

Full Length Research Paper

Teacher professional development in Zimbabwe: Bridging resources to serve young children

Lea Ann Christenson^{1*} and Patrick Makokoro²

¹Department of Early Childhood Education, Towson University, Maryland, United States.

²Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada.

Received 16 June, 2023; Accepted 10 November, 2023

This bounded case study illuminates the planning, delivery, and evaluation of early childhood professional development sessions conducted by the educational experts with a Zimbabwean non-profit organization in response to a need for professional development for early childhood teachers. Ethnographic and grounded theory methods were used by participant observers to collect and analyze data, including observational notes taken during the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the training as well as professional development materials and exit surveys completed by the participants. Results include lessons learned by the non-profit organization, participating teachers and headmasters. The teachers and headmasters revealed that the professional development opportunity supported their daily work, made them think of other innovative approaches to teach with limited resources, and enhanced their capacity to create a quality classroom experience for students. For the non-profit organization, developing a curricula that is directed at continuous professional development of early childhood teachers in rural communities was seen as critical in order to bridge the divide between rural and urban preschool centers. These findings may help inform the planning, delivery, and evaluation of professional development conducted in partnership with international collaborators.

Key words: Professional development, early childhood, international collaboration, teacher education, international development.

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. According to the United Nations Human Development Index (2019) which includes measures of quality of health, education, and standard of living, Zimbabwe ranked near the bottom at 150 out of 189 countries and territories. One specific example of this low standing is the investment in the education of young children. Makokoro (2018) highlighted that, although the

Zimbabwean government had already included Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the education system, investment in ECD has fallen to a minimum in recent years. Rural communities were particularly affected. There was a lack of qualified ECD teachers, classrooms, child- and age-appropriate materials with an inclusive approach as well as access to appropriate equipment and facilities. For example, more than 10,000 ECD

*Corresponding author. E-mail: lchristenson@towson.edu. Tel: 410-404-3815.

teachers were lacking basic pedagogical skills and 48% of the available teachers had no training that qualified them for their profession. In addition to qualified teachers, staffing is seen as a barrier as teacher-student ratio was 1:40 in urban areas and in rural schools this ratio increases to 1:100 (Makokoro, 2015). The last audit on educational infrastructure revealed that the infrastructure was not adequate to insure all children have access to an education of any quality. The existing ECD centres, especially in rural areas, are often dilapidated and lack some basic facilities such as tables and chairs. In addition to this, Makokoro (2015) noted that there was no comprehensive ECD government policy in place to create a strategic infrastructure to improve and sustain development of optimal ECD programs.

Zimbabwe's education policy stipulates that two years of ECD are compulsory in order to be enrolled in primary school, but participation in the last six months of ECD is sufficient to ensure that the child has a place in primary school (Sibanda, 2018). Accordingly, the net enrolment rate for ECD institutions was only 31.99% in 2017. This is due in part to a lack of awareness on the part of rural families of the relevance of ECD, a lack of or poor infrastructure for ECD, and a lack of education and training for teaching staff. The shortage of financial resources, especially of families who only run subsistence economies, is another reason for the low attendance rate. Many parents are unable to pay school fees or do not send their children to (pre-)school because they do not have the financial means for appropriate clothing. Another major problem with school attendance is the malnutrition of children in Zimbabwe. There is a school feeding program in Zimbabwe, but it is based exclusively on carbohydrates. The provision of other necessary food and cooking utensils is the responsibility of the parents. Thus children in Zimbabwe, particularly rural children do not have their basic nutritional needs met which negatively impacts their growth and development. Thus the leaders of the Nhaka Foundation were looking for additional resources to mitigate these negative circumstances impacting young children.

The Director of the Nhaka Foundation and a professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education at a university in the mid-Atlantic United States met at an international conference. Discussions between the two regarding teacher capacity, the current state of Early Childhood Development (ECD), and leadership development led the professor to collaborate on planning professional development opportunities for ECD teachers. This collaboration also involved traveling to Zimbabwe to co-deliver the professional development in partnership with the Director of the Nhaka Foundation. As part of its strategic focus, the Nhaka Foundation has consistently emphasized the necessity of improving the quality and depth of ECD services. This commitment has attracted funding and support from various agencies to scale up its operations (Makokoro, 2015). In 2011, the

Nhaka Foundation initiated a multi-pronged transformation of its programming to address the growing demand for access to early childhood development services in rural schools. The Nhaka Foundation began to implement an ECD program for children to address the gaps in the current system. This program included the renovation and maintenance of ECD centres located at rural primary schools and training of para-professional teachers in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The foundation also has lobbied for a coordinated response towards increasing access to ECD and supplied food provisions for children at the schools. These provisions start with the littlest and most vulnerable children and account for the school fees for identified vulnerable children. Additionally, the foundation provides mentorship to orphaned children in various communities. The Nhaka Foundation also pushed for greater partnerships and collaboration by civil society organizations through the formation of the Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Actors, ZINECDA.

Through an international partnership between the Nhaka Foundation and an early childhood educator in the United States, the authors of this study created an early childhood development teacher training. This training aimed to improve each teacher's capacity in effectively delivering pre reading and reading education. The importance of reading is underplayed in poor communities in Zimbabwe. Pre reading skills and knowledge is rarely shared within these communities and has always been seen as a preserve of wealthier families. Early childhood development teachers need to be continuously trained on the importance of pre reading as well as the promotion of a reading culture in communities.

These professional development sessions, in addition to follow up consultation and technical support by the non-profit organization for the early childhood teachers, was conducted in order to support the organizations' focus on building the capacity of trained early childhood development teachers and para-professionals.

Theoretical framework

The purpose of the professional development reported in this case study was to better meet the needs of young children by increasing the knowledge base of early childhood in service teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2000). During the last decade, international education efforts have centered on the quality of teachers and this program focused on the quality of teachers. In addition, sociocultural theory was a key theoretical stance in this study, wherein the researchers investigated the knowledge gained through two-way iterative interpersonal interactions with "knowledgeable others" (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, the "knowledgeable others" included all key stakeholders: the Non-Government Organization (NGO), the two

trainers - one from Zimbabwe and the other from the United States, and the participating teachers and headmasters. The professional development was employed in an interactive manner of presentation, where the trainers learned from the participants, and the participants learned from the presenters. Optimally, this reflects that professional development is most effective when there is a reciprocal relationship between 'experts' and participating teachers (Laster and Finkelstein, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework has been highly influential in the re-conceptualization of early childhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Woodhead, 2003) and was used to frame this study in addition to the sociocultural theory. The Bronfenbrenner's ecological model postulates that the development of a child is meshed in a series of interacting systems. Closest to the child, one finds the microsystem that comprises of the daily settings and relationships at home, school, and in the community. The next level circle is the mesosystem, defined by Bronfenbrenner as the inter relationships that exist between the microsystems such as between the home and school and between the parents and teachers. The ecosystem are the powerful influences that have an indirect bearing on the child such as parental employment that bring in financial resources supporting the child through access to food, clothes, shelter as well as day care or preschool attendance. The outer circles, the macrosystem and the chronosystem, show the influence of the values and beliefs around young children and these are ever changing and not static.

Another important framework utilized in this study was the democratic stance. This perspective stresses the importance of reflective thinking in one's own practice to enhance teaching and learning to create ways for the participants to facilitate change in the world (Dewey, 1933; Kubow and Blosser, 2014; Vavrus et al., 2013), along with the work of Paolo Freire providing tools for empowering the local early childhood teachers and head masters (Freire, 1972).

Background to present investigation

In order to understand the context of the procedures and participants included in this study, it is necessary to describe the context. The Nhaka Foundation is a Zimbabwe based non-profit organization established in July 2007 and whose founding purpose is to feed as well as provide access to education and basic health care for the vulnerable and orphaned children in Zimbabwe. According to Makokoro (2015), Nhaka Foundation believes that one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways of supporting Zimbabwe's vulnerable children is by supporting communities to ensure that their young children have access to early childhood development (ECD) services. The goal being to ensure that all children within the program enjoy their right to a protective and

nurturing environment within which their normal psychological, social, and physical development can be assured. Therefore, the organization implements a comprehensive ECD program that maximizes the potential for children to have a great foundation and pathway for success in life.

Nhaka's mission

To educate, feed, and improve the health of orphans and vulnerable children of Zimbabwe.

Nhaka's vision

A nation with young children living a life full of possibilities.

Nhaka foundation's theory of change

The Nhaka Foundation's theory of change and ECD model are based on the challenges that have confronted the uptake and acceptance of ECD by parents across Zimbabwe, which include;

- (1) Distances from the ECD centers - many ECD children have to walk several kilometers to get to school, and this places a high caloric burden on children who do not have access to enough food already adding to the nutritional deficit many children face. Parents therefore often elect to keep younger children at home.
- (2) Negative parental perceptions about ECD, including lack of safety in terms of poor or non-existent classrooms, untrained teachers (daycare vs. learning), unfamiliarity with the benefits of ECD, and lack of involvement of the community
- (3) Through meetings with communities, Nhaka Foundation identified the following as top 4 factors preventing ECD children from attending school:

- i) Illness/Health conditions 14%
- ii) Parent ignorance/negative attitude 23%
- iii) Hunger/Drought/Poverty 23%
- iv) Fees and distance to school 40%

Utilizing knowledge generated from community meetings and stakeholder engagements, Nhaka Foundation thus worked to refine a model within their program development that ensures children receive support that targets their holistic development and includes the following components.

Daily provision of a healthy meal

Providing a healthy, daily meal is the first step in

overcoming some of the issues related to distances from school and parents not seeing value in sending their younger children to ECD. If a meal is provided, especially if a meal is not available at home, then the likelihood of a child coming to ECD increases dramatically (Makokoro, 2015). It also sets the stage for improved nutrition and health for the children, which is fundamental to improving education. It also engages the mothers at the school, through the formation of a rotating schedule of cooking the porridge for the children. Thus, the hope is that ECD attendance rates will rise.

Renovation/Construction of safe, engaging and function classroom spaces

It is very clear that most indoor facilities for ECD classes are inadequate (Sibanda, 2018). The facilities include classrooms and indoor play areas which should be well equipped with developmentally appropriate materials to cater for holistic development of children which include social, intellectual, language and fine motor skills which is an important goal for education in Zimbabwe (ECD A: younger and ECD B: older children). Rather, children from Grade One are given the classrooms while ECD B children are expected to attend their lessons under trees despite the weather conditions they might experience.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 Section 11 item (k) clearly states that, 'adequate indoor ... storage space and clock room facilities shall be provided in respect of early childhood development centers.' However, the Zimbabwe Annual Statistical Report (2012: 70) supports the above information when it points out that, 'while 98% of all primary schools offer ECD B classes, the provision of classroom facilities for this level is still a challenge as 75 children share one classroom.' Thus, just because availability of facilities is advocated by the government it is not always the case that the facilities are adequate.

Training of teachers and school management

The development of language and literacy skills begins at birth. Children develop much of their capacity for learning in the first three years of life, when their brains grow to 90% of their eventual adult weight (Shonkoff, 2007). Parents, educators, and communities are key to a child's success in learning to read. When they read, talk, or play with the child, stimulation of the growth of the child's brain and building the connections that will become the building blocks for reading occurs.

Nhaka Foundation trains preschool teachers at government schools to ensure that they improve on the quality of play and education for the students under their care. The teacher training program is carried out in order to ensure that the teachers are well equipped with the right knowledge and skills to support the growth and development of the little children and to stimulate their

pre-reading interest.

Involvement of parents in the school through a Parenting program

A community parenting initiative is also run under the ECD program. By placing a heavy emphasis on community involvement at all levels of the Early Childhood Development program, and through capacity building activities, we develop a sense of community ownership and responsibility. Bronfenbrenner (1979) through the ecological framework, argued that the relationships around a child help foster the growth and development of a child. Thus, when parents and caregivers are given information on the importance of growth monitoring, HIV/AIDS, homeschool relationships, importance of access to Early Childhood Development services, birth registration, and parental involvement in the education of children, better choices are made for young children. This cocktail of measures in the parenting initiative ensure that children are better looked after in the communities. Parents also are involved through:

- (a) Participation in renovation of classrooms
- (b) Capacity building of School Development Committees (and participation of ECD parents)

Healthy children in schools

Nhaka Foundation partners with the Ministry of Health and Child Care, District Medical Offices, and local health clinic practitioners serve to facilitate health assessments of the children enrolled in the ECD Centers. On a rotating basis, team Nhaka members accompany nurses from the rural health clinics to each school to evaluate the most basic and immediate health concerns facing the children. The assessments capture baseline information on height, weight, heart rate, immunizations, and personal hygiene as well as screen for common conditions such as ringworms, scabies, skin infections and cavities. The program is designed as a starting point to address basic medical conditions and to educate parents, caregivers, and the communities on infant and child health care issues and preventions.

METHODS

Using ethnographic methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), this retrospective-reflective descriptive case study triangulated multiple sources of data resulting in a richer description (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Our data sources included pre and post workshop surveys by participants daily logs, field notes, and analytic memos and reflective journaling of the entire process. In addition, the case study methodology described by Merriam (2009) was employed to create descriptive accounts of the planning, context, and episodes of professional development as "phenomenon...occurring in a bounded context" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 25). Multiple

methods in qualitative research including counts on surveys and coding of transcripts were used as the inquiry advanced (Borman et al., 2006). For example, through open coding, overarching themes via thematic analysis emerged (Patton, 2003; Stake, 2003). The themes helped develop an understanding of how the experiences affected the participating early childhood teachers, head masters, and trainers (Merriam, 2009). Finally, critical reflective writing enabled the researchers to illuminate an integrated, holistic, and shared understanding of the cases.

Procedures: Teacher professional development

In 1999, a national review of the education system recommended that ECD be integrated into education structures rather than running parallel to them (Nziramasanga, 1999). In line with this mission statement, Ministry of Education Secretary's Circulars 14 of 2004 and 12 of 2005 introduced two ECD classes for the 3 to 5 year olds in primary schools.

This introduction of two years of pre-primary school education (ECD A: younger and ECD B: older children) necessitated the need for qualified teachers to provide a holistic early childhood program in Zimbabwe further giving rise to implementing a ECD program.

Project goals

- 1) Training of 120 Early Childhood Development teachers in 5 wards of Goromonzi Rural District in Zimbabwe
- 2) Establish a monthly training program for teachers on literacy development
- 3) Development of Nhaka Foundations' Early Childhood Development Teacher Training manual for use by ECD practitioners on literacy and indoor classroom activities

Teacher training (professional development) topics

- 1) Learning theory (tapping into expertise of teachers)
- 2) Serving students with special needs
- 3) Literacy instruction Premaths
- 4) Planning for effective instruction

Procedures of study

The two PIs (the Director of an NGO in Zimbabwe and a university professor from the United States) of this study met at a conference where they discussed teacher capacity, leadership development, and gaps in the education experience.

This conversation led to the delivery of teacher training workshops on-site in Zimbabwe, guided by the PIs and other members of the NGO. Planning over the course of six months occurred via Skype. In order to promote the project goals and objectives, the Nhaka Foundation team identified 120 preschool teachers and school heads from 10 schools in 5 wards. These teachers were selected on the basis of having received some prior teacher training from Nhaka Foundation and this follow up training was aimed at enhancing their capacity. Procedures were followed and permission was secured via the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at one of the PIs institutions to analyze and report findings based on the data collected.

Participants

One hundred and twenty early childhood development (3 to 6 years olds) teachers and head masters from rural public schools outside Harare each participated in a one-day training led by the PIs. Training was held regionally at five different public schools for five

full days of training where a different group of teachers and/or headmasters attended each day. The PIs and trainers traveled 45 min to an hour and a half each way from Harare to the rural schools each day. The interactive workshops consisted of developmentally appropriate learning theory, strategies to support emergent literacy, and dual language learning theory. A co-teaching model was used. The professor from the United States provided content in English and, at certain points, the Zimbabwean educator translated the content into Shona and provided culturally relevant illustrations.

Data sources

Data for the study were collected from multiple sources. Through reflexive journaling, the researchers documented the workshop planning process from January to June. Additionally, pre-surveys using open ended questions to determine prior knowledge and specific desired outcomes from the teachers were administered to participants before they attended the early childhood education workshop. During the workshop, the key stakeholders also documented their experiences on professional development days. Throughout their time implementing the workshop, investigators recorded participant observations and maintained daily logs, field notes, and analytic memos on the process. At the end of each training session, the participants completed post-professional development training surveys. Additionally, formal open-ended interviews were conducted by the investigators at the conclusion of each professional development day.

Data analysis

Multiple methods that are common in qualitative research were used to analyze the data in this study (Creswell, 2002; Miles et al., 2014). To understand the experiences the researchers analyzed the data with thematic analysis (Merriam 2009). Through the researchers' constant comparison of data, key themes emerged and from them, initial categories were formed. Following the guidelines of Strauss and Corbin (1998), a coding category for each unit of data was formed.

The data was subsequently re-examined through the lens of these categories after establishing coding categories and to ensure the categories aligned with the data. Finally, axial codes were created across the accumulated data to identify and establish categories to further solidify and establish categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of participants' responses across the survey items then triangulated with field notes and interview transcripts revealed three emergent themes illuminating the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the Teacher Professional Development Program across all of the 10 schools. Themes included, (1) acquiring new teaching strategies, (2) language and literacy education, and (3) general program feedback. It is interesting to note that the themes which emerged did not vary from each of the sites in which the trainings took place, so the data is reported out as an aggregate of all of the sites.

Theme 1: Acquiring new teaching strategies not related to literacy

The main theme that emerged after the analysis of the

study data was the acquisition of new teaching strategies not related to language or literacy. Across all survey items, 143 responses were coded within this theme. The majority of these responses suggested that participants were interested in learning more about alternate strategies at future trainings ($n = 46$). A number of participants stated they were ready to implement teaching strategies not related to literacy in their classrooms immediately following the training ($n = 42$). Additionally, there was a portion of responses that indicated participants enjoyed this part of the training the most, learning about new teaching strategies ($n = 41$). Only five participants did not understand this element of the training. Within this theme, four subthemes emerged. These subthemes centered on (1) organizational and administrative requirements of teaching, (2) specialized training for students with unique needs, (3) discovering a new teaching strategy, and (4) facilitating the teacher and student alliance.

Organizational and administrative requirements of teaching

Across the survey items, organizational and administrative requirements of teaching was mentioned 44 times throughout participants' responses. Mainly, participants indicated that they would be able to start using these skills in their classroom after the completion of this training ($n = 22$). An equal numbers of participants responded that they enjoyed this part of the training the most ($n = 10$) and that they were interested in learning more about it at the next training ($n = 10$). Very few participants stated that they did not understand some parts of this theme ($n = 2$). In particular, they reported that they did not comprehend "some of the record keeping." Still, the responses with regard to this theme were largely positive in comparison to the few individuals who did not understand parts of the record keeping. This suggests that it would be worthwhile to continue making organizational and administrative requirements of teaching a part of the Teacher Professional Training Program.

Specialized training for students with unique needs

Another subtheme that emerged was that the participants were interested in learning teaching strategies for students with disabilities and other unique needs ($n = 43$). The majority of responses centered on participants' interest in learning more as a follow up in subsequent trainings ($n = 26$). They were satisfied with the content of the current training but saw this as a next step. A few responses indicated that participants were ready to meet the needs of students with special needs by adapting what they learned from the current training ($n = 6$) and that this was the most enjoyable part of the program for

them ($n = 10$). Out of all the responses, only one suggested that a participant did not understand specialized instruction for students with special needs. Therefore, these results suggest that participants found this topic of the training coherent and applicable but would have liked to learn even more about it for their future practice.

Discovering a new teaching strategy

Overall, a number of responses centered on the participants acquiring a new teaching strategy from the program that they otherwise were unaware of ($n = 34$). The largest number of responses in this theme suggested that the program helped participants feel ready to incorporate the new skill into their classroom ($n = 14$). Another portion of responses indicated that participants enjoyed learning a new skill more than any other part of the program ($n = 13$). There were a small number of participants who wanted to learn more about the new teaching strategies in the next training ($n = 5$), and only two responses suggested that some specific teaching strategies were incomprehensible. The responses in this theme indicated that participants not only enjoyed learning new teaching strategies, but that the program was successful in making them feel confident enough to use them in their own practice.

Facilitating the teacher and student alliance

Throughout the survey items, there were a number of responses that suggested participants were interested in facilitating the teacher and student alliance, meaning building positive relationships with their students ($n = 22$). Most of these responses indicated a new awareness that positive relationships with their students was important ($n = 9$). Other responses indicated that this was the most enjoyable part of the training for participants ($n = 8$) or that they were interested in learning more about this theme in future trainings ($n = 5$). None of the participants stated that they did not understand this theme in the training which indicates that the program was successful in presenting this theme in a comprehensive manner. Overall, the responses in this theme suggest that the program helped participants learn the importance of and how to best cultivate positive relationships with students and their families.

Theme 2: Language and literacy education

The language and literacy education theme emerged in participants' responses 96 times across each of the survey items. Of these responses, a majority participants indicated that this theme was the part of the training they enjoyed the most ($n = 51$) and this is what they would put

to use first in their classrooms ($n = 30$). Only a few ($n = 7$) were interested to learn more about this in future trainings. There were a small number of participants who suggested that they did not agree that they could effectively implement language and literacy education ($n = 7$), and only one participant who did not understand this theme at all at the conclusion of the training. Within this theme, three subthemes also emerged. These subthemes centered on (1) language acquisition, (2) strategies for teaching language, and (3) strengthening students reading and writing.

Language acquisition

The first subtheme, language acquisition, appeared across the participants' responses to survey items the most frequently ($n = 41$). According to the responses in this subtheme, most participants indicated that it was their favorite part of the training ($n = 30$). The rest of the responses in this subtheme suggested that participants were ready to use what they learned in this subtheme in their classroom ($n = 11$). Interestingly, none of the participants stated that they would like to learn more about this theme in the next training or that they did not understand any parts of it. This suggests that the training successfully explained language acquisition theory in a way that was comprehensible and entertaining for participants.

Strategies for teaching language

The second subtheme within the language and literacy education theme, consisted of responses surrounding strategies for teaching language. Overall, there were 26 responses that were categorized into this subtheme. The majority of participants' responses within this subtheme suggested that they enjoyed this part of the training the most ($n = 19$).

Additionally, there were a number of participants who stated that they felt ready to use this new subtheme in their classroom ($n = 11$). It is important to note, none of the participants felt like they wanted to learn more about this subtheme in the next training or that they did not agree with any parts of this subtheme. This suggest that this subtheme was not only enjoyable for participants but also comprehensible enough for them to feel prepared to implement these strategies immediately following the training.

Strengthening students' reading and writing

The final subtheme within this theme centered on responses that indicated participants' desire to strengthen students reading and writing skills. In total, 26 responses within the language and literacy theme were categorized into this subtheme. The majority of responses in this

subtheme suggested that participants were ready to implement this subtheme into their classroom immediately ($n = 12$). Still, there were a portion of participants whose responses suggested that they would like to learn more about this theme at the next training ($n = 7$). There were only two responses that suggested participants enjoyed this part of the training the most. The responses across the survey items suggest that this subtheme may need to be explained in better and more enjoyable manner in the future.

Theme 3: General program feedback

No subthemes emerged from theme 3 as emphasis was placed on general feedback at the conclusion of the program. There was an overwhelming amount of positive feedback about the program, with nearly all of the concluding responses being of a positive nature ($n = 139$). Only a few of the responses suggested that participants disagreed with any of the content of the training, such as language and literacy education ($n = 7$), lesson planning ($n = 1$), and how to play with the children ($n = 1$). The only negative comments were centered on the quality of food and drinks provided by the program ($n = 3$). Despite this, there were still a number of participants who reported feeling as though the refreshments provided were their favorite part of the program ($n = 5$). Additionally, a substantial number of participants reported that the most enjoyable part of the program was the structure of the program itself ($n = 24$). In total, the results of this study suggested that this program was well-received by the participants, and investing resources into improving the program would be worthwhile and beneficial.

Table 1 shows examples of comments from the exit surveys completed by the participants to illustrate each of the three major themes and delineates each of their subthemes.

Lessons learned at the NGO level

Overall, the data revealed that the training was a positive experience for all stakeholders (that is, participating teachers, head masters, Nhaka personnel and the professor assisting with the training). In addition to the positive feedback, this type of ECD intervention is a cost-effective response to human capital challenges. The interventions of the professional development sessions and sustained follow up on the part of the non-profit organization not only assists ECD teachers to immediately promotes children's cognitive, language, social-emotional and physical development, but also provide children with fundamental skills that will better prepare them in school and in the labor market. Investment in training and capacity enhancement for teachers is of utmost importance as it improves the

Table 1. Emergent themes and subthemes of survey responses.

Theme	Subtheme	Sample comments
Acquiring a new teaching strategy	Organizational and administrative requirements of teaching	<i>'Learning how to better keep my records was very interesting and helps me plan.'</i>
	Specialized training for students with unique needs	<i>'I learned to give the pupils just the right exercises and that may be different from the rest of the class.'</i>
	Discovering a new teaching strategy	<i>'I learned to focus my teaching on one theme or topic at a time to better teach vocabulary.'</i>
	Facilitating the teacher and student alliance	<i>'The interactive brainstorming was very useful and it keeps people active. I will try this with my students.'</i>
Language and literacy education	Language acquisition	<i>'It was interesting to learn that using another (child's first) language to support comprehension is effective.'</i>
	Strategies for teaching language	<i>'I learned to teach children to acquire language through imitation and play.'</i>
	Strengthening students' reading and writing	<i>'The training was logically done and the way I participated helped me to know how to teach my students writing skills.'</i>
General program feedback		<i>'The workshop was worth attending and was an eye opener. It helped answer questions on the grey areas. Thank you.'</i>
		<i>'The facilitator was friendly and we learned a lot.'</i>
		<i>'The program helped us keep updated with current information.'</i>
		<i>'Thank you and thank you for this workshop. I've been equipped so much and hope to have another training too.'</i>
		<i>'Thank you for empowering us. Please come again.'</i>
		<i>'These staff development workshops are very essential, it helps teachers to learn new things even if they were trained some time ago.'</i>
		<i>'I am very impressed about how the training was done. Was happy to have someone from the Ministry engage with us. To me I was enriched.'</i>

delivery of quality activities at a community level utilizing local resources (Makokoro, 2021). As such, a multi sectorial/holistic approach to ECD, such as this one, should be promoted.

Secondly, there has always been subjectivity when it comes to discussions on quality of instruction. Moss and Pence (1994) argue that quality should be defined by those that are having the lived experiences and realities of the programs or lifestyles they are leading. Having teachers participate in these trainings and demonstrate how they make toys and other play material using locally available resources, supports the notion that quality can and should be seen from the individuals who are most directly impacted. The ECD teachers are not just consumers of knowledge but co-constructors of Knowledge. In this case, the teachers are able to determine the important aspects to include in the classroom setting and ensure that their students are able

to play and learn. Serpell and Nsamenang (2014) argue that the design of early childhood development services in Africa should focus on local strengths including indigenous games and music, emphasize community-based provision, incorporate participation by pre-adolescent children, use indigenous African languages and local funds of knowledge, and accord priority to inclusion of children with special needs. This study illuminated Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The context of the training influenced the planning, delivery and evaluation with the child always as the center most influence. In total, this training served as an example of how this can be accomplished.

This research aligns with Nhaka Foundation's mission which acknowledges that this theoretical basis outlined here in this study has the potential to encompass the significance of multiple settings and influences in the lives

of children.

Nhaka Foundation views that professional development programs for early childhood development teachers should be seen in light of this model. The pre-training, training and post-training activities that were carried out in this project points to an intersection of various systems in the lives of children as governments, through policy planning and formulation initiatives, worked to create integrated early childhood service provision. This then calls for ministries such as health, education, and social services working directly with parents, community organizations amongst others to provide a continuum of care and support that promotes the continuous learning of children even outside the classroom environment.

Lessons learned at the professional development level

The participating teachers highlighted and appreciated the training, noting that it provided 'real-time, on-the-ground training,' which was important for them as it connected with what they did in the classroom each day. For Nhaka Foundation, this was important feedback because the organization works to implement programs and projects that address the real needs on the ground level while meeting the requirements of educational policy. A member of the national Educational Ministry joined the training to go over record-keeping. This strengthened the training as it showed that the training was not separate from what teachers were doing, it strengthened what was already expected of them.

The training started with recognizing the strengths that each participating teacher brought to the training which was targeted by introducing vocabulary and learning theories for strategies they already practice in their classroom. This asset model of training is supported in the literature (Dewey, 1933; Kubow and Blosser, 2014; Vavrus et al., 2013). By taking this approach, teachers were appreciative, and in some cases, were not aware of how much they knew already. This allows the participating teachers to leave the training empowered and equipped with the skills necessary to create a quality learning environment for young children. They learned the vocabulary and learning theories for strategies they already practice in their classrooms. This asset model of training is supported in the literature (Vygotsky, 1978; Freire, 1972). The participating teachers leave the training empowered and not made to feel humiliated, thus maximizing the potential for implementing what they have learned and making it their own. Finally, because conceptual knowledge was the basis of the training and not just discrete strategies, the asset model also maximized the impact of the training by giving the teachers the critical thinking skills of how to use the tools that had been shared.

In addition, it was clear that the headmasters of the

school also saw value in the training because they actively participated in it, and thus believed that teacher professional development should be continuous and not a once-a-year activity. This paralleled a strong desire by the teachers themselves to have these professional development trainings throughout the school year so they are able to learn actively from one another as peers and from different resources.

Nhaka Foundation values were mirrored in the trainings, and this project supported the notion that communities can learn from one another and are able to support each other through mentorship, resource sharing, and simply expressing their frustrations in light of a constricting workplace that does not always give them the tools they need to work with children.

The planning process contributed to the success of the Teacher Professional Development. An ideal situation emerged as the training was co-planned by a Zimbabwean educator with expertise in early childhood best practices.

This insider expert knew and understood the context of the teachers who would participate in the training. In addition, she was academically fluent in Shona and English, so she could communicate fluidly with the participating teacher, head masters, and the professor from the United States. The planning which occurred over the course of six months, via Skype between the PIs and training team personnel, was critical as it provided the training team with time to become unified in the content of the training and in the context it was held. resulted in the workshops being presented seamlessly and fluidly; the US Professor led with the delivery of new information, and the Zimbabwean expert translated and gave relevant examples often, as necessary. The two presenters were one cohesive unit. In total, the researchers determined that this grounded case study was successful and should be replicated to address the growing need of literacy education in ECD.

Future professional development needs

At the NGO level

The teachers who participated in the training highlighted their appreciation that this experience had provided real-time and on the ground training, which was important for them as it made for a personal experience. For Nhaka Foundation this was important feedback because the organization works to implement programs and projects that speak to the real need on the ground and not from abstract thinking. It was clear when engaging with the schools' headmasters that teacher professional development should be continuous and not one-time activities. It was pleasing to note that there was a strong desire by the teachers themselves to have these professional development trainings throughout the school

year, so they can continue to learn from one another as peers as well as from different resources.

Nhaka Foundation values community, and this project supported the notion that stakeholders can learn from one another and are able to support each other through mentorship and the sharing of resource both materials and ideas.

Based on the feedback received through the post training surveys, Nhaka Foundation identified the following areas to be addressed:

- (1) Develop a strategic plan, scope and sequence for future trainings
- (2) Develop a schedule for the reinforcement of concepts taught on a continuous basis
- (3) Design of a “train the trainer” model that will support a school-based continuous professional development model
- (4) Identify funding to support early childhood development teachers with reading resources such as books, play kits and other read alouds resources for them to use when working with children.

Limitations

This study is limited to the events of one episode of planning, training, and delivery of the Teacher Professional Development program, as described in the procedures part of the study. Due to this limitation, the results may not be generalizable to other settings or locations, including participants from rural schools outside Harare, due to potential changes in the political and cultural environment. Additionally, the project initially received registration from over 300 participants who had signed up to receive the training; however, due to financial limitations, only 120 could participate in the training.

Conclusion

This project allowed Nhaka Foundation to identify the need for stakeholders to come together and partner to provide capacity support for teachers. To do this effectively, it was established that the status of Early Childhood Development (ECD) teacher professional development in Zimbabwe, the status of the policy framework for teacher capacity development, and mechanisms for sustaining a continuous teacher professional development model must be at the forefront of professional development programming. These questions are better addressed through this research. In order for children to develop the requisite skills and knowledge for their lives, it is important to equip their teachers with the necessary tools for them to work with children.

Scholars such as Anderson et al. (2019) have argued

that educational reform should be supported by teacher professional development if it is to be successful. Through this professional development process, stakeholders, including Nhaka Foundation, have learned that it is important to create and maintain partnerships for teacher education.

This involves continuous interaction between the home and school environment, community engagement on involvement in planning and delivery of child-care support, maintaining governmental relations as well as working with other professionals as done through this case study by partnering with an experienced educator in the delivery of this training.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors acknowledge and recognize the dedication and commitment of the teachers that participated directly and indirectly in this training program. Appreciation also goes to the various community gatekeepers and stakeholders that facilitated their entrance into the communities and allowed the training team to carry out the teacher professional development. The support of the entire Nhaka Foundation Team is appreciated.

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