are manned by unqualified teachers (para-professionals). Lack of resources (material) by schools was cited by participants as another challenge which is likely to affect successful transitions. Most ECD centres in rural areas have inadequate resources due to financial constraints.

Participants 4.5% (2) said distance travelled by children was a challenge. Children are travelling long distances to school and this may result in some children dropping out of school. To prevent this from occurring, parents may pool their resources together and build community/village ECD centres and this would cut down on distance travelled by children. Most ECD centres are overcrowded with a ratio of 1:60 children per class instead of the prescribed 1:20 due to lack of infrastructure.

Responses 4.5% (2) indicated that the attitude of some community members towards ECD was negative, hence, lack of community involvement. The community needs to be educated on the importance of ECD through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

Participants 2.2% (1) showed that children's poor health was a challenge during the transition period. Children are prone to diseases and this impedes the smooth transition of the child. Depending on the condition of the child, he/she may be subjected to labeling and may eventually drop out of school. The village health workers can assist by educating communities on how to maintain hygiene in the homes.

The aforementioned responses seem to indicate that there are multidimensional challenges that may hinder the smooth transition of children from ECD to Grade One. These challenges call for collective efforts between public and private players. Where parents are involved, there is need to educate them on their parental obligations during the transition of their children (Figure 2).

How the challenges are overcome

The participants from the five groups listed a number of possible solutions to the challenges faced during the transition period. 23.5% (7) of the respondents indicated that the challenges that affect transition can be solved by way of recruiting more qualified teachers, 23.5% (7) of the respondents said parents should be involved in the transition, 12% (4) of the responses indicated that the government should be involved, 20.5% (6) of the participants thought the community could be a solution and 20.5% (6) of the participants mentioned the provision of resources as a solution to the challenges of transition. Participants pointed out that the qualified teachers needed to be increased in order to address the challenge of high teacher-pupil ratio. The participants suggested that the staffing officers should deploy in schools appropriately qualified teachers to teach ECD children and that the school heads should declare the rightful person needed for the ECD post and not get general teachers for this programme. The participants also highlighted that there is need to mount refresher courses for teachers so that they are capacitated to teach ECD effectively. To cut distance walked by children to school, participants pointed out that children needed to attend schools within their zones. The government should regulate how fees are charged in some centers since high fees deter parents from sending ECD children to school. The participants highlighted that the community should mobilize resources for the school and for children and suggested that locally available materials such as thatching classrooms with grass instead of using asbestos; making toys from locally available materials, using charcoal or leaves as paint; using clay in place of play dough; using gum trees to make play equipment; using old car tyres for ECD play centres and parents can be involved in toy production and moulding of bricks for the construction of the ECD classrooms. The participants stated that the School Development Committees should help schools come up with projects to assist children who are less privileged. Given the aforementioned responses, the need for multiple actors in facilitating the smooth transition of children is urgent so as to address the challenges which may impede the transition process. The challenges can only be minimized when different duty bearers work together for the greater good of the children (Figure 3).

DISCUSSION

In the study, it surfaced that there are many challenges that are faced by children during transition. Some of the challenges are: lack of qualified personnel, lack of involvement by communities, lack of focus and specific policy on transition, lack material and financial resources,
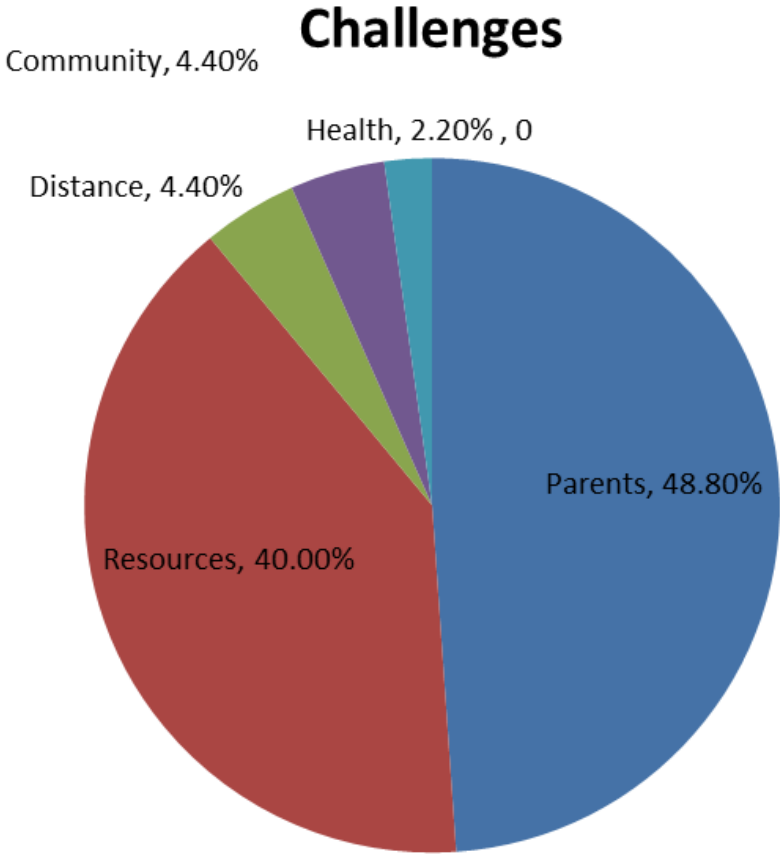
Challenges

Figure 2. Challenges faced during the transition period.

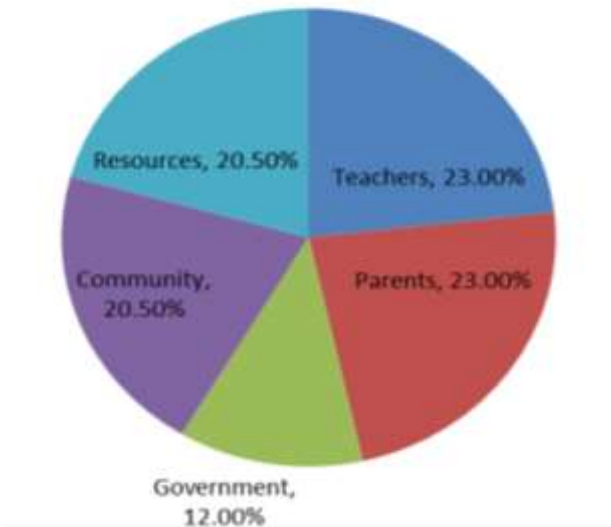## How to overcome Challenges

Figure 3. How to overcome challenges.

distance travelled by children and poor health. The Annual Statistical Report (2014) indicates that ECD trained teachers in Zimbabwe constitute 28.3% and the rest of the teachers are unqualified. This scenario poses a problem for children during the transition period because the untrained teacher lacks specific knowledge, skills and competencies on how to handle children during the important phase. A desk study of the National ECD curriculum revealed that it has many knowledge bases that are rooted in Child Development, Special Needs, Mathematics, Science, Technology and Social Sciences. For teachers to understand this curriculum, they need to be skilled in these areas and unfortunately it is not the case with unqualified teachers. There is a strong link between the level of education and/or pedagogical practices. The unqualified teacher cannot interpret the ECD curriculum and this affects the quality of service delivery and learning outcomes. Ability to create rich, stimulating environments in ECD is jeopardized when staff have inadequate, insufficient or incorrect content and pedagogical knowledge. A qualified teacher has the ability not only to support children and parents to understand the changes, expectations and practicalities of transition, but also assisting children and families to adjust to the social and emotional demands of starting school.

If resources are unavailable, the holistic development of children is compromised. This goes against the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990, Article 11) which stipulates that the education of a child shall be directed to the promotion and development of the child's mental and physical abilities. Lack of resources results in some schools having high teacher-pupil ratio because of inadequate infrastructure. Resources make learning more meaningful. They are more than just physical things, but are systems of objects, relationships, actors and environments. Learning is achieved through successful child-resource interaction.

With regards to lack of material resources (infrastructure) the classroom is the most important area for children during the transition period. Hence, its entire design should reflect the priorities, goals, philosophy, personality and teaching style of early learners. Over-crowdedness has a direct impact on children`s performance along with the "enjoyability" of school for children. It diminishes the quality of teaching and learning with serious implications on attainment of educational goals. Teachers face problems such as discipline and other behavioural problems when classes are over-crowded. In other words, the quality of learning during the transition period is compromised. Over-crowding creates unsafe environments. Teaching many children results in little or no access to the learning materials which are critical to the development of basic skills and competencies. Overcrowding also results in limited individualized attention which children need. The

introduction of shifts to address large class sizes may result in even fewer contact hours.

Participants also cited long distance travelled by children going to and from school as a challenge because some children miss school and if they go to school, they are inactive due to fatigue. Health was also another challenge during the transitional period for example lack of food to eat at home hinders children from participating at school actively and it also promotes absenteeism from school by children. Illnesses and diseases hinder children from going to school. The participants reported that some policies from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education are difficult to follow and they take long to give feedback when approached with certain issues, for example if the school applies to the ministry seeking for permission to increase fees to be paid by children, the ministry takes a long time before the school gets feedback.

Professional continuity is important in the facilitation of transition from ECD to primary school. Children benefit when ECD and primary school teachers work together. When teachers from the two levels communicate and collaborate well, they are more likely to develop compatible programme philosophies and broaden their understanding of children`s trajectory from preschool to primary school. Charles and Williams (2006) argue that ECD and primary school children should work together in school, home visits and after-school programmes. Such strategies encourage connections and coherence in teaching styles across two distinct levels. In Zimbabwe teacher training for ECD teacher is integrated, that is, teachers' colleges now train teachers who can teach children from ECD to Grade one. In this case teacher trainees follow common core of courses. Joint initial training helps teachers to develop a common knowledge base and common practices upon which to build partnerships.

Lack of parental involvement is a challenge to smooth transition of children from ECD to Grade One. Home-to-school continuity helps to ease transition challenges. Children's transitions can be eased by sharing information and developing ways to involve parents that take into consideration their preferences and values, and respect ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and other forms of diversity (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Parents play an important role during the transition period. Supporting parental confidence and enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the school context, as well as promoting involvement and collaboration within the school community, both during transition and beyond, promotes positive outcomes for children in the short and long term. Schools are ideally placed to assist parents during this potentially stressful period through the provision of parenting support and education. Baumeister (1995) points out that schools also play an important role in fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness to the

school community for children and parents which not only supports children's adjustment during transition, but helps to promote mental health and wellbeing. Thus, parents need assistance from schools on how to help their children to make a positive transition to school. This can be done through parenting programmes. One of the most important objectives of any parenting initiative is to foster a sense of confidence and self-efficacy in parents in relation to supporting their children during the transition period. It is important to address parent concerns about transition to school and information about evidence-based strategies for dealing with specific parenting issues during this time. It can be argued that the transition to school is a process that is accompanied by a family transition, therefore, preparation and support is needed not only for children, but for parents too. Transition programmes for parents should therefore aim to support and empower the family as a whole (Margetts, 2009). Giallo et al., (2010) proposes a multiple-session, multi-pronged transition programme aiming to:

(1) Provide families with an opportunity to learn strategies to support children's adjustment to school;
(2) Promote family involvement in children`s learning at home and at school; and
(3) Facilitate collaborative partnerships between families and schools as a resource and source of information and support on the transition process and raising children.

One of the primary means of promoting successful transitions is to establish and maintain a healthy ecology of flexible social connections and social support for children. Ideally these relationships are characterized by quality communication and social contexts that mitigate discontinuities. A multi-sectoral approach is essential in solving or overcoming the challenges discussed earlier.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

(1) Lack of qualified ECD teachers interferes with the smooth transition of children.
(2) Parents and communities were not actively involved in the school activities which essentially assist children in their transition from ECD to Grade One.
(3) Lack of material and financial resources was found to be a hindrance in the smooth transition of children.
(4) There was no policy on transition. The absence of a focus specific policy on transition left teachers unguided with respect to smooth transition of children from ECD to Grade One.
(5) Long distances travelled by children and poor health contributed to school wastage such as dropping out of school

(6) Successful transition for children depended upon collective efforts from different stake holders like public and private duty bearers such as the Government through its line ministries and non-state actors like parents and NGOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of efforts can be undertaken to improve abilities to support children to transition and adjust successfully and learn effectively. In that regard, several recommendations to improve practice are proposed based on the following findings.

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare

Recruitment of qualified ECD teachers and capacity building for those qualified teachers who are already in practice.

(1) Parents and communities should be made aware of the importance of ECD so that they can support the programme fully by constructing ECD classrooms, outdoor play equipment and paying fees for the children. Collaboration based on open communication establishes a context where the educational needs of the child are uppermost in the minds of all involved.
(2) A range of material resources and space (infrastructure) in order to operate the programme effectively are needed. The schools should provide these together with parents. The schools should treat this issue as a matter of urgency. The government through partners such as NGOs like Nhaka Foundation can assist in the erection and renovation of infrastructure for ECD children with building materials. Parents can mould bricks and provide with labour.
(3) A clear cut policy on transition should be developed
(4) Introduction of satellite/village/community ECD centres to reduce distance travelled by children going to and from school is encouraged.

Ministry of Health and Child Care

Village health workers should educate the communities on the importance of good health habits so as to reduce poor health in children.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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