INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

by

BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

in the

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF RSS MPHAHLELE

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF MH PHAJANE

SEPTEMBER 2025

Open Rubric

DECLARATION

NAME: BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI

STUDENT NUMBER: 67129633

QUALIFICATION: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

TITLE: INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

This thesis is the original work of Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai. She has not submitted it to any other academic institution, and she has acknowledged all sources used or cited in the reference list. She also confirms that she submitted the thesis to Turnitin to verify compliance with the University of South Africa's originality requirements.

Signature: 

Date: September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I am very grateful to my supervisor, Prof Ramashego Shila Mphahlele, for the mentorship, the focus and the encouragement she offered for this research to be completed. Her knowledge, astute criticism, unshakeable commitment and supervision have improved the calibre of this work and elevated my academic and work experiences, for which I am sincerely thankful. Your loss of sleep over this research is greatly appreciated, I salute you Prof Mphahlele.

I am also greatly indebted to the UNISA student Bursary Fund for the financial assistance that enabled me to complete this research.

My gratitude also goes to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Mr Mhike for granting me permission to carry out this research. In addition, I thank all the heads of different schools who allowed their educators to participate in this study.

I sincerely appreciate the educators who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their time, knowledge and expertise played a crucial role in advancing our understanding of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment in Early Childhood Development. Their thoughtful contributions have contributed significantly to developing and refining the findings presented in this work.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr Nicky Tjano for invaluable assistance in editing and refining this thesis. Her meticulous attention to detail, insightful feedback and dedication to ensuring clarity and coherence have greatly enhanced the quality of this work.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my mother, Doctor Gamuchirai Charumbira, whose expertise, unwavering support and priceless guidance have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of this study.

To my children, Praise Rudaviro, Tafadzwa and Princess Kelly, tie up your shoes, tighten your belts and follow on this academic path. Yes, you can.

Lastly, Glory is to the Heavens for seeing me through this research. God's grace has consistently given me consolation and certainty, reminding me of the bigger picture beyond my academic achievements, God, you are my God.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative multiple-case study explored curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in Early Childhood Development (ECD) education in Zimbabwe. The study focused on three government primary schools in Sanyati District, Mashonaland West Province. It used a constructivist paradigm because teachers construct meanings about curriculum implementation through their daily classroom experiences. The researcher purposively selected six ECD teachers who had direct experience of implementing the national ECD curriculum. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. The researcher analysed the data thematically by familiarising herself with the transcripts and field notes, generating codes, grouping related codes into themes, reviewing the themes, and interpreting them in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. The findings show that teachers understood the curriculum as child-centred and holistic, and they used play, storytelling, songs, group activities and observation-based assessment to support learners' cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development. However, large classes, limited resources, uneven infrastructure, weak digital integration and gaps in teacher assessment knowledge constrained implementation. The study concludes that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices can promote holistic development when teachers receive sustained professional support, when schools have adequate resources, and when assessment remains continuous, inclusive and developmentally appropriate. The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education provide continuous professional development on play-based pedagogy and formative assessment, and that schools strengthen resource mobilisation, parent involvement and low-cost digital learning support for ECD classrooms.

KEY TERMS: Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment, Early Childhood Development

KAKARETŠO

Nyakišišo ye ya khwalitheithifi ya maemo a mantši e hlahlobile mananethuto, thuto le mekgwa ya go hlahloba thutong ya Tlhabollo ya ka Pela ya Bana ba bannyane (ECD) kua Zimbabwe. Nyakišišo e ile ya lebiša šedi dikolong tše tharo tša mmušo tša praemari tša Selete sa Sanyati, Profenseng ya ka Bodikela ya Mashonaland. E be e diriša mohlako wa kago ya tsebo le kwešišo ka gobane barutiši ba bopa ditlhalošo ke go diriša mananethuto ka maitemogelo a bona a letšatši le letšatši a ka phaphošing ya borutelo. Monyakišiši o ile a kgetha ka boomo barutiši ba tshelelago ba ECD bao ba bego ba na le maitemogelo a go diriša mananethuto a bosetšhaba a ECD. Datha e tšweleditšwe ka dipoledišano tše di rulaganywago ka go felela, go tebelelo ya thuto le go tshekatsheko ya ditokumente. Monyakišiši o ile a sekaseka tshedimošo go ya ka dihlogo ka go itlwaetša ka dingwalwa le dintlha tše di kgobokeditšwego lefelong, go tšweletša dikhoutu, go kgoboketša dikhoutu tše di tswalanago ka dihlogo, go hlahloba dihlogo le go di hlatholla mabapi le dipotšišo tša nyakišišo le mahlako a teori. Dikhwetšo di bontšha gore barutiši ba be ba kwešiša mananethuto e le ao a theilwego baneng le ao a akaretšago, gomme ba be ba diriša dipapadi, go anega dikanegelo, dikoša, mešongwana ya sehlopha le kelo yeo e theilwego go tebelelo go thekga go gola ga barutwana ka tša tsebo, tša leago, tša maikwelo, tša mmele le tša polelo. Le ge go le bjalo, diphapoši tše kgolo tša borutelo, methopo e lekanyeditšwego, mananeokgoparara a sa lekalekanego, kopanyo ya titšitale yeo e fokolago le dikgoba ka go tsebo ya go ela barutiši di thibetše tiragatšo. Nyakišišo e phetha ka gore mananethuto, mekgwa ya go ruta le mekgwa ya kelo e ka godiša tlhabollo e feletšego ge barutiši ba hwetša thekgo e swarelelago ya tša mošomo, ge dikolo di na le methopo e lekanego le ge go ela go tšwela pele, go akaretša bohle le go swanela tlhabollo. Nyakišišo e eletša gore Kgoro ya Thuto ya Praemari le Sekontari e nee tlhabollo ya go tšwela pele ya botsebi mabapi le thuto ya go thewa go dipapadi le tekolo ya go aga, le gore dikolo di matlafatše go kgoboketšwa ga methopo, go kgatha tema ga batswadi le thekgo ya go ithuta ka mokgwa wa elektroniki ya theko ya tlase bakeng sa diphapoši tša borutelo tša ECD.

MAREO A BOHLOKWA: Kelo, Lenanethuto, Tlhabollo ya ka Pela ya Bana ba bannyane, Go ruta

NKATSAKANYO

Ndzavisiso lowu wo andza wo kongomisa eka mavonelo na ntokoto wu lavisisile kharikhulamu, maendlelo ya ku dyondzisa na dyondzo na maendlelo ya ku kambela eka dyondzo ya Nhluvukiso wa Vana va ha ri Vatsongo (ECD) eZimbabwe. Nkambisiso lowu wu kongomisiwe eka swikolo swinharhu swa le hansi swa mfumo eXifundzheni xa Sanyati, eXifundzeninkulu xa Mashonaland West. Wu tirhiswile tanihi ndlela ya ku twisisa leswaku vanhu va aka vutivi bya vona hi ku tirhisa ntokoto, ku dyondza, ku tihlanganisa na van'wana hikuva vadyondzisi va aka tinhlamuselo hi mayelana na ku tirhisiwa ka kharikhulamu hi ku tirhisa ntokoto wa vona wa siku na siku etlilasini. Mulavisisi u hlawurile hi xikongomelo vadyondzisi va tsevu va ECD lava a va ri na ntokoto wo kongoma wo tirhisa kharikhulamu ya rixaka ya ECD. Data yi endliwile hi ku tirhisa nkambela-vutivi lowu nga hlelekangiki ngopfu, ku langutisisa tidyondzo na nxopaxopo wa dokhumente. Mulavisisi u xopaxopile data hi ku ya hi nhlokomhaka hi ku tolovelana na matsalwa ya leswi rhekhodiweke na tinotsi ta ndzavisiso wa le ndhawini leyi ndzavisiso wu endliwaka eka yona, ku tumbuluxa tikhodi, ku hlengeleta tikhodi leti fambelanaka ku ya eka tinhlokomhaka, ku kambisisa tinhlokomhaka, na ku tihlamusela hi ku ya hi swivutiso swa ndzavisiso na rimba ra thiyori. Swikumiwa swi kombisa leswaku vadyondzisi va twisisile kharikhulamu tanihi leyi kongomisiweke eka vana na leyi heleleke, naswona va tirhisile ntlangu, ku vulavula hi switori, tinsimu, migingiriko ya ntlawa na ku kambela hi ku langutisisa ku seketela nhluvukiso wa vadyondzi eka mianakanyo, mahanyelo, mintlhaveko, miri na ririmi. Hambiswiritano, titlilasi letikulu, switirhisiwa leswi pimiweke, switirhisiwa leswi nga ringaniki, ku hlanganisiwa ka xidijithali loku nga tiyangiki na swivandla eka vutivi bya ku kambela vadyondzisi swi sive ku tirhisiwa. Ndzavisiso wu gimeta hi leswaku kharikhulamu, maendlelo yo dzondzisa na dyondzo na maendlelo ya nkambisiso swi nga tlakusa nhluvukiso lowu heleleke loko vadyondzisi va kuma nseketelo wa xiphurofexinali lowu nga heriki, loko swikolo swi ri na switirhisiwa leswi ringaneleke, na loko ku kambela ku tshama ku ri karhi ku ya emahlweni, ku katsa hinkwavo na ku faneleka hi tlhelo ra nhluvukiso. Ndzavisiso wu ringanyeta leswaku Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo ya le Hansi na Sekondari yi nyika nhluvukiso wa xiphurofexinali lowu yaka emahlweni eka dyondzo leyi simekiweke eka mintlangu na ndlela yo kambela ku dyondza ka vadyondzi loko dyondzo yi karhi yiya emahlweni, na leswaku swikolo swi tiyisisa ku hlengeletiwa ka switirhisiwa, ku nghenelela ka vatswari na nseketelo wa dyondzo ya xidijithali ya nxavo wa le hansi eka titlilasi ta ECD.

MARITO MA NKOKA: Nkambisiso, Kharikhulamu, Nhluvukiso wa Vana va ha ri Vatsongo, Maendlelo yo Dyondzisa na ku Dyondza

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

DECLARATION ..... **i**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **ii**

ABSTRACT ..... **iii**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **xvi**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **xvi**

LIST OF ACRONYMS ..... **xvii**

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY **1**

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY **1**

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT **2**

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS **3**

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY **3**

1.5.1 Aim ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.5.2 Research objectives ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.6 REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE **4**

1.7 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK **5**

1.7.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Overview and Relevance to the Study) ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.7.2 Piaget's Cognitive Theory (Overview and Relevance to the Study) ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.7.3 Erikson's Theory (Overview and Relevance to the Study) ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN **5**

1.8.1 Research Paradigm ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8.2 Research type ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8.3 Research Approach ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8.4 Research Design ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8.5 Population and Sampling of the Study ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.8.6 Data Collection and Methods ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.8.6.1 Interviews ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.8.6.2 Observations ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.10 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY/CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.10.1 Credibility ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.10.2 Transferability ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.10.3 Dependability ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.10.4 Confirmability ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.11 RESEARCH ETHICS ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.11.1 Permission ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.11.2 Informed Consent ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.11.3 Protection from Harm ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.11.4 The Right to Privacy ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY **7**

1.12.1 Limitations of the Study ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.12.2 Delimitation of the Study ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS **7**

1.13.1 Curriculum ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.13.2 Pedagogy ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.13.3 Assessment ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.13.4 Early Childhood Development ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY **8**

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 9

2.1 INTRODUCTION **9**

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES INFORMING CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECD LEARNERS **10**

2.2.1 Play-Based Theory **11**

2.2.2 Experiential learning Theory **12**

2.2.3 Learner Centered methodology ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3 ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND ECD LEARNER DEVELOPMENT **15**

2.3 1 Assessment Strategies and Practices in European ECDE Contexts **16**

2.3.2 Assessment Strategies and Practices in African ECDE Contexts **17**

2.3.3 Assessment Strategies and Practices in Zimbabwean ECDE Contexts **17**

2.4 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES GUIDING CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION **19**

2.4.1 Education Amendment Act (2015) **19**

2.4.2 ZIMSEC Early Childhood Development Syllabus for Primary Schools **20**

2.4.3 National Early Childhood Development Policy (2018) **21**

2.4.4 Early Childhood Development Curriculum Framework (2015) **21**

2.4.5 Comparative Analysis and Relevance of Policies and Procedural Frameworks Guiding Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Early Childhood Development Education.....22

2.5 CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECD CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES.....23

2.5.1 Curriculum implementation challenges.....24

2.5.2 Teacher-related challenges 25

2.5.3 Knowledge and skills challenges.....25

2.6 STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION.....27

2.6.1 Strategies for Strengthening Effective Curriculum Implementation in ECDE.....27

2.6.2 Post-COVID-19 Strategies for Strengthening Early Childhood Development Programmes.....27

2.6.3 Management and Systemic Strategies for Enhancing Early Childhood Education.....28

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK..... 30

3.1 INTRODUCTION 30

3.2 VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY.....31

3.2.1 Teaching and Assessment of ECD Learners within Vygotsky's Sociocultural Framework 33

3.2.2 Relevance and Application of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in the Zimbabwean ECD Context 34

3.3 PIAGET'S COGNITIVE THEORY 36

3.3.1 Relevance and Application of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory in Zimbabwean ECD Contexts .37

3.4 ERICKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.....39

3.4.1 Relevance and Application of Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development in ECD Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment.....41

3.5 POSITIONING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY **42**

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 47

4.1 INTRODUCTION **47**

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM **48**

4.3 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH TYPE **49**

4.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH **50**

4.5 MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN **50**

4.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING **52**

4.6.1 Population **52**

4.6.2 Sampling **52**

4.7 DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS **55**

4.7.1 Semi-Structured Inteviews ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

4.7.2 Non-Participant Observations **56**

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION **58**

4.9 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS **60**

4.9.1 Ensuring Validity ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

4.9.1.1 Establishing content validity ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

4.9.1.2 Ensuring construct validity ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

4.9.1.3 Enhancing internal validity ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

4.9.2 Ensuring Reliability ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

4.9.3 Ensuring Credibility ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

4.9.4 Ensuring Trustworthiness ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS **60**

4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION 64

5.1 INTRODUCTION **64**

5.2 DESCRIPTION OF CASES **64**

5.3 CASE SITES **65**

5.4 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS **71**

5.5 ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK **72**

5.7 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS **80**

5.6.1 Child-Centred Curriculum for Holistic Development **81**

5.6.2 Policy Frameworks Shaping ECD Practice **83**

5.6.3 Play-Based Pedagogy as a Driver of Development **84**

5.6.3.1 Play and Cognitive Development 85

5.6.3.2 Play and Social-Emotional Development 85

5.6.3.3 Play and Physical Development 86

5.6.4. Contextual Adaptation of Play-Based Pedagogy **86**

5.6.4 Inclusive and Continuous Assessment Practices and Strategies **87**

5.6.4.1 Observation-Based and Informal Assessment 88

5.6.4.2 Alignment Between Curriculum and Assessment 88

5.6.4.3 Challenges in Assessment Implementation 89

5.6.4.4 Cross-Case Interpretation 89

5.6.5 Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation **89**

5.6.5.1 Infrastructure and Resource Availability 90

5.6.5.2 Teacher–Pupil Ratios and Workload Pressures 90

5.6.5.3 Parental and Community Involvement 91

5.6.5.4 Cross-Case Interpretation of Contextual Influences 91

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 93

6.1 INTRODUCTION **93**

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS **93**

6.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK **96**

6.3.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory **96**

6.3.2 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory **97**

6.3.3 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory **98**

6.4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF REVIEWED LITERATURE **100**

6.4.1 Holistic Development in ECD **100**

6.4.2 Cultural Relevance in ECD Curriculum **101**

6.4.3 Play-Based Learning as a Pedagogical Approach **102**

6.4.4 Inclusive Education and Access to Learning **102**

6.4.5 Assessment Practices in ECD **102**

6.5 CONCLUSIONS **103**

6.5.1 What theoretical perspectives inform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province? **104**

6.5.2 How do assessment strategies and practices support curriculum implementation and development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province? **105**

6.5.3 What policies and procedures guide the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province? **105**

6.5.4 What challenges affect the effective implementation of ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in Mashonaland West Province? **106**

6.5.5 What strategies can be adopted to enhance the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in the ECD development in Mashonaland West Province? 107

6.5.6 How effective are the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province? 108

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS 109

6.6.1 Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Development 109

6.6.2 Improving Curriculum Design and Implementation 110

6.6.3 Enhancing Assessment Practices 110

6.6.4 Addressing Resource and Infrastructure Challenges 111

6.6.5 Promoting Inclusive Education 111

6.6.6 Strengthening Policy Implementation 111

6.6.7 Encouraging Research and Innovation 112

6.7 SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FROM THE STUDY 112

6.7.1 Suggested Framework: Digital Literacy and Technology-Enhanced Learning Framework 112

6.7.1.1 Rationale and theoretical basis 113

6.7.1.2 Core components 113

6.7.2 Details of the Components of the Model 114

6.7.2.1 Digital learning tools 114

6.7.2.2 Stakeholders 115

6.7.2.3 Collaborative digital learning culture 115

6.7.2.4 Interactions and flow 115

6.7.2.5 Purpose 116

6.7.3 Significance of the Framework 116

6.8 CONTRIBUTION 116

6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

REFERENCES 119

APPENDICES.....145
Appendix A: Unisa Research Ethics Approval 145
Appendix B: Permission Letter from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe 146
Appendix: C Schools Permission Request Letter.....147
Appendix D: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Permission Request Letter.....149
Appendix E: Consent Letter for The Parents 151
Appendix F: Participant's Information Sheet.....152
Appendix G: A Sample of Document Analysis Form.....156
Appendix H: A Sample of Lesson Observation Checklist 158
Appendix I: A Sample of Interview Schedule Transcript 161
Appendix J: Turnitin Certificate.....164
Appendix K: Language Editing Cetificate 168

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Theoretical Integration of Erikson, Vygotsky and Piaget Guiding the Qualitative Multiple Case Study Design ……..61
Figure 4.1: Six steps of thematic analysis (Authors own design) ……74
Figure 5.1 Geographical location of case study sites..... 87
Figure 6.1: Digital Literacy and Technology-Enhanced Learning Framework..... 1143

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Inclusion and Exclusion criteria ……69
Table 5.1 Biographical data of participants 92
Table 5.2: “Parent” and “child” codes reported by case 95
Table 5.3 Themes..... 99

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASR	Automatic Speech Recognition
CBD	Central Business District
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDE	Early Childhood Development Education
EdTech	Educational Technology
IEPs	Individualised Education Plans
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and secondary education
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLP	Natural Language Processing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SCT	Sociocultural Theory
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TLMS	Teach and Learning Materials
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisations
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

What children learn in the early years lays the foundation for their future success in school and in life (Neuman - Early Childhood Education Scholar)

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study explores how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices promote the development of ECD learners in Zimbabwean primary schools. It focuses on the classroom realities that followed Zimbabwe's post-2015 curriculum reforms, especially the incorporation of ECD Grades A and B into public primary education.

The reform expanded access to early learning, but access alone does not guarantee quality. Effective ECD practice requires a coherent relationship between what teachers teach, how they teach, and how they assess children's progress. This relationship matters because children in the early years develop rapidly across cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language domains.

Existing literature recognises the value of child-centred, play-based, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate ECD practice. However, Zimbabwean schools implement these ideals under different resource, staffing and infrastructure conditions. This creates a gap between policy intention and enacted classroom practice. The present study addresses this gap by examining how teachers interpret and implement curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in selected government primary schools.

The chapter proceeds by presenting the rationale, problem statement, research questions, aim and objectives, a brief review of related literature, the theoretical framework, methodology, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations, key concepts, dissertation structure and summary.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The researcher undertook this study because her professional experience in Zimbabwean primary schools showed that ECD teachers often work hard to implement the curriculum, but they do so in conditions that make holistic development difficult. These conditions include large classes, limited teaching and learning materials, uneven infrastructure and limited support for assessment.

The academic gap lies in the limited empirical evidence on how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment work together in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms. Previous studies have addressed curriculum reform, teacher preparedness and ECD policy, but fewer studies examine the three pillars as an interconnected classroom practice.

Literature shows that young children learn best when curriculum content, teaching methods and assessment practices align with their developmental needs. Scholars also emphasise play-based learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, formative assessment and teacher support as core elements of quality ECD. However, the literature also shows that policy reforms often lose effectiveness when schools lack resources or when teachers do not receive sustained professional development.

The study is significant because it provides evidence that can support teachers, school leaders, parents, policymakers and teacher educators. It also proposes practical strategies for strengthening ECD curriculum implementation in resource-constrained Zimbabwean contexts.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Zimbabwe's post-2015 curriculum reform positioned ECD as a compulsory foundation for formal schooling. The reform aimed to promote equitable access and holistic development. However, teachers must translate this policy into classroom practice through curriculum planning, pedagogical choices and assessment strategies.

The problem is that the effectiveness of these interconnected practices remains uneven and insufficiently documented in Zimbabwean government primary schools. When teachers lack resources, assessment knowledge, manageable class sizes and culturally responsive support, ECD learners may experience weak preparation for Grade 1, limited development of foundational skills, and reduced access to indigenous and play-based learning experiences.

The central gap addressed in this study is the limited context-specific evidence on how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment operate together to promote holistic development among ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Guided by the problem statement, the study addressed the following main research question within the context of selected government primary schools in Mashonaland West Province:

How effective are curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in promoting the development of ECD learners?

1.4.1 Sub-Research Questions

The study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. What theoretical perspectives inform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in promoting ECD learner development?

2. How do assessment strategies and practices support curriculum implementation and learner development?

3. What policies and procedures guide curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices?

4. What challenges affect effective implementation of the ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices?

5. What strategies can enhance the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in ECD education?

6. To what extent do current pedagogical practices align with the theoretical principles of holistic child development?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim

The study aimed to explore the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in promoting ECD learner development in selected government primary schools in Mashonaland West Province.

1.5.2 Research objectives

The study sought to:

1. explore the theoretical perspectives that inform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices;

2. examine how assessment strategies support curriculum implementation and learner development;

3. identify the policies and procedures that guide ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;

4. analyse the challenges that affect implementation;

5. propose strategies for strengthening effective ECD practice; and

6. determine how far current pedagogical practices align with holistic child development principles.

1.6 REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This section presents a brief review of literature that introduces the key debates developed more fully in Chapter 2.

1.6.1 Global and regional landscape of ECDE policy and reforms

Global and regional ECD literature shows growing agreement that early childhood education must support holistic development rather than narrow academic readiness. International frameworks emphasise play, inclusion, health, care, protection and family participation. African studies add that ECD reform must respond to resource constraints, teacher preparation and culturally grounded learning practices. This literature is relevant to Zimbabwe because the country's post-2015 curriculum reform expanded access to ECD but also increased the responsibility placed on primary schools.

1.6.2 Conceptualising the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment nexus

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment operate as one system in effective ECD education. Curriculum defines intended learning and developmental goals. Pedagogy shapes the experiences through which children engage with those goals. Assessment provides evidence of progress and

informs the next teaching steps. When these three elements align, teachers can support cognitive, social-emotional, physical and language development. When they are fragmented, classroom practice becomes inconsistent and learners may not receive balanced developmental support.

1.6.3 Implementation realities in post-reform Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean literature highlights a persistent policy-practice gap. Teachers often value child-centred and play-based curriculum principles, but they struggle to enact them where classes are large, resources are scarce and infrastructure is inadequate. Studies also report uneven teacher understanding of formative assessment and limited integration of local culture and digital tools. These gaps justify the present study's focus on how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are enacted in real ECD classrooms.

1.7 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This study uses a theoretical framework rather than a purely conceptual framework because it is grounded in established theories of child development. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory jointly guide the study.

Vygotsky's theory explains how children learn through social interaction, language, culture and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development. Piaget's theory explains how children construct knowledge through active exploration and developmentally appropriate experiences. Erikson's theory explains how children develop confidence, autonomy, initiative and social competence through supportive relationships.

Together, these theories help the researcher evaluate whether curriculum content, pedagogical practices and assessment methods support holistic development. Chapter 3 provides the detailed theoretical discussion and shows how the theories guide data collection and analysis.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study used a constructivist paradigm, an exploratory qualitative approach and a multiple-case study design. The constructivist paradigm suited the study because teachers interpret curriculum, pedagogy and assessment through their experiences, school contexts and social interactions.

The exploratory qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine how the three pillars of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment work together in ECD classrooms. The researcher used a multiple-case study design to compare practices across three government primary schools and to identify similarities, differences and contextual influences.

The population comprised ECD teachers in government primary schools in Mashonaland West Province. The researcher purposively selected six teachers from three schools because they had direct experience in implementing the ECD curriculum. This small sample was appropriate for an in-depth qualitative case study because the aim was depth, contextual understanding and saturation rather than statistical generalisation.

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations and document analysis. These methods supported triangulation because they allowed the researcher to compare what teachers said, what the researcher observed, and what school documents showed.

The researcher analysed the data thematically. She coded interview transcripts, observation notes and documents, grouped related codes into themes, reviewed the themes against the research questions, and interpreted them through the theoretical framework. Saturation was reached when additional interviews and observations no longer produced new codes or themes.

1.9 Trustworthiness

The study focused on qualitative trustworthiness rather than quantitative validity and reliability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation, member checking and prolonged engagement with the research sites. Transferability was supported through thick descriptions of the cases. Dependability was enhanced through clear documentation of research procedures. Confirmability was supported through reflexive awareness and grounding interpretations in participant accounts and observation notes.

1.10 Ethical considerations

The study followed the principles of autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence. Autonomy was respected through informed consent and voluntary participation. Non-maleficence was addressed by protecting participants from harm, using pseudonyms and maintaining confidentiality.

Beneficence was addressed by ensuring that the study could contribute to improved ECD practice. Data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes.

1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.12.1 Assumptions

The study assumed that participating teachers would provide honest accounts of their classroom practices and that lesson observations would reflect typical ECD teaching and assessment routines. It also assumed that the selected schools offered sufficient variation to illuminate different implementation realities.

1.12.2 Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to six ECD teachers in three government primary schools. The findings therefore cannot be statistically generalised to all Zimbabwean schools. Time, financial constraints and the researcher's professional responsibilities also limited the number of schools visited. However, the researcher addressed these limitations through careful case description, triangulation and focused analysis.

1.12.3 Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to government primary schools in Mashonaland West Province and focused specifically on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. It did not examine private schools, secondary education or learner achievement through standardised testing. This scope allowed the researcher to study the selected phenomenon in depth.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.13.1 Curriculum

For the purpose of this study, curriculum refers to the planned ECD learning content, experiences, values and developmental goals that guide teaching and learning in Zimbabwean primary schools.

1.13.2 Pedagogy

For the purpose of this study, pedagogy refers to the teaching approaches, interactions, materials and classroom strategies that teachers use to support ECD learners' holistic development.

1.13.3 Assessment

For the purpose of this study, assessment refers to the continuous, developmentally appropriate and evidence-based process of observing, documenting and interpreting children's learning and development to inform teaching decisions.

1.13.4 Early Childhood Development

For the purpose of this study, Early Childhood Development refers to the foundational stage of learning in which children develop cognitive, social-emotional, physical, creative and language competencies through supportive educational experiences.

1.14 Overview of the Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1 presented the overview of the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the three cases. Chapter 6 discusses the findings, presents conclusions and recommendations, and proposes the study's framework.

1.15 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined and presented the preliminaries of the study as a preparation for the remaining chapters of the study. The research topic, a brief background to the study, the problem statement, the research aims and objectives as well as the rationale of the study were presented. An overview of the research methodology, the research questions and the research ethics for the study were also included. Key words were also defined as they were used in the context of the current research. The next chapter will review literature on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."— Isaac Newton

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (Chapter 1) presented the study's introduction and background, clearly stating its purpose, rationale, focus, and significance. In addition, the objectives of the study and the key RQs it set out to answer were outlined. The chapter clarified that an education system should be comprehensible when the national curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment are all related and reinforce one another. In section 1.6, the researcher defined literature review and highlighted various types of literature review. She selected a narrative literature review because it involves a rigorous, well-designed approach to identifying, analysing, and synthesising all relevant studies on a topic. This chapter begins by defining narrative literature review before implementing it in the next sections.

Andrews et al. (2021) describe a narrative literature review as a broad and comprehensive method for synthesising research from different methodologies to establish the current state of knowledge in a particular field. In addition, Meng et al. (2020) emphasise that a narrative literature review summarises available evidence on a particular issue, thereby helping identify patterns and responses observed across studies. Furthermore, Ashari and Herachwati (2023) explain that a narrative literature review brings together existing studies on a specific topic and presents them in a structured, coherent narrative.

These narrative literature reviews go beyond merely listing previous studies. Instead, it is evident that when you use a narrative literature review, you will critically examine and connect existing research to provide a clear and organised understanding of what is already known. Through this process, the researcher can integrate findings from different research approaches, highlight major themes, identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and reveal gaps that require further investigation. As a result, the review strengthens the study's academic foundation and demonstrates awareness of current scholarly discussions.

Drawing from Andrews et al. (2021), Ashari and Herachwati (2023) and Meng et al. (2020) the researcher defines narrative literature review as a systematic and critical synthesis of existing

research on ECD curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies, presented in a logical and coherent narrative form. Therefore, this approach enables the study to map current knowledge, identify prevailing debates, and expose contextual gaps related to the implementation of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Zimbabwean primary schools.

Building on this background, the rest of the chapter is organised as follows: Section 2.2 focuses on the theoretical perspectives informing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices and strategies at ECD level. In section 2.3 assessment strategies and practices in supporting curriculum implementation is presented followed by presentation of policy and procedures guiding the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of ECDE in section 2.4. Section 2.5 then presents challenges affecting the effective implementation of the ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies. The discussion of strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECDE is presented in Section 2.6, while the last section provides chapter summary.

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES INFORMING CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECD LEARNERS

In this section, theoretical perspectives that inform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in promoting key domains of development among ECD learners in primary schools are discussed. The theoretical perspectives on learners' learning and development offer a useful scope with which to begin drafting a responsive pedagogy for an improved ECD Curriculum. Suryani and Fleer (2025) mention that having knowledge and understanding of various theoretical perspectives on learners' learning and development shared with a disposition for good teacher enquiry constitute the essential precursors to a responsive pedagogy. The current researcher selected three theoretical perspectives, play based theory that was identified by Aisyah, Harun and Rohman (2023), Experiential theory by Sulistiawati (2024) and Learner-Centred approach by Lubis and Sofni (2021).

2.2.1 Play-Based Theory

According to Aisyah, Harun and Rohman (2023) play is viewed as more than just a pastime for young learners; it is an essential component of Early Childhood Development. They add that it is a self-motivated and interactive experience that nurtures many skills necessary for individual and educational growth. There is a strong emphasis on learner-led play, where learners take the initiative, select activities, and set the conditions of their playtime. This method aligns with the knowledge that learners are active, curious with a natural feeling to explore their environment. Through play, according to Mazaranye (2024) learners learn to discover their world, experiment with social interactions, and advance critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Tovey (2022) states that Froebel, a theorist, identified a play-based curriculum where learners learn and develop creativity and exploration skills. He viewed play as the fuel of human development in ECD. He, according to Tovey (2022) alleged that learners are innately creative and their growth is best nurtured by structured play. Play-based learning offers opportunities for learners to actively and creatively engage with objects, people and the world around them. He believed that young learners are gardens to be nursed for ideal learning to occur.

Froebel's emphasis in Aisyah, Harun and Rohman (2023) was on the importance of early childhood learning since this could form individual life hence the need to provide conducive learning environment to learners at this stage. Tovey (2022) suggests that teachers should provide learners with a variety of play material as play would make them enjoy their learning, explore, discover, express themselves, be creative and develop ideas while playing. To effectively cater for learners' educational needs, Aisyah et al (2023) state that the most crucial point in the play-based theory as proposed by Froebel is the training of ECDE teachers. He suggested that teachers need proper training to competently employ play-based theory to handle the ECD learners. The teachers for ECD, according to Froebel in Wasmuth (2020) should be friendly and facilitate learners as well as supervise and guide them in their play. The teachers' major role in this case as mentioned by Aisyah, Harun and Rohman (2023) is to guide the learners' education and provide appropriate learning materials and direct learners on how to use them. Learners according to Tovey (2022) should be allowed to interact with the environment and get answers to their many unanswered questions. The ECD play-based approach as purported by Froebel in Aisyah et al

(2023) is based on how learners respond best when teachers employ specific pedagogical methods designed to boost and stimulate progress to the subsequent level of development. Teachers should assess learners' natural interests and facilitate their development through effective planned pedagogies that align with their innate inquisitiveness and creativity. Furthermore, teachers are entitled to create rich environments where diverse play forms such as symbolic, constructive, or social play can emerge. However, do the teachers offering ECDE have the capacity to competently address these issues to support the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECDE?

2.2.2 Experiential learning Theory

Sulistiawati (2024) conducted a study on Experiential learning Philosophy of Education in Early Childhood Development and put more emphasis on learning through activities and by doing. Sulistiawati (2024) indicates that this theory was propounded by Dewey, a theorist who alleged that experience was the essential key in knowledge formation, social values and skills. In the context of ECDE in the digital era, this idea could be beneficial by incorporating technology in the curriculum as an interactive learning resource that encourages learners' exploration and creativity. Sulistiawati 2024 believed that learners are valuable and childhood is equally a vital phase in life. Dewey as stated by Sulistiawati (2024) suggested reforming education by changing it from teacher-centred teaching to learner-centred where learners' interests and experiences direct the curriculum. For ECD learners, experiential learning promotes the development of important sensory and motor skills. It is all about involving learners in planning, giving them the platform to have a say in whatever they want to discover. This will increase their sense of ownership and engagement.

Sulistiawati (2024) posits that this philosophy of education underscores that for learning process to be actually useful, learners should be provided with adequate learning opportunities to connect their previous experience with the present knowledge. The same scholar acknowledges that by accepting this educational philosophy, and adapt the curriculum, can develop a composed approach between the use of technology and activities that support children's social interaction, motor skills and creativity. Hildebrand (2022) states that experiential learning prepares learners to suit in the society by assisting them to develop human relationships and social skills and this

learning by doing approach stresses that ECD learners acquire knowledge best through active participation and hands-on experiences instead of passive listening. By giving learners, the freedom to acquire knowledge at their own level, a curriculum with technological devices will create a more effective and entertaining learning experience. This according to Sulistiawati (2024) goes in line with Dewey's principles which highlight the importance of learning experiences that are appropriate and relevant to the learners' developmental stage. To Dewey, pupils are natural learners. He advocated for sequential learning since learners grow through stages. Dewey in Sulistiawati (2024) believed that learners are little scientists and thus therefore, should be able to think and question and the environment in which they live only contributes to the learning process Chen (2023) suggests that a curriculum should affords learners an opportunity to experiment, solve problems and discover new ideas. Teachers should help learners connect real experiences to curriculum content and this is more important than memorisation for effective understanding. A curriculum that provides different materials to stimulate the senses and forms of learning is essential. Overall, the experiential learning theory contributes to the development of a holistic and more relevant ECD curriculum responding to the challenges of the times, providing guidance for teachers in effectively using technology as one of pedagogical strategies to support ECD learning as suggested by Sulistiawati's (2024) study. Effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is needed to achieve all these in ECDE.

2.2.3 Learner-Centred methodology

Synthesis: Play-Based Theory, Experiential Learning Theory and Learner-Centred Methodology complement one another because they connect the three core concepts of this thesis. Play provides the learning context, experience defines the learning process, and learner-centredness shapes the teacher-child relationship. In curriculum terms, these theories support integrated, culturally meaningful and developmentally appropriate content. In pedagogical terms, they require teachers to facilitate exploration, collaboration and hands-on activity. In assessment terms, they support observation, portfolios, anecdotal records and descriptive feedback rather than narrow testing. This integrated perspective guides the study's evaluation of whether Zimbabwean ECD classrooms implement curriculum, pedagogy and assessment coherently.

Lubis and Sofni (2021) in their research stated that learner-centred approach is a learning style that views learners as active participants who initiate their own learning. Learner-centred style of

learning understands that every learner brings own ideas and experiences that enlighten what they want to learn and how they put it into practice. Pestalozzi, in Lubis and Sofni (2021)'s study is one of the theorists who identified this learning approach, he supported education for all including the poor and encouraged learner-centred pedagogy methods that are designed to strengthen the learner's own abilities in their learning. Learner centered is a learning approach that recognises that learners in ECD develop in different areas at their own pace. His ideas in Lubis and Sofni (2021) have constantly influence ECDE curriculum development. Sellars and Imig (2021) supported by Schunk (2021) state that Pestalozzi highlighted a child centered approach in a natural environment to impart knowledge to learners as he proposed that learners learn best in a curriculum that considers their interests and needs. The learner-centred method encourages the learners to use all their senses in learning for proper acquisition of skills and knowledge. It provides learners an opportunity to learn in a way that suits them best.

Considering Pestalozzi's ideas gives valuable insights for promoting learners' optimal development. This knowledge allows teachers to make rich learning experiences associated with how ECD learners naturally learn and grow. For an effective curriculum, pedagogy an assessment, Lubis and Sofni (2021) suggest that teachers should act as facilitators and endeavor to educate the whole child, not concentrate just on their intellect. Learners' curriculum should focus on developing all the developmental domains in ECDE and another important factor when creating a learner-centred environment is giving learners a voice. Teachers should facilitate learning activities with love and avoid domineering, criticism and judgement during the learning process. According to Batkhuyag and Batkhuyag (2025) Pestalozzi advocated for group learning since he alleged that learners acquire various skills, knowledge and confident attitude from each other using this technique of groupwork and this will also create many opportunities to cooperate and collaborate. In Saracho (2023)'s contributions teachers should plan for education which is cross curricular and involves a diverse school life to cater for every learner. To create a successful learner-centred environment, teachers can utilize a variety of digital tools in the teaching and learning process. These tools can help learners to learn at their own pace and retain knowledge and apply it.

The above-mentioned scholars narrate that Pestalozzi underscored the importance of parental and community involvement in supporting learner-centred learning. For Pestalozzi, therefore,

education plays a key role in the advancement of the society. He advocated that the learner should be studied and assessed thoroughly and thereafter appropriate learner-centred methods of teaching should be employed to enhance development.

2.3 ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND ECD LEARNER DEVELOPMENT

Section 1.1 of this study provided an overview of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE), highlighting its critical role in supporting the holistic growth and development of learners. The section emphasised the importance of effective pedagogy and assessment strategies in ensuring quality ECD programmes, while also outlining the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study and clarifying key concepts such as pedagogy and assessment. In addition, Section 1.6 justified the need for a comprehensive review of existing literature on pedagogical and assessment strategies used in ECDE at global, regional, and local levels. Building on this foundation, this section reviews literature focusing specifically on how assessment strategies and practices support curriculum implementation and promote the development of ECD learners.

Pedagogical approaches and assessment methods are widely recognised as central components of quality ECDE, as they guide teaching practices and inform decisions about children's learning and development, as noted by Manzunzu (2019). Wangila (2017) defines ECD pedagogy and assessment as the methods and techniques used to teach and evaluate young children's learning across cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language domains. Similarly, Liu et al. (2017) describe assessment as a systematic process of measuring children's knowledge and skills, while Yambi (2020) conceptualises pedagogy as the instructional approaches and practices teachers use to facilitate learning. Collectively, these scholars highlight that assessment practices are integral to pedagogy and curriculum implementation, as they provide evidence of learning and guide instructional planning to support holistic child development.

To contextualise these perspectives, the review adopts a funnel approach, drawing on studies from Europe, Africa, and Zimbabwe to present international, regional, and local insights into assessment strategies and practices in ECDE. These studies were selected because they illuminate how assessment supports curriculum implementation across different socio-cultural and policy contexts.

2.3 1 Assessment Strategies and Practices in European ECDE Contexts

Transition: European studies provide useful insights into formative assessment, documentation and child-centred pedagogy. However, these findings must be interpreted cautiously because Zimbabwean ECD classrooms operate with different resource levels, class sizes and policy implementation challenges.

Research from Europe illustrates the close relationship between assessment practices and curriculum implementation in ECD settings. A multiple-case study conducted in the Netherlands by Van der Werf et al. (2021) examined pedagogical practices and assessment methods across 80 ECD centres. The study revealed significant variation in quality, with some centres implementing child-centred, play-based pedagogies supported by formative assessment practices, while others relied on teacher-directed instruction accompanied by narrow assessment approaches focused mainly on language and literacy outcomes. Van der Werf et al. (2021) argued that such limited assessment practices undermine curriculum intentions aimed at supporting holistic development, particularly in social and emotional domains.

Although the study by Van der Werf et al. (2021) was constrained by limited generalisability beyond the Dutch context, reliance on standardised assessments, and a focus on urban centres, it provides important insights into the need for assessment strategies that align with curriculum goals. Earlier work by Van der Werf et al. (2018) similarly highlighted inconsistencies in pedagogical and assessment quality in Dutch ECD settings, reinforcing calls for child-centred teaching approaches supported by holistic assessment practices that reflect the full range of children's development.

Murray (2015), using a qualitative research design involving classroom observations, interviews with teachers and parents, and document analysis, explored pedagogical and assessment practices in ECDE centres. The study found that assessment practices embedded within supportive pedagogical environments played a critical role in enhancing children's learning, well-being, and development. Murray (2015) emphasised the importance of individualised assessment, meaningful teacher–child relationships, and engaging learning experiences in supporting effective curriculum implementation.

2.3.2 Assessment Strategies and Practices in African ECDE Contexts

Transition: African studies are closer to Zimbabwe's resource and policy realities because they foreground teacher preparation, cultural responsiveness and implementation constraints. They also show that assessment practices must be judged not only by policy alignment but also by their practicality in everyday classrooms.

From an African perspective, Atakpo (2024) investigated stakeholders' perceptions of curriculum implementation, pedagogy, and assessment practices in selected Nigerian states. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research revealed disparities in assessment practices, with many teachers relying on informal, subjective methods and summative assessments that were not well aligned with curriculum goals. Atakpo (2024) observed that such practices limited the capacity of assessment to inform teaching and support holistic child development.

Although the study was limited by its focus on four states and reliance on self-reported data, Atakpo (2024) provided valuable insights into the challenges facing ECDE assessment in African contexts. The findings underscored the need for formative, developmentally appropriate assessment strategies that support curriculum implementation and reflect children's diverse learning needs.

In South Africa, Lunga et al. (2022) examined the effectiveness of pedagogical and assessment approaches in promoting holistic development among children aged three to six years. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study found that play-based, child-centred pedagogies supported by formative assessment practices were most effective in enhancing cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Lunga et al. (2022) also highlighted the importance of culturally responsive assessment and well-trained teachers in supporting curriculum implementation, while recommending longitudinal and comparative studies to explore the sustained impact of these practices.

2.3.3 Assessment Strategies and Practices in Zimbabwean ECDE Contexts

Synthesis of ECD assessment strategies: The literature identifies observation, checklists, portfolios, anecdotal records, rating scales, progress reports, performance tasks and play-based documentation as the main assessment strategies used in ECD. Observation and anecdotal records

align strongly with Zimbabwe's holistic curriculum because they capture social, emotional, language, physical and cognitive behaviours during natural activities. Portfolios also support curriculum implementation because they document progress over time. However, narrow literacy and numeracy checks misalign with holistic ECD goals when teachers use them as the main evidence of learning. The reviewed studies agree that assessment should inform teaching, but they differ on the extent to which teachers have the skills, time and resources to document development systematically. This study therefore examines assessment as an enacted practice rather than as a policy prescription.

Within Zimbabwe, several studies point to challenges in aligning assessment practices with curriculum intentions. Madondo and Tsikira (2021) examined the use of traditional children's games in ECD programmes and found discrepancies between curriculum policy and classroom practice. Their findings indicated that assessment practices were predominantly focused on literacy and numeracy outcomes, with limited attention to social and emotional development, suggesting misalignment between assessment practices and holistic curriculum goals.

More recently, Mwaruta et al. (2025) investigated the impact of culturally responsive, play-based pedagogy on children's cognitive and socioemotional development in Zimbabwe. The study found that formative assessment practices embedded within play-based learning significantly supported curriculum implementation by enhancing learner engagement, problem-solving abilities, and socioemotional competencies. Mwaruta et al. (2025) also emphasised the importance of trained teachers and inclusive learning environments in maximising the effectiveness of assessment practices.

Despite these contributions, both Madondo and Tsikira (2021) and Mwaruta et al. (2025) identified gaps in existing research, particularly regarding long-term outcomes, regional variations, and the role of parental and community involvement in sustaining effective assessment practices. These gaps highlight the need for further research into assessment strategies that support curriculum implementation and holistic learner development in Zimbabwean ECDE contexts.

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that assessment strategies and practices are central to effective curriculum implementation and the promotion of holistic development among ECD learners. Across international, regional, and local contexts, scholars consistently emphasise

the importance of formative, child-centred, and culturally responsive assessment approaches aligned with curriculum goals and pedagogical practices. However, persistent challenges related to policy alignment, teacher preparation, and contextual relevance remain evident, particularly within African and Zimbabwean ECDE settings. The next section therefore examines the policies and procedures that guide curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECDE.

2.4 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES GUIDING CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

Legislative and policy frameworks play a critical role in shaping the provision and quality of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE). Muzilikazi and Mawere (2020) argue that legislative frameworks establish the fundamental rules and guidelines that ensure consistency, quality, and accountability in ECD programmes across contexts. In Zimbabwe, existing literature emphasises that laws, policies, and regulatory frameworks are central in guiding curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies in ECDE, thereby influencing how effectively ECD programmes promote holistic learner development. The sub-secrtions that follow examine key policies and legislative instruments that guide curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Zimbabwean ECDE.

2.4.1 Education Amendment Act (2015)

The Education Amendment Act of 2015 provides the legislative foundation for the delivery of ECDE services in Zimbabwe. The Act mandates the provision of Early Childhood Development education for children aged three to five years and establishes requirements for the registration and regulation of ECD centres and teachers. Through these provisions, the Act offers statutory guidance for curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment approaches in ECDE. Section 4 of the Act outlines the goals of ECDE, which include enhancing children's health, socialisation skills, cultural identity, and learning capabilities, reflecting a commitment to holistic child development.

The Act further provides a framework for the development and implementation of the ECDE curriculum, which is designed to support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development while responding to the diversity of Zimbabwean learners. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2015) notes that the curriculum framework emphasises play-

based learning, active learner engagement, and the integration of local culture and values. In addition, the Act underscores the importance of child-centred and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and provides guidelines for teacher training, certification, and professional development to ensure effective curriculum delivery, as highlighted by MoPSE (2019).

The relevance of the Education Amendment Act (2015) to this study lies in its role as the legal framework that standardises ECDE provision in Zimbabwe. By requiring the registration and regulation of ECD centres and teachers, the Act promotes uniform standards in curriculum implementation, pedagogy, and assessment. Sibanda (2018) supports this view by arguing that comprehensive legislative frameworks enhance educational quality and ensure equitable access to inclusive ECD services. Consequently, the Act reinforces the need for appropriate curricula, pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices that promote meaningful learning outcomes for ECD learners.

2.4.2 ZIMSEC Early Childhood Development Syllabus for Primary Schools

The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) Early Childhood Development Syllabus for Primary Schools provides operational guidance on curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices in ECDE. Grounded in the National Early Childhood Development Policy and the ECD Curriculum Framework, the syllabus outlines the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that learners are expected to develop at the ECD level.

According to Sibanda (2018), the ECD curriculum articulated in the syllabus is child-centred, holistic, and integrated, with an emphasis on cognitive, physical, social, emotional, creative, and language development. The syllabus promotes active learning through play-based activities that are developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant. It further adopts a constructivist pedagogical orientation by encouraging collaborative, exploratory, and experiential learning experiences that enhance children's reasoning, problem-solving, creativity, and communication skills.

Assessment practices outlined in the ZIMSEC ECD Syllabus emphasise formative and continuous approaches, including observation, portfolios, checklists, rating scales, and progress reports. These methods are intended to provide information that informs instructional decisions and supports

curriculum planning, rather than merely measuring achievement. The syllabus is therefore central to this study, as it provides a benchmark against which the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean primary schools can be evaluated. Examining its implementation allows the identification of gaps, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening ECDE practice.

2.4.3 National Early Childhood Development Policy (2018)

The National Early Childhood Development Policy was introduced in 2018 in response to Zimbabwe's commitment to international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The policy provides national direction for the development and implementation of ECD programmes and adopts a holistic approach that recognises the interconnections between education, health, nutrition, and child protection.

Sibanda (2018) notes that the policy aligns with global best practices in ECD, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy emphasises the provision of safe, nurturing, and stimulating learning environments and advocates for equitable access to quality ECDE services for all children. In terms of curriculum and pedagogy, the policy promotes participatory, child-centred, and play-based learning approaches that encourage exploration, experimentation, and problem-solving.

With regard to assessment, the National ECD Policy recommends formative, continuous, and integrated assessment practices that capture multiple dimensions of child development, including cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and linguistic domains. Assessment is intended to support learning by identifying strengths and areas for improvement, rather than labelling or ranking learners. Madondo and Tsikira (2021) emphasise the importance of aligning classroom practices with the National ECD Policy, demonstrating that play-based pedagogy supported by formative assessment enhances learner motivation, engagement, and holistic development.

2.4.4 Early Childhood Development Curriculum Framework (2015)

The Early Childhood Development Curriculum Framework developed by MoPSE in 2015 provides comprehensive guidance on the content and delivery of ECDE programmes in Zimbabwe. The framework advocates for learner-centred, play-based learning experiences that respond to

individual learners' needs, interests, and cultural contexts. It draws on theoretical perspectives from Piaget and Vygotsky by emphasising active learning, exploration, and social interaction as central to children's cognitive development.

The framework also recognises the role of play in learning, aligning with Froebel's view of play as a primary mode of human development and Montessori's emphasis on experiential and self-directed learning, as discussed by Tovey (2022) and Lubsi and Sofni (2021). In terms of assessment, the framework promotes formative, continuous, and holistic approaches that guide teaching and learning, provide feedback to parents and caregivers, and support children's overall development. This perspective aligns with Black and Wiliam's (2018) argument that formative assessment enhances learning outcomes when used to inform instruction.

Empirical studies further support the principles of the ECD Curriculum Framework. Muzembe et al. (2021) found that play-based pedagogy combined with formative assessment improved learner engagement, motivation, and development in ECD settings. Similarly, Mugweni (2017) reported that implementing the framework's principles enhanced learner participation and promoted culturally responsive teaching practices. These findings affirm the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment approaches outlined in the ECD Curriculum Framework.

2.4.5 Comparative Analysis and Relevance of Policies and Procedural Frameworks Guiding Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Early Childhood Development Education

Across the reviewed policies and legislative frameworks, there is a shared emphasis on providing high-quality ECDE programmes that promote holistic child development through play-based and learner-centred approaches. The policies consistently recognise the importance of family and community involvement, as well as the role of language and culture in shaping children's learning experiences. However, differences exist in scope and focus. While the ECD Curriculum Framework concentrates primarily on education within the formal school system, other policies adopt a broader perspective that includes health, nutrition, and child protection. Despite these differences, the frameworks collectively demonstrate Zimbabwe's commitment to ensuring equitable access to quality ECDE services.

The Education Amendment Act (2015), National ECD Policy (2018), ZIMSEC ECD Syllabus for Primary Schools, and the ECD Curriculum Framework collectively provide a comprehensive

policy and legislative foundation for ECDE in Zimbabwe. These instruments emphasise child-centred, play-based pedagogy and formative, holistic assessment practices that support curriculum implementation and promote learner development. Their relevance to this study lies in their role in shaping how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are conceptualised and enacted in Zimbabwean primary schools. Understanding these policies provides a critical context for evaluating the effectiveness of ECDE practices and identifying areas for improvement. The next section examines teaching and learning activities that teachers and learners engage in to promote the development of ECD learners.

2.5 CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECD CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

The following synthesis shows how implementation challenges have persisted and changed over time in Zimbabwean ECD literature.

Period	Main challenges reported	Implication for this study
2015-2020	Policy-practice gaps, limited teacher preparedness, resource shortages and uncertainty about child-centred pedagogy.	These studies show that the first phase of reform created implementation pressure at school level.
2021-2025	Persistent infrastructure deficits, large classes, limited inclusive education skills, weak assessment documentation and uneven digital readiness.	These later studies show that earlier challenges have persisted and have been intensified by new expectations around inclusion and technology.

Despite progressive curriculum reforms and policy commitments towards inclusive and competency-based education in Zimbabwe, emerging research reveals persistent challenges in implementation. Studies by Muzembe et al. (2021), Mhofu and Sefotho (2024), and Pakombwele and Nkomo (2024) highlight systemic, institutional, and pedagogical challenges that continue to hinder effective curriculum delivery in Early Childhood Development (ECD). While policy frameworks emphasise inclusivity, learner-centred pedagogy, and competency-based approaches, the practical realities within schools and teacher training colleges reflect gaps in preparedness, resources, collaboration, and infrastructure. The following section critically examines these

challenges across curriculum implementation, pedagogy, assessment, teacher preparation, and systemic support structures.

2.5.1 Curriculum implementation challenges

The researcher identified curriculum implementation challenges from the study conducted by Muzembe et al. (2022) in Epworth, Mabvuku, and Tafara Districts on ECD curriculum implementation in Zimbabwean primary schools within Harare Metropolitan Province. The study examined challenges hindering the implementation of the updated ECD curriculum, with specific consideration to curriculum content, pedagogical procedures, and teacher readiness. The scholar used a qualitative research design and data was collected through interviews, document analysis and classroom observations. The sample was a total of fourteen participants, consisting of two district school supervisors, four primary school heads and eight ECD teachers.

The results exposed that while teachers largely welcomed the revised ECD curriculum as important and relevant, several causes hindered its successful implementation. These include ineffective teaching and learning resources, inadequate teacher training, poor administrative support, and inadequate infrastructure such as large classes and inappropriate instructional materials. Moreover, numerous teachers persisted to depend on teacher-centred methodologies, failing to embrace the learner-focused, activity-based pedagogy supported by the curriculum. Muzembe et al (2021) observed that this over dependence on traditional methodologies impose limited pedagogical flexibility and assessment literacy among ECD teachers that hinders inclusive and learner-centred approaches. Heavy workloads, crowded timetables, and high teacher–pupil ratios further limited teachers' capability to implement the curriculum as intended.

Practically, the small sample size and limited geographical focus on chosen urban districts hindered the research which reduced the extent to which the outcomes can be generalised to other settings. Data gathering was also affected by school interruptions which hampered full participation and comprehensive classroom observations in some schools. Subsequently, the study showed a substantial gap in knowledge regarding system-level policy provision mechanisms and necessity for longitudinal studies to follow the long-term outcomes of curriculum implementation in ECD.

2.5.2 Teacher-related challenges

A study by Mhofu and Sefotho (2024) explored the challenges teachers face in implementing a competency-based curriculum for learners with learning disabilities in Mhangura, Makonde District, Zimbabwe. The study was underpinned by a lived constructivist experience perspective, in which a single case study was used to engage participants in discussing challenges teachers face in implementing competency-based education, focusing on learners with learning disabilities. The authors used purposive sampling to select 9 participants (4 females and 5 males). Data collection was done through face-to-face interviews, and it was verbatim transcribed. The results showed that participants were encountering several challenges in the implementation of the competency-based curriculum to learners with learning difficulties. Among the identified challenges were teachers' negative attitudes towards learners with learning disabilities, poor teacher planning, limited resources, and poor collaboration.

It was concluded that the competency-based curriculum's objectives are relevant to learners, but with no inclusivity in their implementation. The research focused solely on the teachers, without involving the parents. The study's findings, according to Mhofu and Sefotho (2024), will help identify areas that need strengthening. Policymakers in the Ministry of Education will gain a better understanding of the challenges teachers face in implementing the competency-based curriculum in Zimbabwe.

2.5.3 Knowledge and skills challenges

Emerging research stresses persistent challenges within Zimbabwe in creating equitable ECD programmes and services for all learners. Pakombwele and Nkomo (2024) carried research on perceived challenges and gaps experienced by teachers' colleges in preparing inclusive early childhood development (ECD) teachers. The study employed a qualitative approach using interviews and document analysis as data gathering tools. Data collection was from one teachers' college in the Metropolitan province of Harare. To participate in the study, two lecturers, five student teachers and two college administrators were purposively sampled.

Pakombwele and Nkomo (2024) study states that while administrators regularly understand inclusion, a major portion of lecturers do not have a deeper understanding of inclusive education, creating a challenging situation to properly offer training to pre-service teachers. Mabasa-

Manganyi (2023), as cited by Pakombwele and Nkomo (2024), supports that regardless of official support for inclusive education, some teachers under training display negative attitudes toward embracing inclusion. The research findings indicated that a lack of skills and knowledge to address inclusive education, together with unfavourable infrastructure, were the main challenges encountered by teachers in colleges. A specific policy is therefore recommended to implement inclusive education in teacher training colleges. More importantly, the infrastructure in teachers' colleges should reflect inclusivity. The study mentions that further studies can be undertaken to ascertain the availability of funding and resources in inclusive education in teacher training colleges.

From a systematic perspective, the study was limited by its small sample and exclusive focus on one teachers' college, which may inadequately represent many other colleges that offer pedagogical practices in inclusive education. In addition, the lack of direct classroom observations and learner outcome data limited the ability to validate the alignment between teachers' reported practices and their actual instructional attitudes.

These reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that the challenges facing ECD curriculum implementation in Zimbabwe are deeply systemic rather than incidental. While policy frameworks advocate for inclusivity, competency-based learning, and learner-centred pedagogy, practical implementation is constrained by inadequate teacher preparation, negative attitudes towards inclusion, limited resources, weak collaboration, infrastructural deficiencies, and unclear policy guidance. These challenges reveal a significant gap between reform intentions and classroom realities. Without deliberate investment in teacher capacity development, clear policy direction, improved infrastructure, and strengthened support systems, curriculum reforms risk remaining theoretical rather than transformative. Addressing these structural and attitudinal barriers is therefore essential to ensure that ECD programmes genuinely promote equitable, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning for all children.

2.6 STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

In response to the challenges affecting Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, particularly in the post-COVID-19 context, recent studies propose a range of strategic interventions to revitalise and strengthen ECDE systems.

2.6.1 Strategies for Strengthening Effective Curriculum Implementation in ECDE

Affandi (2025) conducted a study using a library research method, drawing on references from several online sources to determine the resources that facilitate the successful implementation of the curriculum. He identified the following: information and communication technology, facilities and infrastructure, teaching materials, and excellent human resources. These resources, as stated by Affandi (2025), facilitate a more productive and efficient learning process, maximising the time and energy of learners and teachers. According to Affandi (2025), to stay effective, teachers need to continuously advance their skills. Opportunities for professional development should be offered to help teachers stay up to date on new teaching techniques, best practices, and technologies. The study was limited by its focus on ideas from different library sources, without involving other stakeholders who influence the ECD curriculum and teachers who directly implement it.

2.6.2 Post-COVID-19 Strategies for Strengthening Early Childhood Development Programmes

A study by Chigonda, et al. (2025) emphasise the need for coordinated and urgent action to restructure ECD systems to enhance effective curriculum implementation. They used a qualitative interpretivist paradigm and data was collected from six ECD teachers-in-charge and six school heads. They identified strategies for enhancing effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. These strategies focus on creating safe and engaging learning environments, strengthening teacher capacity through ongoing professional development, fostering collaborative partnerships among key stakeholders, and promoting equity and cultural responsiveness. Collectively, these interventions seek to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable ECD programmes capable of supporting holistic learner development in changing educational contexts. Stakeholders emphasised the need to renew the ECD curriculum to align with current times, infrastructure

development, policy reforms, and teacher capacity-building. The identified strategies reflect a shift from reactive responses to deliberate system strengthening within Early Childhood Development. Rather than focusing solely on recovery, the emphasis is on building resilient, equitable and future-oriented ECD systems capable of adapting to emerging educational demands. The success of these interventions depends not only on policy formulation but also on sustained commitment, coordinated action and accountability among all stakeholders. Ultimately, revitalising ECD programmes requires a balanced integration of structural reform, professional capacity development and community engagement to ensure that young learners receive quality foundational education that supports long-term academic and social success. The research was limited by its focus on teachers in charge and school heads, leaving out ECD teachers, who are key implementers of the ECD curriculum and interact daily with ECD learners.

2.6.3 Management and Systemic Strategies for Enhancing Early Childhood Education

The study by Egwunatum and Atakpo (2025) examined effective management strategies for enhancing Early Childhood Education in Delta State, with lasting benefits for learners in primary schools in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and the study population comprised of 5,000 teachers and 1,350 public Nursery School heads. A total number of respondents was 274 involving 247 teachers, 27 school heads were chosen from 27 Nursery schools attached to public Primary Schools in Delta State. The scholars used a proportional stratified sampling procedure in selecting public nursery schools. A self-designed questionnaire was used as the data gathering tool.

Egwunatum and Atakpo (2025) identified numerous systemic issues hindering the effectiveness of ECE, including, poor funding, lack of qualified teachers, insufficient infrastructure, poor supervision and lack of stakeholder participation. Drawing on policy frameworks and related literature, the study suggested strategic interventions such as, curriculum reform, improved training for teachers, inclusive practices, enriched teaching and learning environments, greater monitoring, and tougher community engagement. The findings discovered that learners who get well-structured ECE services excel in primary school, display stronger emotional and social skills, and are more possible to successfully complete their education. The study faced some limitations; the study sample was too large, which could cause data analysis and management to be more

complex, and also, there was potential for identifying statistically important but practically unimportant results.

2.7 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature on theoretical perspectives, assessment strategies and practices supporting the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECDE in Zimbabwe. The chapter also examined policies guiding the curriculum and challenges affecting its effectiveness. Lastly, the chapter discussed the strategies for enhancing effective curriculum pedagogy and assessment in ECDE and how these strategies could be integrated to inform curriculum implementation in ECD. The literature recommends that while there have been positive changes to the ECDE system in Zimbabwe; there is still room for improvement. One significant gap is the need for more research to be conducted on the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies in ECDE. This could be a useful area for future research, particularly for those interested in improving education outcomes for young children in Zimbabwe. Chapter 3 will present theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Children are not empty vessels to be filled, but active learners constructing their own understanding of the world."

— Inspired by Jean Piaget

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher selected Vygotsky, Piaget and Erikson over alternatives such as Bronfenbrenner, Bandura and Montessori because the three theories collectively address the developmental domains central to Zimbabwe's ECD curriculum. Piaget explains cognitive development, Erikson explains psychosocial development, and Vygotsky explains sociocultural mediation. Together, they provide micro, relational and cultural lenses for analysing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Chapter 2 reviewed the critical literature on the pedagogies and assessments and policy guidelines used in the teaching and learning of ECD learners. This literature provided a guide against which the research findings were considered to determine the contribution of the current research. This Chapter discusses theories forming the theoretical framework of this study with the view for the researcher to frame and position this study. In section 1.7, the research framework was defined, and the theoretical framework was identified as most suitable for framing this study.

A theoretical framework, as defined by Luft et al (2022), is a review of current theories that helps as a guide for developing the opinions that will be used in research. These existing theories that support the research are presented to demonstrate that the study topic is relevant and situated within established ideas. In support, Salcedo Mosquera et al (2022) elaborate that a theoretical framework illustrates an understanding of the theories and concepts appropriate to the study and assists in limiting the scope of the study and provides the wider areas of knowledge under consideration. Kivunja (2018) weighs in by defining a theoretical framework as the structure that connects the researcher to existing knowledge by identifying and explaining the theory that form the foundation for understanding the research problem and guiding the design, analysis, and interpretation of the study It can be said that a theoretical framework is a relevant instrument in planning and carrying out research which helps to find gaps in knowledge emphasising areas where further studies is required. The researcher chose Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Piaget's

Cognitive Development Theory and Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development Theory to guide this study. Incorporating these theories into this research helped the researcher gain an understanding of the nature of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in ECDE. The selected theories could assist teachers in aligning pedagogy and assessment strategies with the learners' level of development and can positively impact learners' achievement.

3.2 VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

Critical application to this study: Vygotsky's theory is useful because it explains scaffolding, peer collaboration and cultural mediation. However, the theory has limitations in overcrowded Zimbabwean classrooms because teachers may struggle to identify each learner's Zone of Proximal Development. The theory also emerged in a different cultural context, so it must be applied with sensitivity to Zimbabwean family structures, indigenous knowledge, multilingualism and non-verbal learning through play and imitation.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, introduced in Section 1.7, provides an important foundation for understanding how key aspects of child development are enhanced. Vygotsky (1978) argues that cognitive and social development begin from birth within a social context. According to his theory, learning does not occur in isolation but develops through interaction with others in society. He explains that children acquire knowledge, language, and skills through engagement with more knowledgeable members of their communities. In this way, knowledge is constructed through social interaction rather than transmitted directly from teacher to learner.

Irshard et al. (2021) further explain that Vygotsky viewed human development as shaped by social institutions, language, culture, belief systems, and the meanings attached to experiences. These cultural and environmental influences help learners understand concepts, especially when content is explained in familiar language. Zhou (2024) supports this view by highlighting that learners with different abilities support one another through scaffolding, where stronger learners assist others in understanding tasks. Shabani (2016) adds that curriculum should reflect constructivist principles by creating opportunities for both individual and social knowledge construction.

A central concept in Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as the gap between what a child can achieve independently and what the

child can achieve with guidance. Remorosa et al. (2024) explain that this guidance, known as scaffolding, functions like temporary support that is gradually removed as the learner becomes more competent. Niazi (2025) emphasises that effective curriculum implementation requires teachers to use varied teaching methods and media to support learners within their ZPD.

Chinhara and Kuyayama (2021) argue that effective teaching results from careful planning, presentation, and assessment. In line with this view, Vygotsky (1978) maintains that knowledge formation is influenced by the values and beliefs present in children's families and communities. Vasileva (2019) notes that social interaction is the foundation of learning and thinking. Vygotsky also identifies play as an essential activity through which children extend their abilities beyond their current level when supported by peers or adults (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky & Rieber, 1997). Acharya et al. (2024) emphasise that teachers should use collaborative pedagogies that promote mental development. Likewise, Arasomwan and Mashiya (2021) argue that social constructivism rejects the idea that knowledge is simply transmitted; instead, learners actively construct knowledge through experience.

Research further shows that children's development is shaped by the quality of early experiences at home and in ECD settings. Takaendesa (2024) explains that teachers guide learners by supporting what they can already do, while Nardo (2021) adds that teachers create enabling environments that support academic, social, and moral growth. Conti and Krever (2021) observe that children learn more effectively in environments that are supportive and engaging.

In relation to this study, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a strong lens for examining how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices promote holistic development among ECD learners. The theory supports investigating how teachers scaffold learning, facilitate social interaction, and design activities within learners' ZPD. It also justifies exploring whether classroom environments, instructional strategies, and assessment practices create opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and developmental growth. Therefore, Vygotsky's framework directly guides this study in evaluating how curriculum implementation in Zimbabwean primary schools enhances cognitive, social, and emotional development through socially mediated learning processes.

3.2.1 Teaching and Assessment of ECD Learners within Vygotsky's Sociocultural Framework

The ZPD has important implications for teaching, learning, and assessment in Early Childhood Development (ECD). Niazi (2025) explains that curriculum functions as a psychological tool that supports learners' development and academic growth. Within the ZPD framework, Nardo (2021) notes that learning occurs at two levels: what the child can do independently and what the child can achieve with support. When learners master concepts at a lower level, they become ready to understand more complex ideas. Therefore, teachers are expected to introduce challenging tasks and guide learners toward deeper understanding. Remorosa et al. (2024), together with Irshard et al. (2021), emphasise mediation as a central principle in Sociocultural Theory, meaning that teachers and peers assist children in moving from their current level of development to more advanced cognitive and social skills.

The ZPD suggests that learners' abilities can be strengthened through guidance from teachers or more capable peers. Rogers (2021) explains that social skills allow children to participate meaningfully in interactions and to develop self-concept and emotional understanding. In this context, teaching in ECD should intentionally promote both cognitive and social growth through structured interaction.

Assessment also plays a critical role in Vygotsky's framework. Vygotsky (1978a) argues that effective teaching within the ZPD requires continuous assessment to determine what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with support. Allal (2020) stresses that without proper assessment, decisions about teaching within the ZPD become guesswork. Manzunzu and Mutovosi (2021) further state that teachers must first identify learners' prior knowledge before introducing new concepts. However, Vygotsky (1978), as discussed by Dixson and Worrell (2016), criticises traditional assessments that only measure what learners can do alone. He maintains that such assessments focus on past achievements and do not capture learners' developmental potential. A more meaningful assessment approach evaluates both independent performance and supported performance to gain a complete understanding of cognitive growth.

Bennet (2018) supports this view by arguing that traditional assessments separate learning from assessment and focus mainly on final results. In contrast, constructive assessment models integrate

learning and assessment and provide feedback that improves performance. Margolis (2020) explains that learners benefit when they internalise skills first learned through interaction, eventually performing tasks independently. This process reflects Vygotsky's idea that knowledge moves from social interaction to internal mental functioning.

In teaching practice, McLeod (2024) highlights that developmentally appropriate curriculum should include activities that learners can perform alone and tasks they can accomplish with support. Allal (2020) emphasises that ECD programmes should consider children's concentration span and incorporate play-based learning. Gjems (2017) notes that language and social interaction are central to children's understanding of new concepts, while Crain (2015) explains that age-appropriate grouping and culturally relevant language enhance learning. Karaya (2022) adds that teachers should understand the developmental origins of learning processes, and Velez-Agosto et al. (2017) argue that culture shapes the learning environment. Vasileva and Balyasinkova (2019) identify practical classroom strategies such as using the ZPD, encouraging peer support, promoting private speech, and placing instruction in meaningful contexts.

In relation to this study, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a strong framework for analysing how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices support holistic development in ECD classrooms. The theory guides the investigation of whether teachers scaffold learning effectively, use assessment to identify learners' developmental potential, and create socially interactive environments that promote cognitive and social growth. By applying the ZPD and mediation principles, this study evaluates how teaching and assessment practices in Mashonaland West primary schools enhance learners' developmental progress within their sociocultural contexts.

3.2.2 Relevance and Application of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in the Zimbabwean ECD Context

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains how social interaction and culture influence children's cognitive and social development. In educational psychology, the theory is widely recognised for emphasising that higher-order thinking skills develop through interaction with others and within cultural contexts. Vygotsky (1978) explains that human development occurs gradually from infancy through childhood and adolescence,

shaped by social and cultural experiences. This developmental perspective aligns with the purpose of this study, which seeks to examine how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices support the growth of ECD learners in Zimbabwe. Esmonde (2017) highlights that Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for analysing learning processes, while Smagorinsky (2018) identifies its key principles as the central role of social interaction, the importance of language as a cultural tool, and learning within the ZPD. These principles directly inform the present study, as they provide a lens for interpreting field data in relation to the objectives of evaluating curriculum implementation and classroom practice.

In Zimbabwe, several studies have applied Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to examine curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECD settings. Musweweshiri (2024) investigated how sociocultural factors influence the implementation of the ECD curriculum in primary schools. The findings showed that the curriculum was largely influenced by Western models that did not fully reflect local cultural values and practices. This cultural mismatch limited effective teaching and learning. The study therefore recommended integrating local cultural elements into the curriculum to make it more meaningful and contextually relevant.

Madondo and Tsikira (2021) examined how teachers' understanding of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory shaped their pedagogical practices. Their study found that teachers who understood Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory were more likely to adopt learner-centred approaches that encouraged collaboration and scaffolding. These strategies promote active participation and cognitive development. In contrast, teachers who lacked understanding of the theory tended to use traditional teacher-centred methods, which reduced opportunities for social interaction and learning within the ZPD.

Pangeti et al. (2023) explored how SCT can guide assessment practices in ECD. They argued that standardised testing does not adequately capture children's abilities within their sociocultural environments. Instead, they recommended alternative approaches such as portfolio and observation-based assessments, which allow teachers to assess learners' development in more holistic and culturally responsive ways. Similarly, Brown (2020a) emphasised the importance of culturally relevant curriculum and assessment methods, while Mazambani and Tapfumanei (2017)

highlighted the need for teachers to apply Vygotsky's principles to promote learner-centred instruction.

The afore-mentioned studies demonstrate that Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a meaningful framework for understanding how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices influence holistic development in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms. By focusing on social interaction, cultural relevance, and guided learning within the ZPD, the theory supports this study's aim to evaluate whether current practices effectively promote children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth within their sociocultural context.

3.3 PIAGET'S COGNITIVE THEORY

Critical application to this study: Piaget's theory helps the researcher judge whether curriculum activities and assessment tasks match ECD learners' developmental readiness. However, Piaget underemphasised the role of culture, language and schooling in shaping cognitive development. In Zimbabwean contexts, children's reasoning may reflect indigenous knowledge systems, multilingual experiences and community responsibilities. The researcher therefore uses Piaget's stages as a guide, not as a rigid measure of ability.

Section 1.7 stated that Jean Piaget (1896–1980) made significant contributions to understanding cognitive development in children. His theory continues to influence the design and implementation of ECD curricula worldwide. Piaget explains that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their social and physical environments. Roostin (2018) states that such interaction, especially through play, stimulates the development of knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes at the ECD level. Adegbite (2025) also emphasises that children learn best when they engage directly with their surroundings and experiences.

According to Piaget and Inhelder (2000), play is a process of assimilation in which children interpret reality based on their existing understanding of the world, a view also discussed by Otto et al. (2019). Through play, children experiment with roles, objects, and situations that reflect real-life experiences. Piaget identifies four stages of cognitive development: the sensorimotor stage (0–2 years), the pre-operational stage (2–7 years), the concrete operational stage (7–11 years), and the formal operational stage (11 years and above). McLeod (2024) explains that the pre-operational

stage is especially important for this study because it corresponds with the age group of ECD learners. During this stage, children begin to use language and symbols to represent objects and ideas. Piaget's ideas continue to guide ECD practice, including the use of clinical interviews to understand children's reasoning and thinking processes.

Otto et al. (2019) note that teachers should focus on what children at each developmental stage can understand. However, recent research suggests that children in the preoperational and concrete operational stages may demonstrate abilities more advanced than Piaget originally proposed. Even so, it remains important for teachers to provide learning activities that match children's developmental levels. Pre-operational learners benefit from opportunities to express themselves through speech, drawing, role play, music, and movement. While abstract concepts such as conservation, time, and number may be introduced, full understanding of these ideas is more appropriate during the concrete operational stage. At that stage, learners can better understand classification, ordering, and basic mathematical operations when they manipulate concrete materials.

In this study, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory provides a useful framework for examining whether the ECD curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessment practices are developmentally appropriate. The theory guides the investigation of how classroom activities support active learning, exploration, and problem-solving in ways that align with learners' cognitive stages. By applying Piaget's principles, this study evaluates whether teaching and assessment practices in Zimbabwean primary schools create meaningful learning experiences that promote cognitive growth among ECD learners.

3.3.1 Relevance and Application of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory in Zimbabwean ECD Contexts

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory is a major framework in developmental psychology that explains how children think and learn. Munsaka (2023) describes the theory as central to understanding how children construct knowledge and develop intellectual abilities. Rabindiran and Manadagopal (2020) argue that understanding Piaget's key concepts is important when researching the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECD within Zimbabwean primary schools.

According to Faizah et al. (2022), Piaget explains cognitive development as occurring through four stages: the sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years), the pre-operational stage (2–7 years), the concrete operational stage (7–11 years), and the formal operational stage (11 years and above). Each stage builds on the previous one, with children gradually developing more advanced reasoning skills. Dube et al. (2021) explain that during the sensorimotor stage, children learn through physical actions and sensory experiences and develop object permanence. This highlights the importance of hands-on learning in early childhood settings.

Munsaka (2023) explains that during the pre-operational stage, children develop language and symbolic thinking but may struggle with logical reasoning and understanding others' perspectives. Rabindiran and Manadagopal (2020) therefore stress the need for age-appropriate activities that support language development and symbolic play. In the concrete operational stage, learners begin to think logically and understand conservation tasks. At this stage, teaching should involve concrete materials to support understanding of abstract ideas. In the formal operational stage, learners develop abstract and hypothetical reasoning skills, as demonstrated in the work of Inhelder and Piaget (1958), who show that inquiry-based approaches can strengthen problem-solving abilities.

Piaget also introduces the concept of schemas, which Faizah et al. (2022) define as mental structures used to organise knowledge. Munsaka (2023) explains that learners adapt these schemas through assimilation, which involves adding new information to existing knowledge, and accommodation, which involves adjusting knowledge structures to fit new experiences. These processes are important for curriculum planning, teaching strategies, and assessment methods in ECD.

Several studies in Zimbabwe have applied Piaget's theory to improve educational practice. Gasva and Phiri (2020) found that curricula based on active learning and hands-on experiences enhanced learners' cognitive development. Munsaka (2023) further shows that when teachers apply Piagetian principles, such as encouraging exploration and discovery, learners demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills. Regarding assessment, Adegbite (2025) argues that standardised testing may not fully reflect children's cognitive growth. In response, Manzunzu and Manzunzu (2021)

recommend authentic assessment approaches such as observation and portfolio assessment, which provide a fuller picture of learners' abilities.

In relation to this study, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory provides a strong framework for analysing whether the ECD curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean primary schools are developmentally appropriate. The theory is especially relevant because the pre-operational stage (2–7 years) corresponds with the age of ECD learners. By using Piaget's framework, this study examines whether current practices support active learning, symbolic thinking, and cognitive growth. The theory also offers an internal developmental perspective that complements Vygotsky's sociocultural view, allowing this study to analyse curriculum and pedagogy from multiple theoretical lenses. Consequently, Piaget's theory guides the evaluation of how teaching and assessment practices promote meaningful intellectual development among ECD learners

3.4 ERICKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Critical application to this study: Erikson's theory helps the researcher examine whether ECD classrooms promote autonomy, initiative, confidence and positive relationships. For ECD learners aged approximately four to six years, the most relevant stages are autonomy versus shame and doubt and initiative versus guilt. Teachers can observe autonomy when learners choose activities, attempt tasks independently and express preferences. They can observe initiative when learners ask questions, lead play and participate confidently. However, Erikson's theory remains largely descriptive and Western in origin, so the researcher applies it critically within Zimbabwean collective cultural values.

Section 1.7 noted that Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development provides a broad framework for understanding children's social, emotional, and cognitive development from birth through childhood. Erikson (1993) explains that child development occurs in stages, and at each stage children face a psychosocial crisis that must be resolved for healthy development. Samsanovich (2021) notes that this theory offers important insights into understanding how early childhood curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment can support holistic development. The theory highlights that development results from the interaction between biological factors and the social environment.

According to Erikson (1993), successful resolution of each psychosocial crisis leads to the development of positive qualities such as trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. McLeod (2018) explains that during early childhood, children need supportive environments that encourage exploration and social interaction. The OECD (2021) further emphasises that curriculum design should respond to children's developmental needs at different stages. For example, during infancy, a safe and responsive caregiving environment helps children develop trust and independence, as explained by Samsanovich (2021). As children grow, the curriculum should provide increasingly challenging activities that promote initiative, cooperation, and identity formation.

In terms of pedagogy, Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development stresses the importance of guided support in learning. Santrock (2017) explains that children learn best when adults or more capable peers provide appropriate guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Teachers, therefore, play an important role in modelling behaviour, supporting independence, and creating positive classroom relationships. This approach connects with the idea of scaffolding discussed in Vygotsky's work, particularly in *The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Vygotsky, 1978), which highlights the importance of guided interaction in learning.

Assessment within Erikson's framework focuses on understanding children's progress in social and emotional development. Santrock (2017) states that assessment should be continuous and developmentally appropriate. Erikson (1993) suggests that methods such as observation and informal interviews can provide meaningful information about children's strengths and challenges. Manzunzu and Manzunzu (2021) support the use of observation-based assessment to measure social and emotional growth. Although Jean Piaget (1950) focuses more on cognitive development, his emphasis on developmental stages and active learning complements Erikson's view that children progress through structured phases of growth.

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development is directly relevant to this study because it provides a lens for examining whether the ECD curriculum, teaching practices, and assessment strategies in Zimbabwean primary schools support children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. The theory helps to analyse whether classroom environments promote trust, autonomy, initiative, and positive relationships. By applying Erikson's framework, this study

evaluates how curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment methods contribute to healthy psychosocial development among ECD learners within their school context.

3.4.1 Relevance and Application of Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development in ECD Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development is highly relevant to ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment because it explains how children grow socially and emotionally. McLeod (2018) explains that Erikson proposed eight stages of psychosocial development, each marked by a specific crisis that individuals must resolve in order to achieve healthy psychological growth. Samsanovich (2021) adds that these stages begin in infancy and continue across the lifespan, while Erikson (1993) emphasises that social relationships, identity formation, and moral development are central to this process.

In early childhood, Erikson (1993) identifies the stage of trust versus mistrust, where children develop trust when caregivers respond consistently and warmly. McLeod (2018) notes that teachers in ECD settings should therefore create safe and nurturing environments that promote emotional security. This can be done through stable routines, supportive communication, and positive interactions. As children move into the stage of initiative versus guilt, McLeod (2018) explains that they develop autonomy and purpose through exploration and play. Educators can support this development by encouraging independent activities, problem-solving tasks, and creative expression within clear and supportive boundaries.

During the school-age years, children enter the stage of industry versus inferiority, in which they seek to develop competence and confidence. Erikson (1993) explains that children need opportunities to succeed in meaningful tasks to build a sense of capability. Santrock (2017) suggests that inclusive and culturally responsive classrooms promote positive identity formation and respect for diversity. Crain (2015) further stress that children benefit from age-appropriate challenges that balance support with increasing responsibility. In ECD curriculum design, this means planning activities that match children's developmental levels while gradually extending their abilities.

Play remains central within Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development. McLeod (2018) describes play as a medium through which children explore emotions, develop social skills, and understand their environment. Therefore, play-based learning approaches, including cooperative games and imaginative activities, support holistic development. Assessment practices should also reflect this broader understanding of growth. Yambi (2020) argues that assessment should not focus only on cognitive outcomes but also consider social and emotional development. Manzunzu and Manzunzu (2021) recommend observation-based tools such as anecdotal records and portfolios to capture children's interpersonal skills and emotional regulation. Kroger and Marcia (2022) emphasise that such comprehensive assessment methods provide a fuller picture of children's psychosocial progress.

In this study, Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development provides an important framework for evaluating whether ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean primary schools promote social competence, emotional well-being, and identity development. The theory guides the examination of whether classroom environments are supportive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate. By applying Erikson's concepts, this study assesses how teaching strategies and assessment approaches contribute to the holistic growth of ECD learners within their school context.

3.5 POSITIONING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Operationalisation for analysis: Vygotsky informed the analysis of scaffolding, peer interaction, language use, cultural relevance and collaborative assessment. Piaget informed the analysis of hands-on activities, symbolic play, concrete materials and developmentally appropriate tasks. Erikson informed the analysis of learner confidence, autonomy, initiative, emotional security and supportive teacher-child relationships.

Mapping to research questions: RQ1 is directly informed by all three theories because it asks what theoretical perspectives guide practice. RQ2 draws mainly on Vygotsky and Piaget because assessment must identify both supported performance and developmental readiness. RQ3 connects theory to policy because policies translate developmental assumptions into curriculum guidance. RQ4 uses all three theories to interpret how resource constraints limit holistic development. RQ5

uses the theories to frame strategies that strengthen scaffolding, active learning, psychosocial support and holistic assessment.

Integrated synthesis: Effective ECD practice requires teachers to scaffold learning and encourage peer collaboration, provide hands-on and developmentally appropriate experiences, and support autonomy, confidence and social-emotional security. A classroom that emphasises only one of these dimensions remains only partially effective. This integrated framework therefore guides the study's data collection, coding and interpretation.

The integration of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Piaget's cognitive theory and Erikson's psychosocial theory provides a multidimensional understanding of child development. Their shared emphasis on social interaction, developmental progression, and active knowledge construction informs the interpretivist qualitative design adopted in this study. These theoretical constructs guide the exploration of curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment strategies in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms. Figure 3.1 presents an integrated theoretical framework that positions these three theories as complementary foundations guiding this study.

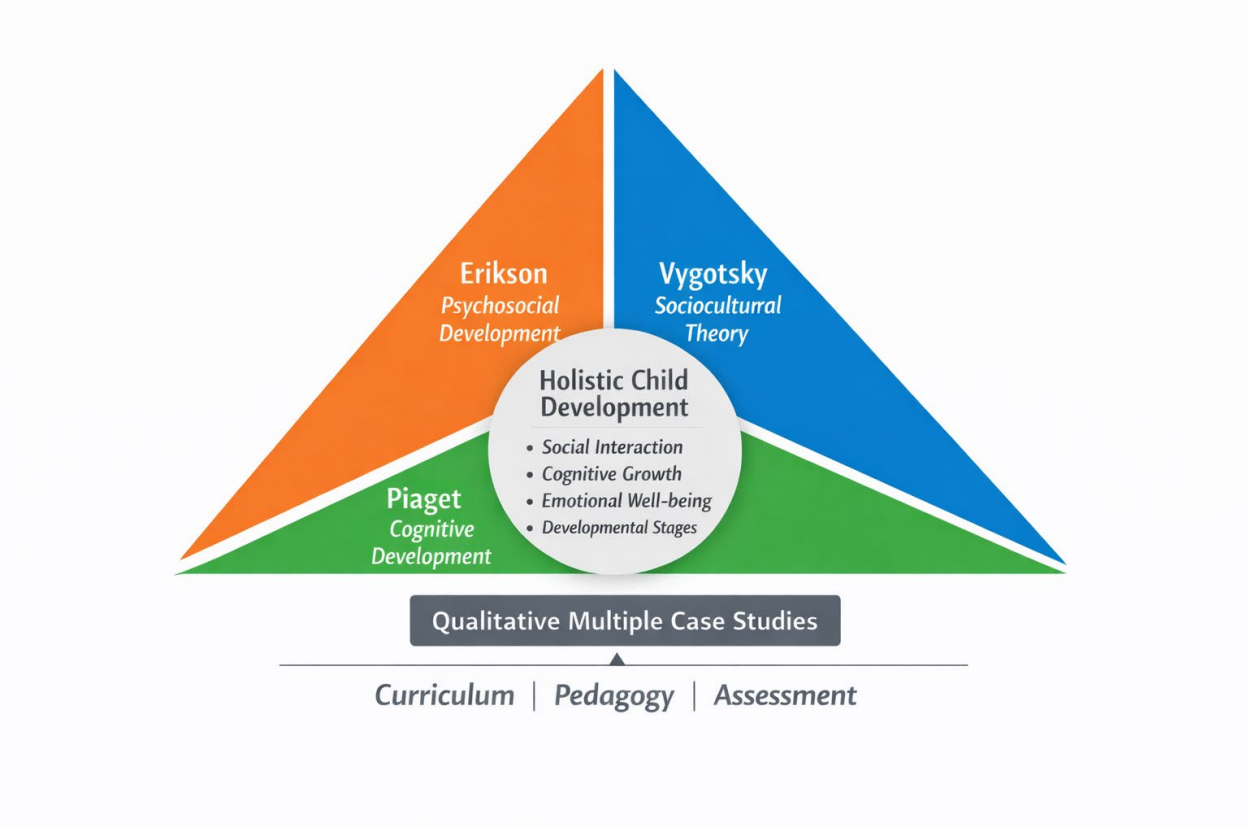


Figure 3.1: Theoretical Integration of Erikson, Vygotsky and Piaget Guiding the Qualitative Multiple Case Study Design

Figure 3.1 illustrates how these three theories intersect around the shared construction of holistic child development, which encompasses cognitive growth, social interaction, emotional well-being, and developmental progression. Taking from Rawiadji and Limanta (2021), the researcher affirms that Erikson's psychosocial theory foregrounds the importance of social relationships and identity formation in early childhood. This perspective directs the study to examine how classroom practices support learners' psychosocial development, including trust, autonomy, initiative, and a positive self-concept. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, according to Zhou (2024), emphasises that learning is socially mediated and occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable others within the ZPD. This theoretical lens guides the investigation of collaborative learning, scaffolding practices, and the use of cultural tools within ECD classrooms. Zhou (2024) established that Piaget's Cognitive Theory views children as active constructors of knowledge, informing the examination of whether curriculum content, learning activities, and assessment strategies align with learners' developmental stages and cognitive readiness.

In this study, the convergence of these theories around shared constructs of developmental progression, social mediation of learning, active participation, and contextual influence provides a multidimensional understanding of child development. This theoretical integration justifies the adoption of a qualitative multiple case study design. Since development is understood as contextual, socially constructed, and embedded within lived classroom experiences, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for capturing the complexity of teaching and learning processes. The multiple case study design further enables in-depth exploration of practices across different school contexts, allowing for comparison and identification of patterns in curriculum implementation, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies.

Thus, the theoretical framework does not merely provide background knowledge; it actively shapes the study's methodological choices. It informs the selection of data collection methods such as interviews and classroom observations, which allow for examination of social interactions, teaching practices, and assessment strategies in real contexts. In this way, this theoretical framework ensures coherence between the study's philosophical assumptions about child development and the methodological approach adopted to investigate it. Positioning the theoretical framework in this integrated manner strengthens the analytical depth of the study and provides a structured lens through which curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms can be meaningfully examined.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter explored three key theories that formed the theoretical framework of this study, namely Erickson's theory, Vygotsky's SCT, and Piaget's Cognitive Theory. These theories provided insights into the psychosocial development of young children and how it influences their learning experiences. Vygotsky's SCT emphasised the importance of social interactions and cultural context in influencing children's cognitive development. Piaget's Cognitive Theory highlighted the stages of cognitive development that children pass through as they construct knowledge and understanding of the world around them. By drawing on these theories, the researchers intended to gain a comprehensive understanding of ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. The next chapter looked into the research methodology employed in this study. It presents the specific methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data related to

ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. It provides a comprehensive explanation of the research design, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. By establishing a solid research methodology, the study aims to approve the validity and reliability of its findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"Research Methodology is the bridge between theory and evidence."

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains how the methodology answered the main research question on the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. The constructivist paradigm, qualitative approach and multiple-case study design allowed the researcher to study teachers' meanings and classroom practices in context. The chapter presents the paradigm, research type, approach, design, population, sampling, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness and ethics.

Chapter 3 presented the theoretical framework for the study. In Section 3.2, the chapter discussed Vygotsky's SCT, which shed light on the enhancement of the main aspects of child development. This was followed by a discussion of Piaget's cognitive theory in Section 3.3 and Erikson's socio/emotional theory in Section 3.4. The chapter also presented the studies that have applied the same theories. These theories gave insights into early children's psychosocial development and how it shapes their learning experiences. The importance of social interactions and cultural background in moulding children's cognitive development was stressed by Vygotsky's SCT. Piaget's Cognitive Theory stressed the phases of cognitive development that children go through as they build knowledge and comprehension of their surroundings. The researcher hoped to get a thorough knowledge of ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment processes by depending on these ideas. In this chapter the researcher focused on the methodologies which were used to achieve the research objectives in Chapter 1.

Section 1.8 the researcher defined research methodology as a systematic procedure that aims to find answers to the research question by gathering research data that is interpreted to draw conclusions about the research. Oranga and Matere (2023) view a research methodology as a blue print which outlines the research approach, the research design, the sample and sampling procedures, methods of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the research. The techniques and processes used to collect and evaluate data relevant to ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were highlighted in this chapter. The researcher explained the study design and sample in depth. In order to effectively explore the research objectives within this study, it is important to consider the relevant research paradigm for the study.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The researcher chose constructivism because the study examined how teachers make meaning of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in their own school contexts. Ontologically, the study recognises multiple classroom realities. Epistemologically, knowledge was co-constructed through interviews, observations and document engagement. Axiologically, the researcher acknowledged that her professional background shaped interpretation, and she used reflexivity and evidence-based coding to reduce bias.

In Section 1.8.1, the concept of a research paradigm was clearly defined in relation to this study. Khatri (2023) explains that a research paradigm acts as a lens through which a researcher views and understands reality. They further describe a paradigm as a set of beliefs, assumptions, and practices that guide the research process and influence how data are interpreted and knowledge is generated. In this study, the constructivist paradigm was adopted to provide a suitable framework for inquiry. From an ontological perspective, the constructivist paradigm assumes that reality is not fixed or single, but multiple and socially constructed. This means that the realities of curriculum implementation, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in ECD classrooms may vary depending on teachers' and learners' experiences and contexts. As Shek and Wu (2018) explain, a paradigm shapes how reality is viewed and understood. In this study, reality is therefore understood as being shaped by social interactions and cultural contexts within Zimbabwean primary schools.

From an epistemological standpoint, the constructivist paradigm holds that knowledge is created through interaction between the researcher and participants. Mohajan and Mohajan (2022) argue that knowledge is socially constructed and that individuals interpret and give meaning to their lived experiences. This aligns with the aim of the present study, which seeks to understand how teachers and other stakeholders interpret curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in their own contexts. Knowledge is therefore not discovered as an objective truth, but co-constructed through dialogue, interviews, and observations.

In terms of axiology, constructivist paradigm recognises that research is value laden. This means that the researcher’s values, experiences, and background may influence the research process. Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that in qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges

personal positioning and reflexivity. In this study, the researcher recognises that interpretations are shaped by engagement with participants and by professional experiences within the Zimbabwean education system. Rather than eliminating values, the study makes them transparent to ensure credibility and trustworthiness.

Therefore, the constructivist paradigm aligns philosophically with the study's focus on exploring subjective meanings, social interactions, and contextual realities in ECD settings. Grounding this study in these ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, the study ensures coherence between its philosophical stance and its qualitative research approach.

4.3 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH TYPE

The exploratory type suited this study because the interconnection between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms remains under-researched. The study did not merely describe ECD practice; it explored how the three pillars worked together across different cases.

In Section 1.8.2, the researcher defined research type as the general category or nature of the study. She also identified common research types, including exploratory, descriptive, analytical, predictive, basic, applied, and explanatory research. The research type chosen for this study is exploratory as it allows the researcher to probe a topic, recognise key themes on observational data and come up with suggestions for further investigations. Alamoush et al. (2021) describe exploratory research as an approach that seeks to generate new and meaningful insights through careful investigation of a research topic. Building on this understanding, Casula et al. (2021) explain that exploratory research is typically conducted in the early stages of inquiry, where the focus is on discovery, openness, creativity, and the possibility of uncovering unexpected findings. Considering Alamoush et al. (2021) and Casula et al. (2021), exploratory research can be understood as a flexible, inquiry-driven process that aims to deepen understanding of a phenomenon that has not yet been fully examined, especially in contexts where prior knowledge is limited.

In line with this study, exploratory research refers to a systematic, open-ended investigation of the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in ECD within Zimbabwean

primary schools. In this context, the exploratory approach enables the researcher to examine emerging patterns, participants' experiences, and contextual realities, generating new insights and identifying areas warranting further scholarly attention. Therefore, the exploratory research design necessitates a qualitative approach that allows for in-depth investigation, flexibility in data collection, and rich description of teachers' experiences in the ECD context.

4.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was stronger than a quantitative approach for this study because the researcher needed detailed accounts of teacher practice, classroom interaction and contextual constraints. Numerical measures alone would not have captured how teachers interpreted policy, improvised resources or assessed learners during play-based activities.

In Section 1.8.3, the research approach was defined, and several types were identified. The researcher found the qualitative research approach most suitable for this study. Mohajan (2018) explains that a qualitative research approach is appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand people's beliefs, experiences, and systems of meaning from their own perspectives. Expanding on this view, Lim (2025) describes qualitative research as a methodology for scientific inquiry that prioritises depth, contextual richness, and participants' authentic voices to understand social phenomena. Looking at these definitions, one can conclude that qualitative research is an approach that focuses on exploring human experiences in their natural settings, allowing the researcher to capture detailed meanings, interpretations, and contextual realities rather than relying on numerical measurement. In this study, a qualitative research approach is used to explore how teachers and other stakeholders understand and implement curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECD classrooms in Zimbabwean primary schools. This approach enables the researcher to examine teachers' experiences, interpretations, and interactions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of ECD practices in their real educational context. Having established the qualitative research approach under the constructivist paradigm, the next section presents the research design that guided how the study was systematically planned and executed.

4.5 MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, a case refers to one government primary school offering ECD classes within the selected district. Three cases were selected to allow cross-case comparison while preserving depth.

The cases were chosen because they implemented the national curriculum, were accessible for fieldwork, and represented varied school conditions relevant to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment implementation.

In Section 1.8.4, research design was defined as a strategic plan that guides what will be done in a study, who will be involved, what will be measured, how and when data will be collected, and how the findings will be interpreted. Drawing on Creswell and Creswell (2018), research design is a framework that guides the entire research process by systematically collecting and analysing evidence to address the research questions clearly. Several qualitative research designs were examined in Section 1.8.4, and the multiple case study design was selected as the most appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of several cases within a specific context.

In defining the qualitative multiple case study design, Busetto et al. (2020) argue that this design is particularly useful for studying complex social phenomena in their natural settings. They emphasise that multiple cases allow cross-case comparisons, which can reveal patterns, similarities, and differences across contexts. Similarly, Karmina et al. (2021) advocate the use of multiple case studies to understand complex educational issues from multiple angles. The researcher, considering the perspectives of Busetto et al. (2020) and Karmina et al. (2021), notes that the qualitative multiple case study design emerges as a rigorous approach that balances in-depth contextual understanding with analytical comparison across cases.

In this study, a qualitative multiple-case study design involves an in-depth, comparative investigation of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies across selected Zimbabwean primary schools offering ECD. This design enables the researcher to explore how these strategies are implemented across different school contexts, identify recurring themes and variations, and generate contextually grounded insights into their effectiveness in promoting holistic child development. A detailed description of the multiple cases examined in this study is presented in Chapter 5. Having outlined the multiple case study design, the following section describes the target population and sampling procedures used to select the cases and participants included in the study.

4.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The semiotic relationship between population and sampling is key in research studies. It is essential to outline the population to specify its characteristics, diversity, and key attributes. This allows researchers to understand the scope and context of their study and make informed decisions about sampling. When researchers understand the population, it becomes easier to determine appropriate sampling techniques and strategies to obtain a representative sample that reflects the population's diversity and key attributes.

4.6.1 Population

Section 1.8.5 defined population as all elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. The population for this study was identified as ECD classes and their estimated 200 teachers in Mashonaland West Province schools. By selecting ECD teachers as the target population, the researcher gained valuable insights into their perspectives, experiences and practices related to curriculum implementation, pedagogical strategies and assessment methods. This information will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the current state of ECD education in Zimbabwe and identify areas for improvement. To ensure that the selected cases are clearly situated within the broader context of the study, the next section outlines the target population and the sampling strategies employed to identify appropriate participants.

4.6.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling benefited this study because it allowed the deliberate selection of information-rich teachers who had direct experience with ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The sample of six teachers was sufficient because the study sought depth rather than breadth, and data saturation occurred when later interviews and observations repeated codes already identified in earlier data.

In the Section 1.8.5.1 the researcher noted that, sampling is a crucial process in research that involves selecting a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population to collect data and make inferences about the whole population. It is used when it is impractical or impossible to study the entire population due to factors such as time, cost or accessibility. For the purposes of this study purposive sampling was used.

Purposive sampling, according to Nikolopoulou (2022), is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research topic. Expanding on this view, Memon et al. (2024) describe purposive sampling as a deliberate, structured process in which participants or cases are selected according to predefined criteria closely aligned with the study's focus. In addition, Tajik et al. (2025) emphasise that purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative and mixed-methods research because it enables researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and context-specific information. Considering the aforementioned researchers' viewpoints, the researcher concludes that purposive sampling is a systematic, intentional selection strategy that prioritises relevance, depth, and contextual insight over statistical representativeness.

In this study, purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of ECD teachers from selected Zimbabwean primary schools who possess direct experience and knowledge of curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment strategies. Since the study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Early Childhood Education, participants are selected based on their professional involvement in ECD practices. This approach ensures that the collected data is rich, relevant, and capable of providing an in-depth understanding of how these educational strategies operate in the Zimbabwean context.

The purposive sampling process was conducted systematically and transparently to ensure the selected cases were appropriate for the study. First, clear inclusion criteria presented in Table 3.1 were established to identify schools that met the research requirements.

Table 3.1: Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
School Type	Government primary schools are implementing the national ECD curriculum	Private or independently run schools

Teachers' Age	Teachers aged 21 years and above	Teachers below 21 years
Work Experience	Minimum of 2 years' experience in teaching or managing ECD classes	Less than 2 years' experience in ECD
Gender	Both male and female participants included to ensure diverse perspectives	No gender excluded unless not directly involved in ECD teaching

As shown in Table 3.1only government primary schools were included because they implement the same national curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. This ensured consistency in curriculum expectations across the selected cases. According to the Zimbabwe MoPSE (2023), there are 200 Primary schools in Mashonaland West Province. Once the researcher had an estimated number, she compiled a list of eligible government primary schools in Mashonaland West Province. From this list, three schools within the researcher's proximity of not more than 50km were selected to facilitate access during data collection.

Using the established inclusion criteria presented in Table 3.1, two ECD teachers were purposively selected from each of the three government primary schools sampled. The selection was based on participants' direct involvement in implementing the ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices, as well as their professional experience in early childhood education. In total, six teachers were part of the study sample, ensuring that participants had relevant knowledge and practical experience to provide rich, meaningful data. Having defined the target population and outlined the sampling procedures used to select the participants, the following section describes the data collection and methods employed to gather information from the selected cases.

4.7 DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

The researcher pilot-tested the interview guide and observation schedule with one ECD teacher who was not part of the final sample. The pilot helped refine unclear questions, improve sequencing and confirm that the tools generated data relevant to the research questions.

The researcher defined data collection in Section 1.8.6 and, with guidance from Noble and Heale (2019), identified semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation as the most suitable methods for this study. These methods were selected because, according to Taherdoost (2021), they allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and actual classroom practices within their natural settings. Most importantly, in this study, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation provided complementary data sources that strengthened the depth, richness, and trustworthiness of the findings.

4.7.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Bearman (2019) defines semi-structured interviews as a qualitative data collection method that combines predetermined guiding questions with the flexibility to explore emerging issues in greater depth. Expanding on this understanding, Andalib (2024) explains that semi-structured interviews enable researchers to obtain rich, detailed information while maintaining a degree of consistency across participants. In addition, Whichello et al. (2019) theorise that these semi-structured interviews allow interviewers to sustain a conversational relationship with participants, thereby creating a comfortable environment, while ensuring that essential topics relevant to the study are systematically addressed. From these definitions the researcher understands semi-structured interviews as a balanced and rigorous qualitative method that integrates structure with flexibility, depth with comparability, and guidance with openness.

Against this background, the researcher defines semi-structured interviews as a guided yet flexible conversations conducted with selected ECD teachers in Mashonaland West Province primary schools. Using an interview guide (Attached as Appendix I, the researcher ensured that key issues related to curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment strategies were consistently explored, while also allowing participants to share their experiences, interpretations, and contextual realities in depth. This method therefore supported the generation of rich, context-

sensitive data necessary for investigating the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECD.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted at the respective schools after official contact time to avoid disrupting teaching and learning activities. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, their role in the study, and their rights as participants. The study was explained clearly to ensure full understanding. Participants then signed informed consent forms, acknowledging that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of responses for transcription and analysis. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process and during the dissemination of the findings. They were informed that their real names would not appear in the study and that pseudonyms would be used instead. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, allowing sufficient time for in-depth discussion of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in ECD.

4.7.2 Non-Participant Observations

In Section 1.8.6.2, observation was defined as a data collection method, and various types of observation were discussed. From these, non-participant observation was selected as the most appropriate approach to complement and corroborate the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Non-participant observations are pronounced by Rajkumar (2020) as a research method where the observer stands apart from the individuals being observed, interacting minimally if at all. Rajkumar's position is complemented by Handley et al. (2020), who describe non-participant observation as an approach that enables the collection of authentic data on participants' interactions within their natural settings. They further note that, although the observer does not participate, participants may occasionally offer spontaneous explanations or comments, which can deepen the researcher's understanding of the processes and mechanisms influencing practice. The researcher, guided by these definitions, views non-participant observation as a rigorous qualitative method that prioritises objectivity, naturalistic inquiry, and contextual authenticity while minimising researcher interference.

In this study, non-participant observation is defined as the systematic observation of ECD classroom activities in Zimbabwean primary schools, without the researcher participating in teaching or learning. Through this approach, the researcher examined how curriculum guidelines were implemented, pedagogical strategies were enacted, and assessment practices were integrated into daily classroom routines, thereby providing authentic evidence to complement the interview data.

The researcher arranged appointments with the three teachers who agreed to participate in the study in order to conduct classroom observations. The three participating teachers provided suitable dates and times for the researcher to visit their schools and observe their lessons for 20 minutes, ensuring that the observations did not interfere with normal instructional activities. Prior to these arrangements, formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the respective school heads, following ethical clearance from the University. Thereafter, the researcher requested that the participating teachers distribute parental consent forms to the parents or guardians of learners in the observed classes. Although data were not collected directly from the learners, parental consent was considered necessary because the learners were present and formed part of the classroom environment being observed.

Both parents and teachers were provided with an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants. Consent forms were signed only after they had a clear understanding of the study. All participants were assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout the research process and during the dissemination of the findings. They were informed that no real names of schools, teachers, or learners would be used in the study. During lesson observations, field notes were recorded in an observation schedule (Appendix H) that covered curriculum content, pedagogy, and the assessment of ECD learners. The notes were later transcribed into detailed notes, and these were shown to the teachers to verify the accuracy of the data. With the data collection procedures outlined in this section, the next section explains how the gathered information was systematically organised, coded, and analysed to generate meaningful findings

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Coding combined deductive and inductive processes. Deductive coding used the research questions and theoretical constructs, including scaffolding, play, assessment, policy and holistic development. Inductive coding allowed new ideas to emerge from participants' accounts and observation notes. Codes became themes when several related codes pointed to a broader pattern across interviews, observations and documents. Theme credibility was strengthened through peer discussion, member checking and comparison across the three cases.

In Section 1.9, literature sources were used to describe the data analysis process, and the researcher identified various strategies, selecting thematic analysis as the most suitable for this study. Ahmed et al. (2025) characterise thematic analysis as one of the most frequently employed methods in qualitative research, highlighting its structured yet adaptable framework for identifying, examining, and interpreting patterns of meaning within data sets. In a related perspective, Naeem et al. (2023) present thematic analysis as a widely embraced technique, particularly suited to qualitative studies that generate rich, detailed descriptive data. Also, Lochmiller (2021) conceptualises thematic analysis as a method centred on systematically identifying and reporting recurring themes within qualitative material. Considering these scholarly positions, the researcher regards thematic analysis as a rigorous analytical approach that organises complex textual data into coherent themes while maintaining sensitivity to context and depth.

Guided by the aforementioned descriptions, the researcher regards thematic analysis as a procedure for coding and interpreting interview transcripts and field observation notes to uncover recurring themes in curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment strategies in ECD classrooms in Zimbabwean primary schools. Through this analytical process, the study generated contextually grounded insights into the effectiveness of these educational practices. It should be noted that during and after data collection, the researcher analysed and interpreted data to identify emerging patterns and developing themes following the six steps of thematic analysis as shown in suggested by Nowell et al. (2017) and Creswell (2018). The steps are visually presented in Figure 4.1.

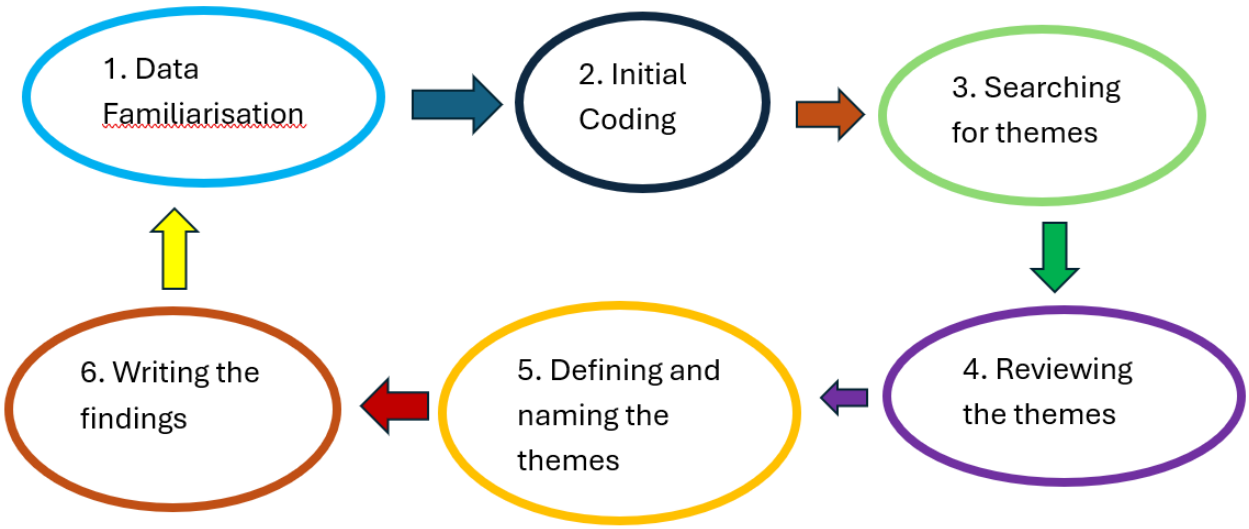


Figure 4.1: Six steps of thematic analysis (Authors own design)

Figure 4.1 illustrates the systematic process of thematic data analysis followed in this study. The process began with the compilation of data from the semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. This initial stage ensured that all data were organised and prepared for analysis. The next stage involved familiarisation with the data. The researcher carefully read and re-read the collected information to gain a deep understanding of the content. For audio-recorded interviews, the recordings were first transcribed into written text. Where interviews were conducted in Chishona, transcription was carried out using Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) systems trained in Chishona and with the assistance of fluent human translators. The transcribed data were then translated into English to allow for systematic analysis.

Following familiarisation, the data were coded. This involved identifying meaningful units within the text and assigning labels to them. Related codes were grouped into categories. Through this process, emerging patterns were identified, leading to the development of themes.

Once themes were established, the researcher interconnected the meanings derived from the individual themes to construct a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices contribute to the development of key aspects among ECD learners. The identified themes were then interpreted in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The final stage involved preparing a narrative report. In line

with Johnson and Christensen (2017), the findings were presented in Chapter 5 of this study. Direct quotations from ECD teachers were incorporated to enhance credibility and support the researcher's interpretations.

Having outlined the procedures followed in analysing the data, the next section addresses the ethical considerations that guided the conduct of this study to ensure integrity, respect, and protection of participants.

4.9 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

4.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The study used qualitative trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through triangulation of interviews, observations and documents, member checking of field notes, and prolonged engagement with the schools. Transferability was supported by thick descriptions of the three cases, participants and classroom contexts. Dependability was enhanced through a clear audit trail that documented sampling, data collection, coding and theme development. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations in participant quotations, observation evidence and reflexive notes.

The researcher also considered coding consistency. She reviewed codes repeatedly, compared them against the research questions, and checked whether each theme was supported by more than one data source. This process reduced selective reporting and strengthened theme credibility.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher obtained ethical clearance before data collection and followed the approval conditions of the University and the relevant education authorities. The final thesis should insert the exact UNISA ethics reference number and Zimbabwean permission reference number in this section. The researcher also observed data protection principles aligned with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) by storing data securely, limiting access and using pseudonyms in all reporting.

In Section 1.11, the researcher presented that, in the process of conducting research, researchers should stick to the guiding ethical principles underpinning research. Kivunja & Kuyini (2017)

stress the importance of following these principles so that researchers will avoid any harm to the participants and society as a whole. Ethical considerations are a key factor in any research study, ensuring that the rights and well-being of participants are protected. The study employed interviews and observations as data collection methods. This section will discuss the ethical considerations the researcher must address when conducting this research, citing relevant scholars to support the discussion.

Informed consent is one of the primary ethical considerations in research. Before involving participants in the study, it is important to obtain their voluntary and informed consent. According to Beauchamp and Childress (2019), informed consent entails providing potential participants with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. In this case, the researcher structured a consent form that clearly outlines these aspects and ensures that participants fully understand what their involvement entails. Suri (2020) states that confidentiality and anonymity are important ethical considerations in research. Participants' privacy should be protected by ensuring that their identities and personal information are not disclosed. The researcher explained how data will be stored securely and how participants' identities will be protected during data analysis and reporting. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), using pseudonyms or assigning codes to participants can help maintain anonymity. It was important to assure participants that their responses will not be linked back to them individually.

Another ethical consideration is the potential for harm or discomfort to participants. The researcher ensured that participation in the study does not cause physical or psychological harm to individuals involved. The researcher carefully designed interview questions and observation protocols to avoid sensitive or distressing topics. It was crucial to provide support mechanisms for participants who may experience emotional distress during or after their involvement in the study. This included providing contact information for counselling services or relevant support organisations. The researcher considered the power dynamics between the researcher and participants. As a researcher, it was important to recognise and minimise any potential coercion or exploitation of participants. A respectful and equitable relationship with participants was established, ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives are valued. This was achieved by actively listening

to participants, acknowledging their expertise, and involving them in the research process as much as possible.

In addition, the researcher considered the study's cultural context and ensured it aligned with the participants' values, beliefs, and practices. In this case, since the research was conducted in Zimbabwe, it was crucial to respect and understand the local cultural norms and traditions. The researcher was sensitive to any potential cultural biases or misunderstandings that may have arisen during data collection and analysis. Smith (2015) states that it is important to involve local stakeholders, such as teachers or community leaders, in the research process to ensure cultural appropriateness.

The researcher also obtained ethical clearance from relevant authorities before conducting the research. In this case, the researcher sought approval from UNISA Research Ethics Committee. Ethical clearance ensures that the study meets ethical standards and guidelines set by institutions and regulatory bodies. It also demonstrates that the research has undergone rigorous scrutiny to protect participants' rights and well-being.

Conducting ethical research is crucial for protecting participants' rights and well-being. In this study on the effectiveness of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment in ECD in Zimbabwean primary schools, several ethical considerations were addressed. These include obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, minimising harm or discomfort, addressing power dynamics, considering cultural context and obtaining ethical clearance. By adhering to these ethical principles, researchers can conduct their studies responsibly while respecting participants' rights and dignity.

4.11 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the various methods used for data collection, the target population, ethical considerations and the approach to data analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in ECD in Zimbabwean primary schools. Interviews were conducted with teachers from three schools in Kadoma, Zimbabwe. These schools were selected based on their representation of diverse educational settings within

the region. Interviews were chosen as a technique to gather in-depth insights into teachers' perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in ECD. Observations were also conducted in three classrooms within the nominated schools to directly observe teaching practices and assess how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were implemented. These observations provided valuable insights into the actual classroom dynamics and interactions between teachers and students. Ethical considerations were given due importance throughout the research process. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants involved in interviews and observations. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to participants and schools during data analysis and reporting. The researcher also adhered to ethical guidelines concerning privacy, data protection and confidentiality. To analyse the collected data thematic data analysis was employed. This method involved identifying frequent themes, patterns and categories within the data. The data was transcribed, coded and categorised to identify major findings and draw conclusions associated to the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD in Zimbabwean primary schools. The next chapter focuses on data presentation and analysis.

.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION

"Moving beyond raw information to meaningful interpretation grounded in evidence"

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 focused on the research methodology employed to ensure that the aim formulated in section 1.5.1 is achieved. The chapter deliberated on the selection of research methods, including interviews and observations. These methods were selected to provide a broad understanding of ECD practices and strategies in the chosen schools. The chapter also emphasised ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and minimising harm.

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected in this study, which investigated the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies and practices in Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Zimbabwean primary schools. The data were generated through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations and were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined in the previous chapter (Chapter 4).

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings in a systematic and coherent manner, guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. As indicated earlier in Section 4.5, this chapter also provides a detailed description and explanation of the selected cases. The following section therefore presents an overview of the cases included in this study.

5.2 DESCRIPTION OF CASES

The cases examined in this study comprised three ECD government primary schools. These ECD sites were active during the autumn term of 2024 and served as the bounded units of analysis within a clearly defined time frame and context. In line with Takahashi and Araujo (2020), each case was treated as a delimited entity, meaning that it was examined within its specific setting and period in order to generate in-depth understanding. The purpose of adopting a multiple-case study research design was to gain a deeper understanding of how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices and strategies were implemented across the ECD contexts. As Takahashi and Araujo (2020) note, case study research aims to provide a rich, contextualised understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, the researcher engaged participants from each ECD site who consented

to semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. These engagements allowed the researcher to identify both the functional characteristics and contextual distinctions of each case.

To establish a meaningful basis for comparison across the three cases, ECD teachers were purposively selected based on their demonstrated commitment to child-centred educational practices. Although the specific instructional strategies and classroom dynamics varied across schools, the shared commitment to learner-centred approaches provided a common foundation for cross-case analysis. This common orientation enabled the researcher to examine similarities and differences in curriculum implementation, pedagogical methods, and assessment strategies while maintaining coherence in relation to the research objectives. Therefore, while each ECD site operated within its own contextual realities, their shared emphasis on child-centred education allowed for systematic comparison and contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in promoting the holistic development of ECD learners.

5.3 CASE SITES

Each of the three selected sites was situated in Kadoma, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe, officially the Republic of Zimbabwe, is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers, bordered by Mozambique to the east, South Africa to the south, Zambia to the north and Botswana to the southwest. As per 2023 census, the country has roughly 15 million people, Zimbabwe's major ethnic group are the Shona, who make up 80% of the population, followed by the Northern Ndebele and other smaller sectors. Zimbabwe has 16 official languages, with English, Shona, and Ndebele the most common. The case studies are situated in Kadoma District, Mashonaland West Province, one of Zimbabwe's 10 administrative provinces. This place lies approximately 141 kilometres (88 mi), by road, southwest of Harare, the national capital and largest city in the country. The city lies on Highway A-5, between Harare and Bulawayo, approximately 300 kilometres (190 mi) northeast of Bulawayo. Figure 5.1 shows the geographic setting of the case study locations.

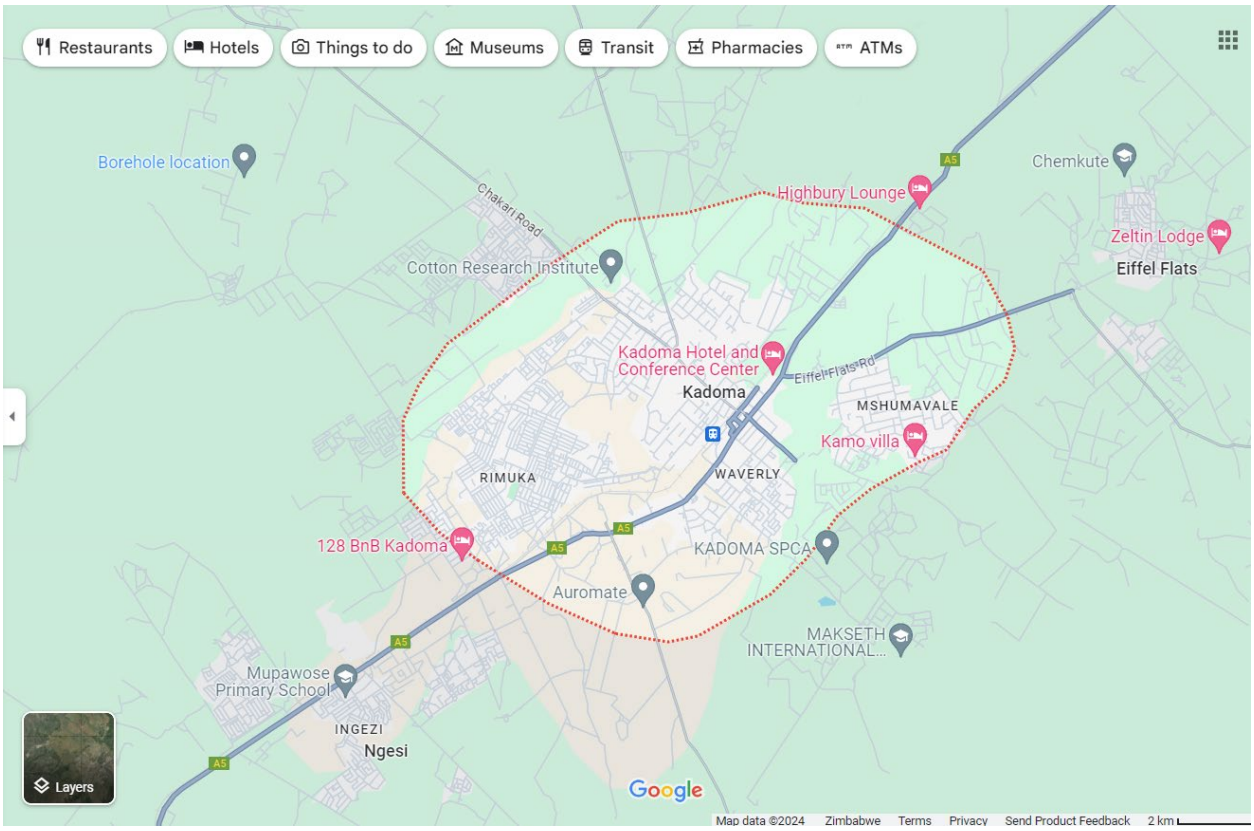


Figure 5.1 Geographical location of case study sites

Source: Researcher's own

The research on the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECDE in Zimbabwe was conducted across three case sites in Kadoma, each representing different socioeconomic contexts. Case A was located approximately 12 kilometres from the eastern side of Kadoma town, with a suburban setting that influences both the educational resources available and the community's engagement with early childhood education. This location presented insights into how geographical distance from urban centres influences access to quality education and pedagogical practices. Case B, located in the Central Business District (CBD) of Kadoma, offered a contrasting environment where educational institutions are likely to have better access to resources, trained teachers, and varied learning materials. The urban context of Case B enabled an exploration of how proximity to economic activities affects curriculum implementation and assessment approaches. Lastly, Case C was cited in the peri-urban area of Kadoma, which lies between urban and rural areas. This case emphasised unique problems, such as fluctuating enrolment rates and varying levels of parental involvement, thereby providing an inclusive

understanding of how these factors affect early childhood education outcomes. Together, these case studies moulded a robust framework for analysing the complex nature of ECDE in Zimbabwe.

5.3.1 Site A

Cite A, situated on the eastern outskirts of Kadoma, is a unique case study within the wider context of ECD education in Zimbabwe. The school includes two distinct ECD classes, ECD A and ECD B, each staffed by a dedicated female teacher. This arrangement not only emphasises these teachers' commitment to promoting a nurturing learning environment but also highlights the gender dynamics prevalent in the educational sector, where female teachers often fill early childhood education roles. The presence of two teachers for the two classes guarantees that each group receives intensive attention, which is important for young learners who thrive on individual interaction and support. Furthermore, the teacher-to-student ratio of 1:20 indicates a more individualised approach to teaching, enabling personalised pedagogical strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners at this formative step.

The infrastructure and resources obtainable at Cite A significantly contribute to its effectiveness as an ECD institution. With a total staff complement of 18 teachers spanning ECD through to Grade 7, the school benefits from a well-structured educational framework that supports continuity of learning as learners progress through the grades. The classrooms are visually pleasing and favourable to learning; they are decorated with colourful displays and educational materials that arouse curiosity and engagement among young students. Such visual aids play an essential role in early childhood education by supporting cognitive development and enhancing language gain through visual literacy. Furthermore, the quality furniture in these classrooms ensures comfort and safety for learners throughout their learning activities, thereby creating an inviting atmosphere that fosters exploration and creativity.

Likewise, the curriculum implemented at Cite A seems to align with best practices in early childhood education, underscoring holistic development across numerous domains: cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and linguistic. Observations showed that teachers use diverse pedagogical approaches tailor-made to occupy young learners actively. This includes hands-on activities that further experiential learning alongside traditional instructional methods. Assessment practices in this setting are likely to be formative rather than summative; they focus on ongoing observations of learners' progress rather than relying solely on standardised testing. Such a

technique allows teachers to adjust their teaching methods based on individual learners' developmental milestones and learning trajectories.

5.3.2 Site B

Site B arose as a compelling case study situated in the bustling Kadoma CBD. This strategic site contributed significantly to the school's modern-day setup and its inclusive effectiveness in delivering quality education. The school included two distinct classes: ECD A and ECD B, each led by a devoted female teacher who brought exceptional strengths to their respective classrooms. The teacher responsible for ECD B demonstrated an active teaching style that engaged students through collaborative learning methods. In contrast, the other teacher of ECD A adopted a nurturing environment that promoted creativity and exploration among her young learners. This gender balance among teachers not only enriched learning experiences but also served as a model for learners regarding the varied roles within educational settings.

The administrative structure of Site B revealed an impressive faculty of 9 teachers. Among these, two were designated for ECD classes, while the remaining seven served grades one through seven, with one teacher assigned to each grade level. Conspicuously, there were no distinct classrooms for each grade beyond ECD; instead, teachers customised their pedagogical methods to house mixed-age learning environments for the learners. This arrangement furthered teamwork and peer learning among learners of varying ages and abilities. The presence of experienced teachers knowledgeable in both curriculum delivery and classroom management played a vital role in maintaining an effective learning environment despite the challenges posed by limited physical space.

One of the standout features of Site B was its advanced technological integration, made possible by its prime CBD location. The school used several digital tools to improve teaching methods and engage learners more efficiently. Interactive boards and educational software were common in classrooms, enabling teachers to present learning activities in innovative styles that seized learners' attention and helped them understand. This technological advantage not only enhanced the curriculum but also equipped learners for a rapidly growing digital world, positioning with global educational trends that highlight technology's role in ECD education.

The confidence exhibited by both learners and teachers at Site B was profound during my observations. Learners enthusiastically participated in discussions and activities, demonstrating their comfort in this supportive environment. Teachers fostered this confidence by using positive

reinforcement that celebrated learners' accomplishments, no matter how small. Such practices not only boosted self-esteem but also cultivated a love for learning among learners, an essential component of effective early childhood education. The school's pledge to nurture emotional intelligence, alongside academic skills, demonstrated a holistic approach to child development that is crucial during these formative years.

The physical structure also played an important role in creating an ideal learning environment at Site B. The school had well-maintained playing areas where learners could engage in physical activities critical to their overall development. Also, sleeping rooms were existing for ECD learners who wanted rest after engaging in exciting morning sessions filled with play-based learning activities. Classrooms featured vibrant decorations, such as wall art that not only illuminated the space but also served as visual aids to reinforce learning concepts. Tiled floors added to the cleanliness and safety of the environment, factors that are frequently overlooked yet critical for young learners' well-being.

The operational logistics added enhanced the efficiency of Cite B's educational framework. ECD classes ended promptly at 1 PM each day, allowing learners ample time to return home safely via a dedicated school bus service. This selfless arrangement ensured parents could rely on timely transport while providing children with organised routines favourable to their development outside school hours.

5.3.3 Site C

Site C was located in the peri-urban area of Kadoma, a region characterised by rapid urbanisation and important socioeconomic challenges. The educational scenery at this site included a single ECD room that catered for both ECD A and ECD B classes. This arrangement mirrored broader systemic issues within the Zimbabwean education system, predominantly in peri-urban areas where resources were often overstretched. The ECD operated with one female and one male teacher, each accountable for one of the ECD classes. This dual-teacher setup was necessitated by the lack of separate classrooms for ECD A and ECD B, underscoring the pressing need for better-quality infrastructure to support early childhood education.

The classroom-sharing arrangement at Site C demonstrated not only logistical challenges but also highlighted the broader implications of overpopulation in schools across peri-urban regions. With ECD taking two teachers assigned to it, while other grades from 1 to 7 had four classes per grade, ranging from 1A to 1D up to 7A to 7D, the request for educational services far surpassed the

existing resources. This situation led to a phenomenon known as “hot seating,” in which students attended classes in shifts due to a shortage of classrooms. Some students attended their lessons after lunch, while others attended in the morning, creating an irregular learning environment that might hamper effective teaching and learning.

The high student enrolment figures at Location C were suggestive of a larger trend within peri-urban areas of Zimbabwe, where families frequently confronted difficulties accessing quality education due to inadequate school availability. Many learners travelled long distances to reach the school, using various modes of transport, and some walked for long hours, whereas others used bicycles or shared rides when possible. This travel not only posed physical challenges but also affected learners’ punctuality and general engagement with their studies. Long travel can lead to fatigue, reducing their capacity to concentrate during learning and to participate actively in classroom activities.

The state at Site C served as a microcosm for understanding the wider educational crisis facing many peri-urban communities in Zimbabwe. The shortage of schools meant learners often had no option but to enrol in overcrowded institutions like Site C, where they faced substandard learning conditions. The consequences of such overcrowding extended beyond simple discomfort; they encompassed reduced individual attention from teachers, exacerbated behavioural issues amongst learners due to a shortage of space and resources, and, eventually, poorer educational results.

Regarding curriculum effectiveness at Site C, it became evident that the limitations imposed by overcrowded classrooms notably affected the pedagogical methods teachers employed. With insufficient time and space for individualised instruction, teachers often resorted to traditional teaching approaches that prioritised rote memorisation over interactive learning. This tactic may have been necessary given the conditions, but raised concerns about whether learners were receiving a well-rounded early childhood education that promotes critical thinking skills and creativity.

Assessment practices within this setting also guaranteed scrutiny; with so many students competing for attention in shared spaces, it became taxing for teachers to conduct detailed assessments that precisely reflected each learner’s developmental growth. Accordingly, there was a risk that some learners’ needs could go unaddressed or unnoticed entirely due to systemic restrictions inherent within Site C’s operational framework.

5.4 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

There were a total of six participants in this study, which investigated the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECDE in Zimbabwe. Within this cohort, two participants came from Site A, comprising two female ECD teachers with significant experience in teaching both ECD A and ECD B. Remarkably, adherence to the exclusion criteria outlined in Section 4.5.2 required that participants have worthwhile teaching experience. Moving on to Site B, the two representatives comprised of both female ECD teachers, each carrying their own exclusive perspectives to the research endeavour. In contrast, Site C housed the remaining pair of participants, a male and a female, within a larger institution characterised by inadequate infrastructure. To uphold anonymity and confidentiality, fictitious name labels were allocated to each participant based on the chronological order of endorsement granted by their respective governing boards, as data generating activities unfolded. It is imperative to note that all six participants served as devoted ECD teachers, each responsible for overseeing their individual classes (referred to as facilitators), resulting in a group composition comprising one male educator and five female counterparts. Table 5.1 presents demographic data of participants.

Table 5.1 Biographical data of participants

School and its participant	Age	Gender	Experience in ECD	Educational background
Site A: Teacher A1	47	Female	22	Bachelor of Education Degree (BeD) in Early Childhood Education
Site A: Teacher A2	32	Female	7	BeD Honours in ECD
Site B: Teacher B1	56	Female	31	PhD in ECD
Site B: Teacher B2	35	Female	10	Master of Education in ECD
Site C: Teacher C1	30	Male	5	Diploma in Education (ECD)
Site C: Teacher C2	40	Female	15	Master of Education in ECD

The biographical information in the table provides a diverse and comprehensive snapshot of the educators involved in the research exploring the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECDE in Zimbabwe. Teacher A1 from Site A, with an age of 47 and an extensive 22 years of experience in ECD, holds a Bachelor of Education Degree specialising in Early Childhood Education. Teacher A2, also from Site A and aged 32, brings 7 years of experience to the study, complemented by a Bachelor of Education Honours Degree in ECD.

Moving to Site B, Teacher B1 stands out for their rich experience: aged 56, with 31 years of practice in ECD. Teacher B2, aged 35, has a decade of experience in ECD alongside a Master of Education Degree in ECD.

As for Site C, Teacher C1, aged 30, brings 5 years of experience with a Diploma in ECD, while Teacher C2, aged 40, brings 15 years of experience and holds a Master of Education Degree focused on ECD.

The varied ages, years of experience, and educational backgrounds of the participants add depth and richness to the study, reflecting a spectrum of knowledge and qualifications across different school settings in Kadoma, Zimbabwe.

5.5 ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The analysis framework, according to Goldsmith (2021:261), aims "to identify, explain, and interpret major patterns within and across contexts". Complementing this view, Langermeier and Bauer (2017) present an analysis framework that integrates diverse analytical approaches by providing a common interface for organising analysis activities. In a similar vein, Kilroy and Fincham (2023) regard an analysis framework as a model used to synthesise key information generated during the data collection phase to produce coherent interpretations. From these definitions, the researcher concludes that an analysis framework is a structured, integrative model that organises, connects, and systematically interprets data across cases and contexts.

In this study, the analysis framework refers to the structured model used to organise and interpret data collected from interviews, observations, and documents across the three ECD cases. It guided the identification of recurring themes, facilitated cross-case comparison, and supported the synthesis of findings regarding curriculum implementation, pedagogical practices, and assessment strategies. This framework ensured that the analysis remained coherent, systematic, and aligned

with the research questions and theoretical perspectives underpinning the investigation into the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education in Zimbabwe.

As indicated in Sections 1.6 and 4.6, this study employed thematic analysis as the most suitable analytical framework. The framework analysis involves six steps as outlined in Figure 4.1 for data organisation and analysis. Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight that, while these steps serve as a framework, movement up and down, and between them, occurs during the analytical process. These include selecting phrases and extracts, coding, theming, and interpretation. In addition, Yadav (2021) affirms that these steps are not discrete phases without overlap, but rather a sequence that progresses from concrete raw information to higher levels of abstraction. Each step is outlined below, along with how it was applied in this study. Each step was completed for each case separately, as guided by Braun and Clarke (2022).

5.5.1 Step 1: Familiarisation

Familiarising herself with the data formed the first and most important step in the qualitative analysis process. The researcher immersed herself in the collected information to gain a deep understanding of its meaning and context. Saldaña (2021) identifies this stage as foundational to qualitative research, emphasising that researchers must read and re-read the data to uncover recurring patterns and emerging insights. By actively engaging with the dataset at this early stage, the researcher established a strong foundation for subsequent coding and theme development. She familiarised herself with the data through transcribing interviews, reviewing observation notes, and repeatedly listening to audio recordings.

To strengthen accuracy and depth of understanding, the researcher followed the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2022), who recommend that researchers listen to recordings while reading transcripts to capture tone, emphasis, and subtle meanings. She carefully compared each transcript with the original recording to correct transcription errors and ensure that participants' voices were accurately represented. This careful engagement enabled the researcher to internalise the data and identify preliminary ideas relevant to the research questions.

The researcher used NVivo Transcription software to convert audio recordings into text. After the automated transcription was completed, she listened attentively to each interview while reading the transcript to identify and correct misheard words or unclear phrases. Where participants spoke in Shona, the researcher translated the transcripts into English to ensure consistency and clarity

during analysis. This deliberate process ensured that she worked with accurate and reliable textual data.

During classroom observations, the researcher wrote detailed field notes immediately after each session. She organised these notes according to the pedagogical strategies employed and the curriculum elements emphasised during the lessons. By systematically categorising the observations, the researcher created a structured foundation for later thematic analysis. Through this deliberate and reflective familiarisation process, she developed a informed understanding of how ECD teachers in Zimbabwe implemented curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in their classrooms.

5.5.2 Step 2: Initial Coding

After transcribing the interviews from Sites A, B, and C verbatim, the researcher engaged deeply with the transcripts through repeated readings and reflective notetaking. This immersion helped the researcher identify preliminary issues relating to curriculum effectiveness, pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices in ECD classrooms. She then applied systematic coding by assigning meaningful labels to relevant portions of the text. While she began with provisional categories aligned to the research focus, she remained open to new codes emerging directly from participants' narratives. She refined these codes iteratively to enhance clarity and consistency.

Wicks (2017) emphasises that thematic analysis aims to identify and report dominant patterns within qualitative data. Simula (2018) adds that, as part of this process, researchers select meaningful statements from interview transcripts and assign codes to them. Lim (2025) further argues that speech contains meanings and perceptions that shape how individuals construct reality, suggesting that words and phrases carry significance that researchers can systematically examine. The initial codes are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Codes from the initial coding process.

Objectives	Parent Codes	Child Codes
Objective 1	Holistic Development	Site A -Physical, cognitive, emotional, social development Site B -Key domains of development: language, literacy, social-emotional, physical, cognitive abilities

Objectives	Parent Codes	Child Codes
		Site C Hands-on activities, practical learning
	Cultural Relevance	Site A - Incorporating cultural components into curriculum Site B - Understanding local culture and traditions Site C - Storytelling, music, dance, art forms from local culture
	Play-Based Learning	Site A - Child-initiated activities, self-directed learning Site B - Dynamic atmosphere, exploration, discovery Site C - Infusing cultural components into play-based activities
	Inclusive Education	Site A - Equal opportunities for all learners Site B - Flexible and adaptive curriculum Site C - Fair, unbiased assessment methods
	Parent and Community Involvement	Site A - Shaping ECD curriculum with diverse perspectives Site B - Involving parents in assessment process Site C - Promoting key domains of development
Objective 2	Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004	Site A - Culturally appropriate instructional materials Site C - Assessment techniques in ECD education

Objectives	Parent Codes	Child Codes
	Circular 12 of 2005	All sites (A, B and C) -Emphasis on holistic development
	Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument 106 of 2006	All sites (A, B and C) -Standards for curriculum development
	Nziramasanga Commission	Site A -Play-based curriculum Site B and C -child-centred pedagogy, community involvement
Objective 3	Play-Based Learning	Site A - Identity and Connections - Interpersonal Skills - Learning Behaviours - Self-Expression and Creativity - Risk-Taking and Problem-Solving
	Social Interaction and Communication	Site B - Communication Skills - Problem-Solving and Negotiating Abilities - Team-Building and Collaboration - Safe Space Creation
	Physical Development and Well-Being	Site C - Outdoor Play and Coordination - Nutrition and Health Screening - Rest and Hygiene - Dance, Music and Fitness
Objective 4	Implementing Play-Based Learning	Site A -Exploration and Experimentation - Hands-On Experiences - Creativity and Critical Thinking - Problem-Solving Skills - Active Engagement and Fun

Objectives	Parent Codes	Child Codes
		- Social Skills Development
	Incorporating Local Context and Culture	Site B - Cultural Diversity Celebration - Heritage Connection - Traditional Games Inclusion - Community Relevance
	Parental Involvement Programmes	Site C - Education Importance - Home Visits and Meetings

Following the coding stage, the researcher moved to the theme search process.

5.5.3 Step 3: Searching for themes

During this step, the researcher examined the coded data to identify patterns and relationships among the codes. She grouped related codes into broader categories that reflect shared meanings. For example, codes related to learner engagement, participation, and classroom interaction were clustered under a broader theme connected to child-centred pedagogy. This step required careful comparison across cases to determine whether patterns appeared consistently or varied by context. The researcher reviewed the emerging themes against the original data to ensure they accurately reflected participants' views and did not distort their meaning.

Through this analytical progression from immersion to coding to theme development, the researcher constructed coherent thematic structures that captured how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices operated across the three ECD settings. This systematic process strengthened the credibility and rigour of the study's findings.

5.5.4 Step 4: Reviewing the themes

After generating initial themes, the researcher moved to the theme review stage to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Campbell et al. (2021) emphasise that reviewing themes is a critical phase in thematic analysis because it strengthens coherence, consistency, and credibility. At this

stage, the researcher examined whether the coded data within each theme formed a meaningful pattern and whether the themes clearly distinguished themselves from one another.

The researcher first returned to the collated extracts for each theme and carefully reread them to determine whether they logically fitted together. If certain data segments appeared inconsistent or weakly aligned with a theme, she either reallocated them to a more suitable theme or refined the theme to better represent the data. Rosairo (2023) note that this internal homogeneity (data within themes fitting together meaningfully) and external heterogeneity (clear distinction between themes) are essential for rigorous thematic analysis.

In addition, the researcher reviewed the themes against the entire dataset to ensure that they captured the overall meaning of participants' responses. Saldaña (2015) highlights that researchers must continuously check emerging themes against the full dataset to confirm that the analysis remains grounded in the data rather than driven by assumptions. By revisiting transcripts and observation notes, the researcher ensured that the themes genuinely represented the experiences of ECD teachers across the three sites.

During this stage, the researcher also assessed whether some themes overlapped or whether broader themes could be divided into more specific sub-themes. According to Nowell et al. (2017), reviewing themes involves refining the thematic map to present a clear, logical structure of the findings. The researcher therefore reorganised and renamed themes where necessary to improve clarity and analytical depth. Through this careful process of refinement and verification, the researcher ensured that each theme contributed meaningfully to understanding the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms. Reviewing themes, therefore, strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings by confirming that the thematic structure accurately reflected participants' lived experiences and aligned with the research questions. The emerged themes are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Themes

Objectives	Themes derived
Objective 1	Holistic Development Inclusive Education Parent and Community Involvement Language Development

Objectives	Themes derived
Objective 2	Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 Circular 12 of 2005 Zimbabwe statutory instrument 106 of 2005 The Nziramasanga Commission
Objective 3	Play-Based Learning Social Interaction and Communication Physical Development and Well-Being Cognitive Development and Problem-Solving Language and Literacy Development
Objective 4	Implementing Play-Based Learning Incorporating Local Context and Culture Professional Development for Teachers Parental Involvement Programmes Integration of Technology into the curriculum

5.5.5 Step 5: Defining and Naming the Themes

After reviewing and refining the themes, the researcher proceeded to the fifth step of thematic analysis: defining and naming themes. Kristanto and Padmi (2020) state that this step requires the researcher to clearly articulate what each theme represents and determines the central idea that captures its essence. Rather than simply listing themes, the researcher must identify the specific meaning each theme conveys in relation to the research questions.

At this step, the researcher carefully analysed each theme to determine its scope and boundaries. She examined the data extracts for each theme and asked critical questions, such as: What is the core issue addressed in this theme? How does this theme relate to curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment practices and strategies? What does this theme reveal about the effectiveness of ECD practices and strategies? Morgan and Nica (2020) emphasise that defining themes involves developing a concise but detailed narrative that explains how each theme contributes to the overall story of the data. Ghorbani and Matourypour (2020) note that effective theme definition requires researchers to move beyond surface description and engage in interpretive analysis.

Guided by Ghorbani and Matourypour's (2020) principle, the researcher refined each theme to reflect not only repeated patterns in the data but also the underlying meanings expressed by participants. She ensured that each theme addressed a distinct aspect of the phenomenon under investigation and that there was no overlap between themes. The researcher then assigned clear and meaningful names to each theme. Parlina et al. (2020) argue that theme names should be concise, informative, and reflective of the data they represent. Accordingly, the researcher selected names that accurately captured the central organising concept of each theme. For example, instead of using vague labels, she adopted titles that directly reflected participants' experiences of curriculum implementation, pedagogical approaches, or assessment challenges.

In this step, the researcher established a coherent analytical structure that guided the presentation of findings in the subsequent section. She ensured that each theme contributed clearly and logically to answering the research questions and interpreting the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in Zimbabwean Early Childhood Development classrooms. The final step which is writing the findings, in this study it is linked with the section of presentation of findings.

5.6 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.6.1 Theoretical Perspectives Informing Classroom Practice

The findings show that teachers did not always name Vygotsky, Piaget or Erikson directly, but their practices reflected elements of these theories. Teachers used peer interaction, songs, storytelling and group work, which aligned with Vygotsky's emphasis on social mediation. They used play, concrete materials and hands-on activities, which aligned with Piaget's view that young children learn through active exploration. They also encouraged independence, confidence and social participation, which aligned with Erikson's focus on autonomy and initiative.

The researcher maintains that this pattern shows implicit theoretical alignment rather than explicit theoretical knowledge. Teachers enacted some principles of holistic child development, but they required stronger professional development to connect daily practice with theory and assessment evidence.

5.6.2 Strategies for Enhancing Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Participants identified several strategies for strengthening ECD practice. These included continuous professional development, improved teaching and learning materials, smaller classes, stronger parent involvement, better infrastructure and greater support for observation-based assessment. The researcher observed that these strategies cut across all three cases, although the urgency differed by site. Site C required stronger infrastructure support, while Sites A and B required more consistent assessment documentation and digital learning support.

These findings respond to RQ5 by showing that effective improvement requires more than teacher effort. It requires coordinated support from schools, parents, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and community stakeholders.

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations conducted across the three selected ECD sites. The presentation of findings is organised around the the following themes that emerged during the analysis: Child-Centred Curriculum for Holistic Development, Policy Frameworks Shaping ECD Practice, Play-Based Pedagogy as a Driver of Development, Inclusive and Continuous Assessment Practices and Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation. Each theme is introduced and supported with evidence drawn directly from participants' responses and observational records. Direct quotations from ECD teachers are included to preserve participants' voices and to enhance the credibility of the findings. Where appropriate, cross-case comparisons are made to highlight similarities and contextual variations among the three schools. Through this structured presentation, the section provides a clear and coherent account of how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices operate within Zimbabwean Early Childhood Development classrooms. It should be noted that the identity of participant is anonymized with the pseudonyms which are presented in the first column of Figure 5.1.

5.6.3 Child-Centred Curriculum for Holistic Development

The findings revealed that the curriculum across the three ECD sites promotes holistic child development by addressing cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language domains in an integrated manner. Participants consistently emphasised that early childhood education must nurture the "whole child" rather than focus narrowly on academic outcomes. For example, Teacher

A1 stated that *"Holistic development in early childhood education refers to the idea that children should be nurtured in all areas of development, physical, cognitive, emotional and social, to reach their full potential."* Similarly, Teacher A2 explained that *"Including holistic development into the curriculum ensures that children receive a comprehensive education that addresses their diverse needs."*

These findings align with Sadguna and Sundari (2024), who argues that holistic development must consider the broader ecological systems surrounding the child, including family, school, and community contexts. This perspective recognises that children's development does not occur in isolation but results from the interaction of multiple environmental influences. The strong emphasis participants placed on parental and community involvement, therefore, reflects an ecological understanding of development. For instance, Teacher C1 emphasised that *"Parent and community involvement is essential in shaping the ECD curriculum as they bring varied perceptions and experiences that strengthen the learning environment."* Such collaboration demonstrates how ecological systems contribute collectively to children's growth.

Implementing holistic development in the curriculum requires intentional planning of activities that simultaneously address multiple developmental domains. Githinji and Orodho (2018) assert that effective ECD curriculum design should incorporate strategies that integrate cognitive, social, emotional, and physical learning experiences rather than treating them separately. This was evident across the three cases during the classroom observations, where teachers combined play, storytelling, music, movement, and collaborative tasks to promote multiple domains simultaneously. As Teacher B2 noted, *"Incorporating storytelling, music, dance, and art forms from the local culture can motivate young learners and enhance their cognitive development."* These integrated activities illustrate how curriculum practices align with scholarly recommendations for multidimensional development.

Language development also emerged as a key component of holistic growth. Teachers emphasised the importance of bilingual instruction in English and Shona to strengthen communication skills while supporting cultural identity. Teacher C2 explained that *"Activities like storytelling, singing songs, and having discussions help youngsters enhance their language capabilities in both English and Shona."* This integration of language, culture, and interaction further demonstrates the interconnected nature of developmental domains.

The findings show that child-centred curriculum implementation across the three ECD cases reflects a holistic and ecological understanding of development. The researcher observed that teachers intentionally design learning experiences that integrate multiple developmental areas while recognising the influence of families, communities, and cultural contexts. This approach strengthens the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in promoting the comprehensive growth of ECD learners in Zimbabwe.

5.6.4 Policy Frameworks Shaping ECD Practice

The findings revealed that national policy frameworks play a central role in shaping curriculum implementation, pedagogical approaches and assessment practices in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms. Participants consistently referred to Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004, Director's Circular 12 of 2005, Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005, and the Nziramasanga Commission as foundational documents guiding their professional practice. These policy instruments collectively promote holistic development, play-based learning, inclusive education and continuous assessment.

For instance, Teacher A1 explained that *"Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 is critical in shaping the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of ECD instruction."* Similarly, Teacher A2 stated that Circular 12 of 2005 *"stresses the significance of holistic development in young learners."* These perspectives align with Moyo (2024), who argues that Secretary's Circular 14 provides educators with a structured framework that emphasises children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Nyoni et al. (2023) further contends that the circular strengthens child-centred approaches by encouraging teachers to adapt instruction to learners' developmental needs.

Director's Circular 12 of 2005 was also identified as reinforcing participatory and play-based pedagogies. Teachers highlighted its emphasis on balancing structured learning with exploratory activities. This is consistent with Madondo and Tsikira (2021), who note that Circular 12 promotes child-centred teaching strategies that enhance learner engagement and critical thinking. Moreover, Mutasa (2020) asserts that the policy advances equitable access to quality early childhood education, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby strengthening inclusive practice within Zimbabwean schools.

Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 provides further regulatory guidance on curriculum standards and assessment procedures. Teacher B1 indicated that the instrument promotes interactive and

play-based teaching methods, while Teacher B2 highlighted its emphasis on continuous assessment. These findings correspond with Moyo (2024), who observe that the instrument establishes guidelines for age-appropriate and holistic learning experiences. Ndlovu et al. (2023) add that the statutory instrument has improved standards in ECD by reinforcing play-based and interactive pedagogical strategies that support creativity and problem-solving.

The Nziramasanga Commission also emerged as a significant reform initiative influencing ECD practice. Teacher B1 noted that the Commission advocated for *"tailored learning experiences that are custom-made to each child's specific needs and preferences."* This emphasis on child-centred and play-based learning aligns with Sadguna and Sundari (2024), who argue that the Commission highlighted holistic development across cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains. Similarly, Moyo (2024) found that implementing the Commission's recommendations positively influenced early childhood education by promoting continuous assessment and learner-centred pedagogy.

Across the three case, observations confirmed that teachers actively implement these policy principles through culturally appropriate instructional materials, collaborative partnerships with parents, participatory teaching strategies and formative assessment practices. Although contextual challenges varied, the shared alignment with national policy frameworks demonstrates the strong regulatory foundation underpinning ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Zimbabwe. In general, the findings indicate that policy frameworks do not operate merely as administrative documents but actively shape classroom practice. By embedding holistic development, play-based learning, inclusive education and continuous assessment into official guidelines, Zimbabwe's ECD policies provide a coherent structure that supports the effective promotion of key developmental domains among young learners.

5.6.5 Play-Based Pedagogy as a Driver of Development

Play-based pedagogy emerged as a dominant instructional approach across Site A, Site B and Site C. Participants consistently positioned play not as an optional activity, but as the core mechanism through which curriculum goals are achieved and holistic development is promoted. Teacher A1 emphasised that: *"Play is essential for delivering a comprehensive curriculum and supporting all elements of child development."*Similarly, Teacher B1 stated that: *"Child-directed, play-based*

learning helps children to make options about how they spend their time and how much effort they dedicate to activities."

These perspectives illustrate that teachers view play as a vehicle for autonomy, engagement and internal motivation. This finding aligns with Lunga et al. (2022), who define play-based learning as an approach that recognises play as a fundamental mode of learning in early childhood, promoting cognitive, social, emotional and physical development simultaneously. In addition, Madondo and Tsikira (2022) argue that play-based learning is deeply embedded in African educational philosophies and supports holistic growth among young learners in Zimbabwe. The following sub-section specifically examines how play-based pedagogy contributes to the development of cognitive skills and problem-solving abilities among ECD learners.

5.6.5.1 Play and Cognitive Development

Participants highlighted the role of play in strengthening critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Teacher A2 explained that: *"Encouraging children to solve puzzles or riddles not only enhances their problem-solving abilities but also boosts their self-confidence."* Teacher B2 further noted that open-ended materials stimulate exploration and experimentation. During observations at Site A, learners engaged in sorting activities, role-play scenarios and hands-on tasks that required reasoning and decision-making. At Site B, imaginative play enabled learners to explore different scenarios and negotiate roles. These activities illustrate what Moyo (2024) describe as the gradual enhancement of a child's ability to think, reason and learn through structured problem-solving experiences. Similarly, Takahashi and Araujo (2019) emphasise that incorporating problem-solving tasks into the ECD curriculum strengthens cognitive development and builds independence and resilience. The classroom observations confirmed that play provided meaningful contexts in which children could apply reasoning skills rather than passively receive information.

5.6.5.2 Play and Social-Emotional Development

Play-based pedagogy also promoted social interaction and emotional regulation. Teacher B2 explained that: *"Through play, children develop social skills such as collaboration, communication, and empathy."* Teacher C2 added that: *A familiar setting gives children a sense of security and belonging… they gain the confidence to direct their own learning.".* At Site B, the

researcher observed children working in groups, negotiating rules during games and resolving minor conflicts independently. At Site C, despite overcrowded classrooms, teachers structured cooperative activities that encouraged peer interaction. These observations align with Moyo's (2024) contention that social engagement is central to early children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Ningsih et al. (2025) further emphasise that meaningful communication between learners strengthens relationships and enhances learning outcomes. The findings suggest that play created safe environments in which learners practised communication, empathy, and self-regulation.

5.6.5.3 Play and Physical Development

Play-based activities also contributed significantly to physical development and well-being. Teacher A2 emphasised: "*Outdoor play allows children to explore their environment, develop coordination, and build strength."* At Site A and Site B, the researcher observed structured outdoor play sessions involving climbing, ball play and rhythmic movement activities. These activities supported gross motor development, while manipulative indoor tasks strengthened fine motor skills. Lunga et al. (2022) explain that early childhood physical development includes both gross and fine motor skills, which are strengthened through movement-based activities. The integration of music, dance and outdoor play across sites demonstrates alignment with this understanding. Even at Site C, where infrastructure was limited, teachers incorporated movement activities within available space, showing adaptability in promoting physical growth.

5.6.6 Contextual Adaptation of Play-Based Pedagogy

Although all three cases prioritised play-based learning, contextual realities influenced implementation. Site B, located in the CBD, had access to digital tools and interactive materials, which enriched play experiences. In contrast, Site C operated under overcrowded conditions and limited infrastructure. However, teachers at Site C remained committed to purposeful play. Teacher C2 stressed that children must feel secure enough to explore and take risks, even in constrained environments. This reflects Chikwiri & Musiyiwa (2017), who found that integrating play-based activities into the Zimbabwean ECD curriculum is essential for promoting holistic development, regardless of contextual limitations. The observations confirmed that while material resources differed, the intentional use of play as pedagogy remained consistent across sites.

Across all cases, play-based pedagogy emerged as the central mechanism through which curriculum objectives were realised and holistic development was promoted. Both participant narratives and classroom observations demonstrated that teachers intentionally used play to strengthen cognitive growth through problem-solving and exploration, social and emotional development through collaboration and communication, and physical development through structured movement activities. These findings align with Lunga et al. (2022), who emphasise that play supports both gross and fine motor development, and with Moyo (2024), who describe cognitive development as the gradual enhancement of children's thinking and reasoning abilities through meaningful engagement. Similarly, Madondo and Tsikira (2022) and Chikwiri et al. (2020) affirm that play-based learning is fundamental in Zimbabwean early childhood education because it promotes comprehensive development across domains. Despite contextual differences among the three sites, teachers consistently prioritised guided and purposeful play, demonstrating that effective curriculum implementation in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms is strongly anchored in play-based pedagogy.

5.6.7 Inclusive and Continuous Assessment Practices and Strategies

Assessment practices and strategies across all cases reflected a shift from traditional summative approaches toward more continuous, observation-based and developmentally responsive strategies. Teachers consistently described assessment as an ongoing process embedded in daily learning activities rather than a separate event at the end of instruction. Teacher A1 explained that: *"We assess learners every day through observing how they participate, how they respond to tasks and how they interact with others."* Similarly, Teacher B2 stated: *"Assessment is not just about written work; we look at how the child is developing socially, emotionally and physically."*

These responses indicate that teachers conceptualised assessment as holistic and formative. This understanding aligns with Yambi (2020), who cautions that what appears in curriculum guides may not always reflect classroom realities, particularly in assessment practices. However, the findings of this study suggest that teachers were deliberately implementing assessment strategies that reflect the developmental needs of ECD learners.

5.6.7.1 Observation-Based and Informal Assessment

Across all three sites, teachers relied heavily on classroom observation, anecdotal notes and informal questioning to monitor learner progress. During observations at Site A, the teacher recorded brief notes while learners engaged in puzzle-solving and group tasks. At Site B, I observed the teacher moving between activity stations, asking probing questions and offering feedback based on learners' responses. At Site C, despite overcrowded conditions, the teacher monitored learners' participation during song and movement activities to gauge understanding and engagement.

These practices resonate with Manzunzu and Manzunzu (2021), who advocate for observation-based assessment methods in early childhood education as they capture learners' developmental progress in authentic contexts. Furthermore, Bennet (2018) critiques traditional assessment models that separate learning from assessment and focus primarily on end-of-term results. In contrast, the practices observed in this study demonstrate the integration of learning and assessment, with feedback delivered in real time.

5.6.7.2 Alignment Between Curriculum and Assessment

Teachers also emphasised the importance of aligning assessment with curriculum objectives. Teacher C2 indicated that: *"We assess according to the learning areas in the curriculum, but we make sure it fits the level of the child."* This statement reflects awareness of developmental appropriateness in assessment design. Yun et al. (2021) argue that alignment between curriculum and assessment significantly influences pedagogical effectiveness. When assessment strategies correspond with learning objectives, teachers are better positioned to support meaningful development. Classroom observations confirmed that assessment tasks were often directly connected to lesson activities. For example, during a literacy session at Site B, the teacher assessed learners' phonemic awareness through interactive storytelling rather than through isolated written exercises. This approach demonstrates constructive alignment between instructional strategies and assessment practices.

5.6.7.3 Challenges in Assessment Implementation

Despite these strengths, some constraints affected assessment practices. At Site C, the high teacher–pupil ratio limited the teacher's ability to consistently provide individualised feedback. Although the teacher attempted to observe all learners, overcrowding reduced opportunities for detailed monitoring. This challenge reflects broader concerns raised by Dhlomo and Mawere (2020), who note that educators in Zimbabwe often struggle to fully comprehend and implement curriculum reforms, particularly when systemic constraints exist. Nyarambi (2020) also highlights the interconnected nature of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, suggesting that weaknesses in one component inevitably affect the others. Thus, while teachers demonstrated commitment to continuous assessment, contextual limitations influenced the depth and consistency of implementation.

5.6.7.4 Cross-Case Interpretation

Across the three cases, assessment emerged as a developmental and formative process rather than a purely evaluative one. Teachers relied on observation, interaction and practical activities to determine learner progress, reflecting principles consistent with holistic child development as discussed by Lalani (2020) and Lunga et al. (2022), who emphasise that effective ECD practices must support multiple developmental domains simultaneously. Although material resources and class sizes differed across contexts, teachers consistently attempted to assess learners in ways that captured cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth. This suggests that assessment in these ECD classrooms functioned as an integral component of teaching and learning rather than as a separate accountability exercise.

5.6.8 Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation

Although teachers across the three cases demonstrated commitment to implementing the ECD curriculum through child-centred and play-based approaches, contextual realities significantly shaped how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were enacted. Data from interviews and classroom observations revealed that infrastructure, teacher–pupil ratios, resource availability, and parental involvement influenced the quality and consistency of implementation. Teacher C2 openly acknowledged contextual limitations, stating: *"We try our best to follow the curriculum, but sometimes the numbers are too high and resources are not enough.*" Similarly, Teacher A2

noted: *"Some activities need materials that we do not always have, so we improvise."* These responses indicate that while teachers understood curriculum expectations, implementation depended heavily on available support structures. This finding aligns with Dhlomo and Mawere (2020), who argue that educators in Zimbabwe face challenges in comprehending and effectively applying curriculum reforms, particularly when systemic constraints persist.

5.6.8.1 Infrastructure and Resource Availability

A clear contrast emerged among the three sites in terms of physical infrastructure and material resources. Site B, located in the CBD, had classrooms that were relatively well equipped, including digital tools and structured learning corners. During observations, I noted the availability of interactive materials, printed charts and designated play stations that facilitated varied learning experiences.

In contrast, Site C operated under overcrowded conditions with limited classroom space. I observed learners sharing materials, and movement activities were confined to restricted areas. Despite these limitations, the teacher adapted activities creatively to maintain engagement. These contextual disparities align with Nyarambi (2020), who emphasises that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are interconnected variables that can be disrupted by structural challenges within Zimbabwean primary schools. When infrastructure and materials are inadequate, teachers' ability to fully operationalise curriculum intentions becomes constrained.

Furthermore, Lalani (2020) and Lunga et al. (2022) argue that holistic child development depends on the careful planning and effective implementation of developmentally appropriate curriculum practices. However, effective implementation requires adequate material and environmental support. The findings suggest that resource disparities directly influence the breadth and depth of curriculum delivery. Having considered material conditions, the next sub-theme examines how teacher–pupil ratios influenced instructional and assessment practices.

5.6.8.2 Teacher–Pupil Ratios and Workload Pressures

High teacher–pupil ratios particularly affected Site C. During classroom observations, I noted that the teacher frequently shifted attention between groups, limiting opportunities for individualised support and assessment. Although learners participated actively, the teacher's ability to provide detailed feedback appeared constrained. Teacher C2 remarked: *"It is difficult to give each child*

enough attention when the class is full." This concern resonates with Dhlomo and Mawere (2020), who identify educator readiness and systemic pressures as barriers to effective curriculum reform. When class sizes are large, formative assessment and individual scaffolding become more difficult to sustain consistently. In contrast, Sites A and B maintained relatively manageable class sizes, allowing teachers to engage more directly with learners during play and assessment activities. These differences demonstrate how structural conditions mediate the practical enactment of curriculum and pedagogy.

5.6.8.3 Parental and Community Involvement

Another contextual factor influencing implementation involved parental and community engagement. Teachers acknowledged that parental support strengthened the continuity of learning between home and school. Teacher B1 stated: *When parents support what we do at school, children improve faster."* Observations at Site B indicated occasional parental involvement in school activities, including providing materials and participating in events. This aligns with Neuman (2021), who notes that expanding primary education to include ECD responsibilities has broadened schools' roles while still requiring family collaboration. When home and school environments align, children's development becomes more consistent and reinforced. However, teachers also indicated that not all parents were equally engaged, particularly in economically disadvantaged contexts. This inconsistency affected learners' preparedness and the continuity of their learning experiences.

5.6.8.4 Cross-Case Interpretation of Contextual Influences

Across the three cases, contextual conditions served as both enabling and constraining forces in curriculum implementation. While teachers demonstrated knowledge of child-centred, play-based and continuous assessment practices, the extent of implementation varied depending on infrastructure, class size and parental involvement. These findings reflect Nyarambi's (2020) assertion that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment operate as interconnected systems influenced by broader educational structures. Furthermore, the implementation challenges identified align with Dhlomo and Mawere (2020), who caution that reform success depends not only on curriculum design but also on institutional capacity and educator support. Despite contextual disparities, teachers consistently attempted to adopt practices to maintain learner engagement and

developmental support. This adaptability suggests professional commitment, even when structural limitations restrict optimal implementation.

5.7 SUMMARY

The findings show both convergence and variation across the cases. All sites showed commitment to holistic development, play and continuous assessment. However, they differed in the resources, infrastructure and assessment documentation available to teachers. This variation confirms that curriculum effectiveness depends on classroom conditions as well as teacher knowledge.

This chapter presented and analysed the study's empirical findings across the three selected ECD sites. Guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework, the analysis moved beyond surface description to interrogate how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are enacted within real classroom contexts. Through cross-case comparison, the findings illuminated both shared practices and contextual variations that shape implementation. It demonstrated that teachers largely embrace child-centred approaches and show commitment to promoting holistic development. Their practices reflect deliberate efforts to integrate play, interaction and continuous assessment into daily classroom routines. At the same time, the analysis revealed that implementation does not occur in isolation; it is influenced by structural, institutional and socio-economic conditions that either enable or constrain practice. Differences in infrastructure, teacher–pupil ratios and parental involvement created varying degrees of opportunity for effective curriculum enactment across sites.

It is important to note that the findings suggest that while policy reform has expanded access to ECD within primary schools, sustained effectiveness depends on alignment between curriculum expectations and contextual realities. Teachers' adaptability emerged as a critical strength, as they continually adjusted strategies to meet learners' needs within available resources. However, systemic challenges continue to significantly shape the depth and consistency of implementation. In general, the chapter provides evidence-based insights into how ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment operate in practice within Zimbabwean primary schools. These findings form the foundation for the discussion chapter, where the results will be interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and broader literature, and where implications for policy, practice and future research will be drawn.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

— William Butler Yeats

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter moves beyond description by synthesising the findings across research questions, theory and literature. It explains how the findings address the study gap: the limited evidence on how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment operate together in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms.

Chapter Five presented the study's findings through a systematic analysis of data collected from the three selected ECD sites. Using thematic analysis, the chapter examined how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices were implemented, highlighting both common patterns and contextual differences across the cases. The analysis drew on interview data and classroom observations to illuminate teachers' approaches to child-centred learning, play-based pedagogy, continuous assessment, and the contextual factors influencing implementation. While the chapter focused on presenting empirical evidence grounded in participants' voices and observational insights, it laid the foundation for deeper interpretation.

Building on these findings, this chapter moves beyond presentation to critical discussion. This chapter interprets the results in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature, drawing connections between the empirical evidence and broader scholarly debates on ECD. It further synthesises the study's key insights, outlines conclusions regarding the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms, and advances practical and policy-oriented recommendations to strengthen implementation.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section provides a summary of the research findings from the qualitative study investigating the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in ECD teaching in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The summaries are presented to answer the research questions outlined in section 1.4. Chapter 5 examined three case sites in Kadoma, and the results are discussed in the current

chapter. The discussion of the results is based on the literature review (presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 5) and the theoretical framework.

At the beginning, findings specified that holistic development emerged as a central theme across all sites. Educators stressed the importance of addressing physical, cognitive, emotional and social development within their curricula, resonating with best practices in child-centred education. For instance, teachers at Site A linked activities with developmental milestones and engaged learners through hands-on experiences that nurtured critical thinking and creativity. Similarly, Site B showed a commitment to holistic approaches by integrating emotional intellect alongside academic skills, thereby developing a more rounded educational experience. However, the challenges faced at Site C, where overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources hindered personalised instruction, raised concerns about the extent to which holistic development could be effectively nurtured in resource-constrained settings.

In terms of curriculum effectiveness, a common thread across all sites was the influence of various educational directives such as Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 and the Nziramasanga Commission. These documents encouraged play-based learning and culturally relevant instruction, which educators applied to varying degrees. Sites A and B successfully employed local cultural elements into their curricula through music, storytelling, and art, enriching the learning experience and making it more appropriate for young learners. In contrast, the severe resource limitations at Site C limited the implementation of such culturally specific strategies, leading to a predominantly rote-learning approach unfavorable to creativity and critical thinking.

Pedagogical approaches used across the case sites also revealed contrasting outcomes. Sites A and B positively implemented interactive, play-based learning strategies that stimulated exploration and discovery. The use of technology and modern teaching aids at Site B evidently enhanced learner engagement, demonstrating that availability of resources within an urban setting can certainly influence pedagogical practices. In contrast, Site C's dual-classroom structure necessitated traditional methods due to space limitations, which poorly affected the learning environment. The resulting "hot seating" provisions compromised the quality of interaction between teachers and students, limiting effective pedagogical delivery.

Assessment practices varied significantly across the sites, with formative assessments being favored in more resource-equipped settings. At Sites A and B, continuous assessment procedures enabled teachers to adjust their instructional strategies based on individual children's progress, ensuring that diverse needs were effectively met. This approach contrasted sharply with Site C, where overcrowded conditions made comprehensive assessments challenging. Teachers often face difficulties in capturing accurate reflections of children's development amidst systemic limitations, putting certain groups of children at risk of being overlooked in their educational needs.

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of holistic development, cultural relevance, play-based learning, inclusive education, and active parent and community involvement in early childhood education (ECD) in Zimbabwe. Through thematic analysis, important insights emerged from participants across three distinct cases, stressing that integrating a holistic approach not only nurtures cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also enriches the learning experiences of young learners. Teachers highlighted the significance of play-based learning as a vehicle for fostering creativity, critical thinking and social skills. Such pedagogical strategies, together with culturally relevant content that reflects local traditions, enhance engagement and facilitate a more meaningful educational journey for ECD students. Notably, even in resource-constrained environments, educators demonstrated resilience and innovation in maintaining effective teaching practices, further illustrating the potential for impactful learning even amidst challenges.

The importance of inclusive educational practices and collaboration with parents and community stakeholders emerged as pivotal in promoting the growth of key developmental aspects among ECD learners. Participants recognised the need to adapt pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of children, ensuring equitable access to quality education. The integration of culturally sensitive formative assessment methods allows for a profound understanding of each child's progress and nurtures a supportive learning atmosphere where all learners feel valued. This study argues that the interplay of theoretical foundations, practical teaching strategies, and community engagement provides a strong framework for enhancing early childhood education in Zimbabwe, and that continued support and resources are essential to sustain these promising educational practices.

6.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The major findings of the research, drawn from the literature review, are presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 3 analysed three theories that underpin the study: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, and Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development. The theories shed light on the development of key aspects of child development and place a sense of responsibility on society to educate young children on how to live and survive in their cultural environments.

6.3.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Critical synthesis: The findings support Vygotsky's view that learning occurs through interaction and scaffolding. However, the study also shows that large classes and limited resources weaken teachers' ability to scaffold each learner effectively. This means that sociocultural mediation depends not only on teacher intention but also on classroom conditions.

The findings demonstrate strong theoretical coherence with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. The emphasis on collaborative play in section 5.6.3, guided instruction, observation-based assessment, and contextual awareness reflects the central assumption of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory that learning is socially constructed and mediated through interaction. Teachers across the three cases functioned as facilitators who scaffolded learners' development within structured social environments. Although contextual constraints mentioned in section 5.6.4.3 influenced implementation, the study's underlying pedagogical orientation reflects core Vygotskian principles of social mediation, cultural influence, and developmental progression within the ZPD.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also highlights the influence of cultural and environmental contexts on learning. Vasileva (2019) notes that children's values, beliefs and learning processes are shaped by their social environments. The findings of this study reveal that infrastructure, teacher–pupil ratios and parental involvement significantly influenced curriculum implementation. Nyarambi (2020) argues that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment operate as interconnected variables within broader institutional contexts. Similarly, Dhlomo and Mawere (2020) highlight that systemic challenges can affect educators' ability to implement reforms effectively. These contextual factors, identified across the three sites, illustrate how learning does not occur in

isolation but within specific socio-economic and institutional conditions, which is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural lens.

Neuman (2021) further observes that the expansion of ECD within primary schools has extended institutional responsibilities, thereby increasing the importance of collaboration between schools and families. Teachers' acknowledgment of parental involvement as a supportive factor reflects Vygotsky's position that development is socially situated and culturally embedded. While Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural mediation in learning, the discussion now shifts to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, which foregrounds the child's active construction of knowledge through developmental stages and direct engagement with the environment.

6.3.2 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Critical synthesis: The findings support Piaget's emphasis on hands-on learning because teachers used play, concrete materials and activity-based tasks. However, the findings also show that developmental appropriateness becomes difficult when teachers lack materials and must improvise continuously. Resource availability therefore moderates the link between cognitive theory and classroom practice.

In Section 5.6.3, the theme of play-based pedagogy, particularly its role in cognitive development, aligns closely with Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory. Piaget (1972) posits that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their social and physical environments. In this study, classroom observations across the three sites revealed that learners engaged in counting games, puzzle-solving, storytelling, sorting activities, and role-play. These activities required children to manipulate objects, explore relationships and make meaning through direct experience, reflecting Piaget's view that knowledge is not transmitted but constructed.

Roostin (2018) emphasises that play stimulates the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes at the ECD level, while Adegbite (2025) reinforces the idea that children build understanding through active engagement with their surroundings. These perspectives support the findings of this study, where teachers deliberately incorporated structured and guided play to promote reasoning and problem-solving. Otto et al. (2019) further explain that during play, children assimilate new experiences into existing cognitive structures, adapting their understanding as they encounter new

situations. This was evident in section 5.6.3.3 when learners used concrete materials to represent real-life situations, demonstrating the symbolic thinking characteristic of the pre-operational stage described by Piaget.

The emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices within the observed classrooms also reflects Piaget's stage theory. McLeod (2024) identifies the pre-operational stage (2–7 years) as a critical period marked by symbolic thought and language development, which corresponds with the age group of ECD learners in this study. Teachers' reliance on concrete materials and experiential learning aligns with Otto et al. (2019), who argue that educators must focus on what children at each developmental stage can meaningfully understand. By designing activities that matched learners' cognitive readiness, teachers supported intellectual growth in ways consistent with Piagetian principles.

Therefore, the study's findings demonstrate that play-based pedagogy in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms aligns with the core assumptions of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, particularly the belief that young children learn best through active exploration, the manipulation of materials, and meaningful play experiences. Having examined cognitive growth through Piaget's developmental lens, the discussion now turns to Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, which broadens the focus to include the social and emotional dimensions that shape children's overall development.

6.3.3 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

Critical synthesis: The findings support Erikson's emphasis on autonomy, initiative and confidence. Teachers encouraged participation and social interaction. Yet overcrowded classrooms sometimes reduced opportunities for individual attention. Psychosocial support therefore requires manageable class sizes, emotionally safe routines and teacher capacity to notice individual learners.

The findings of this study resonate with Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development by demonstrating that effective ECD practice extends beyond academic instruction to include the nurturing of social confidence, emotional security and a sense of competence. Through play-based pedagogy, holistic assessment and supportive classroom environments, teachers contributed to learners' resolution of early psychosocial stages. Although contextual challenges influenced

implementation, the observed practices indicate that Zimbabwean ECD classrooms function as important spaces for fostering initiative, autonomy and early industry, which are central to healthy psychosocial development.

The emphasis on play-based pedagogy in section 5.6.3 across the three cases reflects Erikson's (1963) assertion that young children develop initiative, autonomy and confidence through active engagement with their environment. During classroom observations, learners participated in role play, collaborative games, storytelling and creative expression. These activities allowed children to make choices, take responsibility for tasks and interact meaningfully with peers. McLeod (2018) explains that during the initiative versus guilt stage, children develop a sense of purpose when they are encouraged to explore and experiment within supportive environments. Teachers in this study consistently provided structured yet flexible opportunities for exploration. For example, learners were encouraged to lead songs, organise group activities and contribute ideas during lessons. Such practices fostered confidence and self-belief rather than fear of failure.

Adding to that, Cherry (2024) emphasises that children require age-appropriate challenges that promote competence and mastery. Observational data revealed that teachers balanced guidance with independence, allowing learners to attempt tasks while offering support when necessary. This balance reflects Erikson's view that successful resolution of psychosocial crises leads to the development of virtues such as initiative and industry. In section 5.6.4, the study's findings on assessment practices also align with Erikson's psychosocial perspective. Teachers assessed learners not only on academic performance but also on social interaction, emotional regulation and participation. As one teacher indicated, assessment focused on "how the child is developing socially, emotionally and physically." This holistic orientation corresponds with Erikson's (1963) emphasis on the integration of emotional, social and cognitive development.

Yambi (2020) cautions against assessment practices that narrowly prioritise cognitive outcomes at the expense of broader developmental domains. In contrast, teachers in this study incorporated observation-based assessments that captured learners' behaviour, cooperation and confidence. Manzunzu and Manzunzu (2021) support the use of observation and portfolio-based approaches to measure social-emotional growth in early childhood contexts. Such practices reflect Erikson's position that psychosocial development should be nurtured and monitored alongside academic learning. When integrating assessment within daily classroom interactions, teachers created

environments where learners' emotional well-being and social competence were valued as indicators of growth.

Erikson's theory further emphasises the importance of supportive social environments in shaping identity and self-concept. McLeod (2018) notes that children develop trust, autonomy and competence when they experience stability and positive relationships. The findings of this study in section 5.6.5 reveal that contextual factors, such as infrastructure, teacher–pupil ratios, and parental involvement, significantly influenced learners' experiences. Where classrooms were overcrowded, teachers found it difficult to provide individual attention, which could affect learners' sense of competence. Dhlomo and Mawere (2020) highlight that systemic challenges in Zimbabwean schools can hinder effective curriculum implementation. From an Eriksonian perspective, such constraints may also limit learners' opportunities to experience consistent encouragement and affirmation.

Where teachers created nurturing and inclusive environments, learners demonstrated active participation and positive peer interaction. Neuman (2021) observes that the expansion of ECD within primary schools increases the need for collaboration between schools and families. This aligns with Erikson's understanding that children's psychosocial development occurs within interconnected social systems. Beyond the theoretical interpretations, the discussion now situates the findings within the broader body of reviewed literature to examine areas of convergence, divergence and emerging insights.

6.4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF REVIEWED LITERATURE

The findings align with and expand upon the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly concerning holistic development, cultural relevance, play-based learning, inclusive education and assessment practices.

6.4.1 Holistic Development in ECD

Comparative synthesis: Unlike studies from well-resourced contexts that present holistic development as mainly a pedagogical issue, this study shows that in Zimbabwean ECD classrooms

holistic development is also a resource and infrastructure issue. Teachers may understand holistic learning, but their ability to implement it depends on class size, materials and school support.

The importance of holistic development in early childhood education is one of the key findings in Chapter Section 5.6.1.1. Teachers across all case sites (A, B, and C) stressed that effective ECD programmes should promote cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth. This was observed in Site A, where a composed teacher-student ratio allowed personalised attention, and in Site B, where teachers employ hands-on activities to engage young learners. However, at Site C, limited resources and overcrowding hindered the implementation of a fully holistic approach. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which was discussed in Section 2.3. The theory advises that children's development is influenced by several interacting systems, including family, school and community (Pangeti et al, 2023). Additionally, Van der Werf et al. (2018) in the Netherlands and Atakpo. (2019) in Nigeria discovered that early childhood education programmes that incorporate holistic development principles yield better learning outcomes. These studies are in line with the argument that a well-structured ECD curriculum should encompass all domains of child development, a concept reflected in the Zimbabwean context.

6.4.2 Cultural Relevance in ECD Curriculum

The role of cultural relevance in influencing ECD curricula is another significant theme emerging from Section 5.6.1.2. At all sites, teachers integrated elements of local culture, such as music, storytelling, dance and art, into their learning activities to make learning more meaningful and engaging. At Site A, for example, educators emphasised that cultural relevance improves cognitive and social development by letting children connect their learning experiences to their lived realities. Similarly, in Site B, teachers stressed the importance of using culturally appropriate assessment methods to record learners' progress effectively. These findings align with Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3), where Chikodzi and Mahachi (2019) emphasise the importance of having a culturally responsive ECD curriculum in Zimbabwe. Additionally, Samuels (2018) argues that culturally relevant education nurtures inclusivity and ensures that learners from diverse backgrounds feel involved in the learning process. The emphasis on cultural relevance also aligns with Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory, which states that learning is socially and culturally constructed (Caingcoy, 2023).

6.4.3 Play-Based Learning as a Pedagogical Approach

Across all three cases, play-based learning emerged as an important approach as discussed in Section 5.6.1.3. Teachers at Sites A and B effectively involved play into their teaching strategies, encouraging creativity, problem-solving and social skills among children. However, at Site C, limited space and resources hindered the full implementation of play-based learning. This finding is strongly supported by the literature in Section 2.2.3, where Madondo and Tsikira (2021) in Zimbabwe and Lunga et al (2024) in South Africa initiated that play-based learning is important for cognitive and social-emotional development. Madondo and Tsikira (2021) also emphasise that play-based methods support the development of language and motor skills, reinforcing the necessity of structured play in ECD classrooms. The findings from the current study stipulate that play-based learning remains a key pedagogical tool in Zimbabwe's ECD sector, although infrastructural limitations hindered its full realisation.

6.4.4 Inclusive Education and Access to Learning

Inclusive education was pointed out as a crucial aspect of ECD in Section 5.6.1.4, with teachers across all case sites attempt to provide equal learning opportunities. At Site A, differentiated instruction techniques were used to cater for diverse learning needs, while Site B successfully applied collaborative learning strategies. Site C, however, faced challenges in promoting inclusive education due to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate infrastructure. These findings are aligning with the literature reviewed in Section 2.2.4, where Chinhara and Kuyayama (2024) emphasise the significance of inclusive education policies in Zimbabwe. The Education Amendment Act (2015), discussed in Section 2.4.1, dictates equal access to quality ECD education, stressing the need for resource allocation to support inclusive learning environments. The study findings further align with the SCT (Munyanyi & Muzvidziwa, 2019), which suggests that learning is a social process that need active engagement and collaboration.

6.4.5 Assessment Practices in ECD

The findings in Section 5.6.1.5 disclose that assessment practices in ECD classrooms differ across different contexts. Teachers at Site A and B employed formative assessments, such as continuous observation and documentation of children's progress. In contrast, at Site C, large class sizes and limited teacher capacity made it hard to conduct effective assessments. This finding is strengthened

by the literature in Section 2.2.1, where Van der Werf et al. (2018) in Europe and Atakpo (2024) in Nigeria state that those traditional summative assessments fail to capture the full range of early childhood learning. Instead, child-centred assessment methods, such as portfolios and observational techniques, are suggested for evaluating ECD learners. Additionally, Madondo and Tsikira (2021) identified inconsistencies between Zimbabwe's policy guidelines and actual assessment practices, reinforcing the importance for improved assessment frameworks.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

Across the conclusions, one argument is clear: the curriculum is theoretically sound and developmentally appropriate, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of enactment. Teachers mediate the curriculum through pedagogy and assessment, while school conditions either support or constrain this mediation.

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the study by revisiting its central aim and reflecting on how the research questions were addressed through empirical findings and subsequent discussion. The main aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province. Through a qualitative multiple case study approach, the study explored how these components operate in practice and the extent to which they promote the growth of key developmental domains among ECD learners.

Drawing on evidence generated from semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations across three selected sites, the study responded directly to the research questions by examining (1) the nature of the curriculum content implemented in ECD classrooms, (2) the pedagogical approaches employed by teachers, (3) the assessment strategies used to monitor learner development, and (4) the contextual factors influencing implementation. The thematic findings and theoretical interpretation collectively provide a coherent account of how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment intersect within real classroom environments.

The conclusions that follow synthesise these insights, highlighting the study's key contributions and clarifying how the research aim has been answered. The subsequent sections provides a detailed responses to each of these research questions, starting with the sub-research questions:

6.5.1 What theoretical perspectives inform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province?

The findings of this study demonstrate that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in the selected ECD classrooms are implicitly and, at times, explicitly informed by well-established developmental theories. Although teachers did not always refer directly to theoretical constructs in their everyday language, their classroom practices reflected principles associated with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development.

The emphasis on collaborative learning, guided participation and continuous observation-based assessment indicates alignment with Vygotskian principles of social mediation and scaffolded learning. At the same time, the consistent use of play, concrete materials and developmentally appropriate tasks reflects Piagetian assumptions about active knowledge construction and stage-related cognitive growth. Furthermore, the prioritisation of holistic development, including emotional security, confidence-building and social interaction, resonates with Erikson's view that early childhood education must nurture psychosocial well-being alongside intellectual development.

Most importantly, this study reveals that these theoretical perspectives are not applied in isolation. Rather, they operate in an integrated manner within classroom practice, collectively shaping how teachers interpret curriculum objectives, design learning experiences and monitor learner progress. The interaction between these theoretical foundations and contextual realities further suggests that theory becomes meaningful when translated into adaptive, context-sensitive practice. Therefore, the research question is answered by establishing that ECD implementation in Mashonaland West Province is underpinned by a blended theoretical orientation that supports holistic child development through socially mediated, cognitively appropriate and emotionally responsive educational practices.

6.5.2 How do assessment strategies and practices support curriculum implementation and development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province?

The findings of this study indicate that assessment strategies in the selected ECD classrooms function primarily as supportive and developmental tools rather than as mechanisms for grading or ranking learners. Teachers largely employed continuous, observation-based and activity-embedded assessment approaches, which enabled them to monitor learners' progress within authentic learning situations. Through daily interaction, questioning and informal documentation, teachers gathered evidence of cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, thereby ensuring that assessment remained aligned with the holistic intentions of the ECD curriculum.

Assessment practices also supported curriculum implementation by reinforcing instructional goals. Because assessment occurred during play-based and interactive activities, teachers were able to adjust teaching strategies in response to learners' emerging needs. This responsiveness strengthened the connection between curriculum objectives and classroom practice. In this way, assessment acted as a feedback mechanism that informed pedagogical decisions and enhanced the relevance of learning experiences. In addition, the study reveals that assessment contributed to learner development by promoting participation, confidence and gradual mastery of skills. Rather than focusing solely on completed outcomes, teachers paid attention to developmental progress, which encouraged inclusive and supportive learning environments. However, contextual constraints such as large class sizes occasionally limit the depth of individualised assessment.

Against this background, this study concludes that assessment strategies in Mashonaland West Province meaningfully support curriculum implementation when they are continuous, developmentally responsive and integrated within daily teaching practices. These approaches enhance both instructional coherence and the holistic development of ECD learners.

6.5.3 What policies and procedures guide the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province?

This study identifies several policies and procedures that guide the curriculum and pedagogy of ECD education in Zimbabwean primary schools, concentrating on the government's Education Policy and early childhood education frameworks. The findings indicate that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in the selected ECD classrooms are primarily guided by the national

policy framework introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) following the 2015 curriculum reform. The mandatory inclusion of ECD A and B within primary schools provides the structural foundation upon which curriculum content, pedagogical expectations and assessment procedures are based. Teachers consistently referred to curriculum documents, learning areas and national guidelines when planning lessons and assessing learners, demonstrating alignment with formal policy directives.

In terms of pedagogy, policy expectations promoting learner-centred, play-based and developmentally appropriate practices were reflected in classroom implementation. Teachers' use of interactive methods, structured play and continuous monitoring suggests adherence to procedural guidelines that emphasise holistic child development rather than purely academic outcomes. Assessment procedures were similarly shaped by policy directives encouraging continuous assessment in place of high-stakes summative evaluation at the ECD level.

However, the study also reveals that while policy frameworks provide clear direction, their implementation is mediated by contextual realities such as resource availability, infrastructure and teacher capacity. This suggests that policy functions as a guiding structure rather than a rigid prescription, requiring professional interpretation at the classroom level. On this note, the researcher concludes that national curriculum reform policies and procedural guidelines serve as the principal drivers of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Mashonaland West Province, while teachers operationalise these directives within their specific school contexts to promote holistic development among ECD learners.

6.5.4 What challenges affect the effective implementation of ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in Mashonaland West Province?

The researcher concludes that although teachers demonstrate commitment to child-centred and developmentally appropriate practices, several structural and contextual challenges limit the full realisation of ECD curriculum intentions in Mashonaland West Province. The most significant constraints include high teacher–learner ratios, limited instructional resources, inadequate infrastructure and uneven parental involvement. These factors directly influence the depth, consistency and individualisation of pedagogical and assessment practices.

Large class sizes, particularly in some sites, reduced opportunities for personalised scaffolding and detailed observation-based assessment. While teachers attempted to continuously monitor learners, overcrowding constrained the level of individual attention needed for optimal early childhood development. Similarly, shortages of teaching and learning materials restricted the range of experiential and play-based activities that could be implemented effectively. In such contexts, teachers often rely on improvisation, which, although commendable, does not fully substitute for adequate resources. To add to that, variations in parental engagement affected continuity between home and school learning environments. Where collaboration was strong, learners appeared to benefit from reinforced developmental support. In less supportive contexts, teachers carried a greater responsibility for addressing learners' holistic needs within the classroom alone.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptability and professional dedication in their efforts to align their practices with curriculum expectations. However, this study concludes that the sustainable and equitable implementation of ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment requires systemic support, including improved infrastructure, manageable class sizes, adequate resources, and strengthened community partnerships. Without addressing these contextual constraints, the effectiveness of ECD provision remains uneven across schools.

6.5.5 What strategies can be adopted to enhance the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment strategies in the ECD development in Mashonaland West Province?

From the literature and the findings, the researcher found that enhancing the effectiveness of the ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Mashonaland West Province requires a combination of systemic, institutional, and classroom-level strategies. First, strengthening teacher professional development is essential. Continuous capacity-building initiatives should focus on deepening teachers' understanding of child-centred pedagogy, play-based learning, and formative assessment practices. Ongoing training would enable teachers to align curriculum objectives more effectively with developmentally appropriate instructional strategies.

Second, improving resource allocation and infrastructure is critical. Adequate teaching and learning materials, safe and stimulating classroom environments, and manageable teacher–pupil ratios would create conditions that allow play-based and interactive approaches to flourish.

Investment in these areas would directly support holistic child development and consistent curriculum implementation. Third, reinforcing continuous and observation-based assessment practices can further enhance curriculum delivery. Embedding assessment within daily activities ensures that teaching remains responsive to learners' developmental needs. Structured documentation tools and moderated assessment guidelines could strengthen consistency and reliability across schools.

Fourth, stronger collaboration between schools, parents and communities should be prioritised. When families understand and support curriculum goals, learners benefit from reinforced developmental experiences beyond the classroom. Community partnerships can also help mobilise resources and sustain programme quality. Finally, effective monitoring and policy support from educational authorities are necessary to ensure that reforms are implemented in practice. Regular supervision, mentorship and feedback mechanisms can help bridge the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities. Given this background, this study concludes that improving ECD effectiveness requires coordinated action at multiple levels, combining teacher empowerment, resource support, community engagement and sustained policy commitment to promote equitable and holistic development for all ECD learners.

6.5.6 How effective are the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province?

This is the main research question of this study, and the researcher addressed it by systematically addressing each sub-research question. The researcher examined the theoretical perspectives informing ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment; analysed the policies and procedures guiding implementation; explored how assessment practices support learner development; and identified the contextual challenges affecting effectiveness. By integrating these findings, the researcher established a clear understanding of how effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies are in promoting the development of ECD learners in Mashonaland West Province. The findings suggest that ECD provision in the province has a strong pedagogical foundation but requires coordinated, systemic reinforcement to achieve equitable, consistently high developmental outcomes for all learners.

The conclusions indicate that although teachers implement child-centred and developmentally appropriate practices, contextual and systemic factors influence the level of effectiveness achieved in classrooms. On the basis of this comprehensive analysis, the researcher now proposes recommendations to strengthen curriculum implementation, improve pedagogical practice, enhance assessment strategies, and address contextual limitations to promote more effective and equitable ECD development.

In light of these conclusions, the following section outlines practical, policy-oriented recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in ECD classrooms.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Three cross-cutting implications emerge from the findings. First, teacher capacity limitations require sustained professional development rather than one-off workshops. Second, infrastructure deficits show that curriculum reform without material investment remains weak. Third, the limited integration of digital literacy reveals an emerging gap in ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The recommendations should therefore be implemented as coordinated actions rather than isolated interventions.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of ECD curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Zimbabwean primary schools, particularly in Mashonaland West Province. These recommendations are meant to address the challenges identified and promoting the holistic development of ECD learners.

6.6.1 Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Development

It is essential to strengthen teacher training and professional development programmes to improve the quality of ECD education. Pre-service and in-service training should support the integration of theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's SCT, Piaget's cognitive theory, and Erikson's psychosocial theory into teaching practices. Teachers need practical strategies for implementing play-based learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and inclusive education. Continuous professional development (CPD) programmes, including regular workshops and seminars, should

be established to keep teachers updated on the latest research and best practices. Peer learning and collaboration amongst teachers should also be encouraged to share innovative teaching strategies and solutions to common challenges. These prospectuses must appraise teachers on new trends and better practices in the teaching and assessment of ECD learners. Student teachers ought also to be proficient on thoughtful skills to permit them to replicate on their teaching to advance their practice in the ECD classroom.

6.6.2 Improving Curriculum Design and Implementation

To ensure it is culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate, the ECD curriculum should be redesigned. Local cultural elements, such as storytelling, music, dance, and art, should be incorporated in the teaching and learning process to make learning more meaningful and engaging for learners. Play-based learning should be opted for as a central pedagogical approach, promoting creativity, problem-solving, and social skills. Teachers should be provided with guidelines and resources to effectively integrate play into daily classroom activities. Additionally, the curriculum should address all domains of child development cognitive, emotional, social, and physical through combined and developmentally appropriate activities. Activities that facilitate language and literacy skills, emotional intelligence, and physical coordination should be encompassed to ensure holistic development.

6.6.3 Enhancing Assessment Practices

In ECD, assessment practices should shift from traditional summative methods to formative approaches such as authentic assessment that monitor children's progress comprehensively. Continuous observation, portfolios, and checklists should be used to assess learners' development. Teachers should be equipped on how to use assessment data to adapt instruction to individual learners' needs. Standardised assessment tools that work well with the ECD curriculum and developmental milestones should be established and disseminated. These tools should be culturally sensitive and inclusive, addressing the diverse needs of learners. Parental involvement in the assessment process should be encouraged through consistent updates on children's progress and the incorporation of parental feedback into learning plans. Parent-teacher conferences and home visits can promote collaboration and support children's development.

6.6.4 Addressing Resource and Infrastructure Challenges

Resource shortages, must be addressed to improve the quality of ECD education, particularly in rural and underserved areas. To provide schools with essential materials, such as learning aids, play equipment, and classroom furniture, increased funding should be allocated to ECD programmes. Policies must be implemented to reduce overcrowding in ECD classrooms, ensuring that teachers can provide individualised attention to each child. To maintain manageable teacher-student ratios additional teachers and support staff should be employed. Infrastructure should be improved to accommodate play-based learning and inclusive education, including construction of safe and accessible play areas. Classrooms should be furnished with adequate lighting, ventilation, and space for engaging activities.

6.6.5 Promoting Inclusive Education

To ensure that all children, including those with disabilities or special needs, have access to quality ECD education, inclusive education practices should be implemented. Teachers should be competent enough to use differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and assistive technologies to support learners with diverse needs. Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) should be established for children with disabilities or special needs. Collaboration with parents, community members, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be reinforced to support inclusive education initiatives. To make sure that programmes are responsive to local needs, stakeholders should take part in curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

6.6.6 Strengthening Policy Implementation

Educational policies governing ECD should be reviewed to ensure they are reflective of the different contexts in which children learn. There should be consistent enforcement of existing policies, such as Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004, Circular 12 of 2005, and Zimbabwe Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 across all schools. Compliance with these policies should be supervised, and support to schools facing challenges in implementation should be provided. Policymakers should engage with educators and community members to indicate barriers to effective implementation and come up with strategies to overcome them. A unified ECD policy framework that encompass curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment guidelines should be developed, aligned

with universal best practices. This framework should contain clear provisions for teacher training, resource allocation, and inclusive education.

6.6.7 Encouraging Research and Innovation

To evaluate the effectiveness of ECD programmes in Zimbabwe, further research should be conducted, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Innovative approaches to addressing resource constrictions and improving learning outcomes should be examined. To inform policy decisions and curriculum revisions, research findings should be used ensuring that ECD programmes are anchored in evidence-based practices. Successful case studies and best practices should be distributed to stimulate innovation and improvement across schools.

6.7 SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FROM THE STUDY

The proposed framework responds directly to the study phenomenon by linking digital literacy to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. At curriculum level, digital tools can broaden access to stories, songs, images and culturally relevant content. At pedagogy level, they can support guided play, language development and collaborative learning. At assessment level, they can help teachers document observations, store portfolios and track developmental progress over time.

Based on the research findings, theoretical underpinnings, and key themes identified in the study, the following framework is proposed to improve ECD instruction in Zimbabwe. This framework is rooted in the research questions presented in Section 1.3, and the theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky's SCT, Piaget's cognitive theory, and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

6.7.1 Suggested Framework: Digital Literacy and Technology-Enhanced Learning Framework

This suggested framework introduces the integration of digital literacy and technology-enhanced learning as a key component of ECD in Zimbabwe. Digitalisation is one of the crucial forces behind current changes in the world of education. The OECD (2023) states that education systems, on the one hand, are reforming their curriculum frameworks as a way to respond to the challenges of a digitalised and globalised world. Meanwhile, digital technologies are increasingly permeating teaching and learning procedures. These changes can develop the skills of today's young learners as they progress in their education, including their time in ECD. While the existing frameworks

address pedagogy, inclusivity, assessment, cultural relevance, and resource resilience, they do not clearly explore the role of digital tools and digital literacy in early learning. This framework according to Arrnot and Gillen (2018) fills that gap by aligning with global trends in education and addressing a growing need in the 21st-century learning environment. The researchers cited immediately above alludes that digital literacy promotes the holistic development of ECD learners.

6.7.1.1 Rationale and theoretical basis

Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this framework emphasises that tools (including digital ones) are mediators of learning and development. Technology, according to Trimble (2025) when used appropriately, becomes an influential scaffold that supports children's interaction, exploration, and expression. Trimble (2025) adds that incorporating digital literacy as an approach for enhancing educational opportunities for ECD learners can create a more equitable educational landscape that prepares young learners for future accomplishment in a progressively multifaceted world. Piaget's cognitive theory supports this integration by proposing that young learners are active mediators in constructing knowledge through interactive experiences. Erikson's theory reinforces the notion that engagement with technology can promote a sense of competence and initiative when presented in a developmentally appropriate way.

6.7.1.2 Core components

- Digital Literacy in Early Years: Introducing basic digital navigation skills through age-appropriate tools and software.
- Technology-Supported Pedagogy: Using audio-visual aids, educational apps, and storytelling platforms to enhance engagement and understanding.
- Equity in Digital Access: Promoting access through solar-powered devices, offline-compatible apps, and digital resource hubs.
- Digital Assessment Tools: Using tools like digital portfolios, photo/video documentation, and learner tracking apps for authentic, formative assessment.
- Teacher Digital Capacity Building: Guaranteeing teachers are equipped in digital pedagogy, content creation, and safe technology use.

- Safe Digital Practices: Instructing basic digital citizenship, privacy, empathy, and screen-time balance to both learners and caregivers.

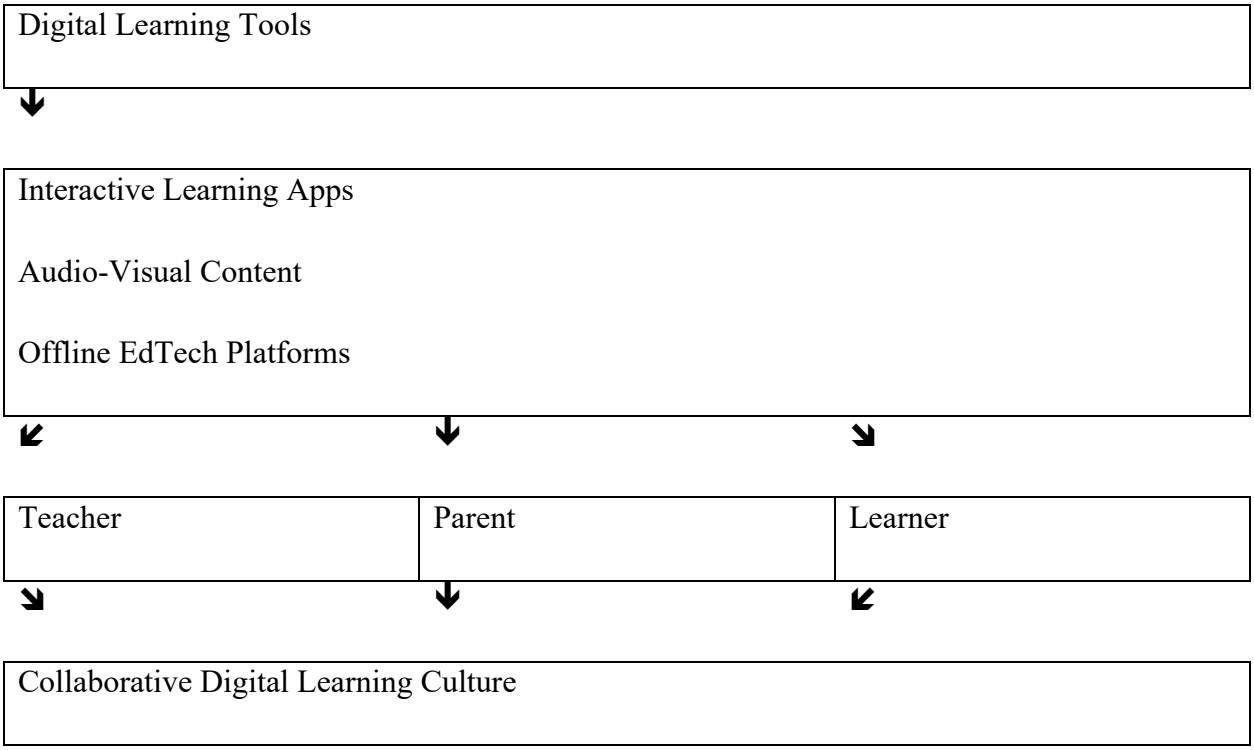


Figure 6.1: Digital Literacy and Technology-Enhanced Learning Framework

Figure 6.1 shows the interchange between tools (digital content and platforms), stakeholders (teachers, parents, learners), and outcomes (a collaborative digital learning culture). This frameworkdemonstrates the integration of digital learning tools and the parts of different stakeholders, teachers, parents, and learners in creating a collaborative digital learning environment. The emphasis is on how several technological tools and platforms support the learning process through a shared culture of digital literacy.

6.7.2 Details of the Components of the Model

6.7.2.1 Digital learning tools

Interactive learning applications are gradually being adopted in education as they encourage active engagement through features such as quiz, simulations, and games. These tools accommodate diverse learning styles and support personalised learning experiences tailored to individual students' needs. Equally, the use of audio-visual content, including videos, animations, and

podcasts, enhances the teaching and learning process by making it more engaging and accessible. Such resources are mainly beneficial for visual and auditory learners, as they simplify the understanding of complex concepts. In addition, offline educational technology (EdTech) platforms, which function without constant internet connectivity through downloaded content, offline applications, or hardware-based solutions, provide crucial access to quality education in regions where internet connectivity is limited.

6.7.2.2 Stakeholders

The successful integration of digital tools in education depends on the active involvement of key stakeholders, namely teachers, parents, and learners. Teachers play a pivotal role by facilitating learning through the incorporation of digital resources into the curriculum, guiding students in the development of digital literacy, and monitoring their progress. Parents also contribute meaningfully by supporting learners at home, encouraging the proper use of digital tools, ensuring a safe online environment, and work together with teachers to reinforce learning objectives. As the primary users of digital technologies, learners engage with interactive applications, multimedia content, and offline platforms to gain knowledge and develop important skills. Together, these roles form a collaborative ecosystem that boosts the effectiveness of digital learning.

6.7.2.3 Collaborative digital learning culture

At the core of the model is the emphasis on creating a cohesive environment in which learners, teachers and parents work together to promote effective digital literacy. This culture nurtures shared responsibility, encourages open communication, and enhances continuous learning about digital tools and best practices. By establishing such an environment, the model ensures that all stakeholders contribute meaningfully to the development of learners' digital competencies.

6.7.2.4 Interactions and flow

The arrows and connections within the model highlight a dynamic and interrelated system in which all stakeholders actively contribute. Digital tools serve as a bridge, enabling seamless interaction among teachers, parents, and learners and ensuring cooperation is both effective and meaningful. Furthermore, the collaborative culture fostered by the model reinforces the idea that digital literacy

extends beyond mere technology use. It also includes the responsible, ethical, and effective application of digital tools to enhance both teaching and learning.

6.7.2.5 Purpose

The model's intention is to highlight that successful technology-enhanced learning depends on the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders and the appropriate use of diverse digital tools. It emphasises the importance of promoting a shared digital culture to maximise learning outcomes and prepare learners for a digital world.

6.7.3 Significance of the Framework

This suggested framework redesigns early childhood learning environments in Zimbabwe by considering low-cost, scalable digital solutions that can support curriculum implementation, personalised learning, and formative assessment, even in rural or resource-limited settings. It encourages the MoPSE and other stakeholders to consider digital inclusion as an important element of educational equity.

6.8 CONTRIBUTION

Limitations and reflexivity: The study was limited by its small sample, its focus on three schools and its reliance on short classroom observations. The researcher's professional background in Zimbabwean education supported contextual understanding but also required reflexivity to avoid over-identifying with teachers' experiences. The researcher addressed this through triangulation, member checking and evidence-based interpretation.

Future research should examine ECD curriculum, pedagogy and assessment across more provinces, include parents and school leaders, and study how digital tools can support low-resource ECD classrooms. Longitudinal research should also follow ECD learners into Grade 1 to assess how classroom practices influence school readiness.

This study significantly contributes to the field of ECD in Zimbabwe by contributing a research-based analysis of current assessment practices and suggesting a comprehensive framework to enhance them. The findings highlight critical gaps in how young children's development is observed and evaluated, particularly stressing the need for more formative, culturally relevant, and

inclusive assessment strategies. One of the main contributions of this study is the development of a well-organised yet adaptable framework that supports teachers in implementing continuous and authentic assessment techniques. Rooted in sociocultural and cognitive development theories, the framework gives a practical guide for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to improve how children's progress is assessed, documented, and used to inform instructional decisions. This framework emphasises teacher capacity-building, parental involvement, data-informed teaching adjustments, and the use of developmentally appropriate tools, including digital innovations.

The study provides evidence for policy development in the ECD sector. Research findings should be used to direct the revision of curricula, the plan of teacher training programmes, and the development of national assessment policies that resonate the holistic needs of young learners. The framework outlined in this study serves as a reference model for such reforms, ensuring that assessment practices are linked with developmental goals and inclusive education principles. The study also encourages the documentation and dissemination of effective case studies and best practices. Sharing these examples across schools and regions can instigate innovation, foster collaboration among educators, and promote continuous improvement in ECD programmes. The impact of this study typically lies in its ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice, contributing actionable insights and tools that can modify assessment in early learning settings. By influencing curriculum development, teacher training, and policy formulation, this research stems the creation of a more equitable, responsive, and effective ECD system in Zimbabwe.

6.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has synthesised the key findings of the study, linking them to the guiding theories of Vygotsky, Piaget, and Erikson, as well as to existing literature and policy frameworks governing ECD in Zimbabwe. The research has revealed that while the national curriculum and policy directives provide a strong basis for promoting holistic, inclusive, and culturally relevant education, the effectiveness of their implementation varies significantly across different contexts, mainly due to variances in resources, infrastructure, and teacher capacity.

The study established that holistic development, play-based learning, cultural relevance, inclusive education, and formative assessment are crucial pillars of effective ECD practice. Sites with

adequate resources demonstrated the transformative potential of these approaches, while resource-constrained settings revealed systemic challenges that hinder equitable learning opportunities. These findings support the centrality of developmental theories in shaping ECD pedagogy and stipulate the necessity for adaptable strategies that respond to diverse socioeconomic realities.

The conclusions drawn specify that successful ECD implementation in Zimbabwe requires a multi-layered effort. Teachers must be adequately skilled and continuously supported to implement developmentally appropriate practices; curricula must be flexible and culturally embedded; assessments must move toward authentic and formative approaches; and policies must be consistently implemented with appropriate resource allocation. The study further highlights the importance of parental and community involvement as a bridge between home and school learning, and it identifies digital literacy as a vibrant emerging frontier for preparing young learners in the 21st century.

The recommendations presented, including strengthening teacher training, enhancing assessment practices, improving infrastructure, and enhancing inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogy point toward actionable strategies for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. If acknowledged, these measures have the conceal to transform the quality and equity of ECD provision in Zimbabwe, ensuring that all children, regardless of background, are given the opportunity to thrive. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on ECD by bridging theory, policy, and practice. It provides a framework not only for refining existing systems but also for reimagining ECD in Zimbabwe in ways that are sustainable, contextually relevant, and linked with global educational trends. In doing so, it highlights the urgency of collaborative efforts among government, educators, communities, and development partners to secure a strong foundation for the nation’s youngest learners.

REFERENCES

Affandi, A. L. (2025). Supporting Resources for the Successful Implementation of the Curriculum. *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Sains*, *6*(2), 426–438. https://doi.org/10.59141/jiss.v6i2.1619

Acharya, B., Sigdel, S., & Poudel, O. (2024). Analysis of Effectiveness of Collaborative Pedagogy Practices. *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, *1*(4), 172–186. https://doi.org/10.3126/nprcjmr.v1i4.70965

Adegbite, B. F. (2025). Application of Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development in Preschool Learning. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, *11*(9), 75–92. www.iiardjournals.org

Aguzzoli, R., Lengler, J., Miller, S. R., & Chidlow, A. (2024). Paradigms in Qualitative IB Research: Trends, Analysis and Recommendations. *Management International Review*, *64*(2), 165–198. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-024-00529-5

Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health, 2(2024), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051

Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., M. Ameen, B. M., & Khdhir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, *6*(2025), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198

Allal, L. (2020). Assessment and the co-regulation of learning in the classroom. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *27*(4), 332–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2019.1609411

Alamri, S. A. (2024). An Overview: Epistemological Foundations of the Qualitative and Quantitative Research Approaches. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Medicine and Clinical Research*, *3*(4), 35–40. https://doi.org/10.18231/j.ijrimcr.2021.027

Alamoush, A. S., Ballini, F., & Ölçer, A. I. (2021). Ports, maritime transport, and industry: The immediate impact of COVID-19 and the way forward. *Maritime Technology and Research*, *4*(1), 250092. https://doi.org/10.33175/mtr.2022.250092

Alem, D. D. (2020). *An Overview of Data Analysis and Interpretations inResearch*. *8*(1), 1–27. ttp://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJARER/Index.htm

Andalib, E. (2024). Semi-Structured Interviews as the Foundation for Interdisciplinary Research About the Built Environment, Health, and Happiness. *Keeping Up with Technologies to Imagine and Build Together Sustainable, Inclusive, and Beautiful Cities, International Academic Conference on Places and Technologies*, *8*(2024), 693–703. https://doi.org/10.18485/arh_pt.2024.8.ch80

Andrews, P., Sunde, P. B., Nosrati, M., Petersson, J., Rosenqvist, E., Sayers, J., & Xenofontos, C. (2021). Computational Estimation and Mathematics Education: A Narrative Literature Review. *Journal of Mathematics Education*, *14*(1), 6–27. https://doi.org/10.26711/007577152790061

Arasomwan, D. A., & Mashiy, N. J. (2021). Early childhood care and education educators' understanding of the use of music-based pedagogies to teach communication skills. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *11*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v11i1.896

Arundel, A. (2023). How to Design, Implement, and Analyse a Survey. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800376175

Ashari, C. A., & Herachwati, N. (2023). Implementation of Organizational Agility Model in Improving Sustainable PHEIs Competitive Advantage: Narrative Literature Review. *RSF Conference Series: Business, Management and Social Sciences*, *3*(3), 578–588. https://doi.org/10.31098/bmss.v3i3.725

Atakpo, T. (2025). Early Childhood Development and Education for National Development: Relevance and Delivery System in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, *12*(11), 6–11. https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2024/v12/i11/HS2411-009

Bearman, M. (2019). Focus on Methodology: Eliciting rich data: A practical approach to writing semi-structured interview schedules. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*, *20*(3), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v20i3.387

Beauchamp, T., & Childress, J. (2019). Principles of Biomedical Ethics: Marking Its Fortieth Anniversary. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, *19*(11), 9–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2019.1665402

Batkhuyag, T., & Seded, B. (2025). Theoretical Foundations of Early Childhood Education: A Comparative Analysis of Classical and Modern Philosophies in the Context of the Mongolian Early Childhood Education Curriculum. *US-China Education Review A*, *15*(05). https://doi.org/10.17265/2161-623X/2025.05.001

Bennett, R. E. (2018). Educational Assessment: What to Watch in a Rapidly Changing World. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *37*(4), 7–15. https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12231

Berry, A. (2020). Disrupting Driving: Exploring upper primary teachers' perspectives on student engagement. *Teachers and Teaching*, *26*(2), 145–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1757421

Biedenbach, T., & Jacobsson, M. (2016). The Open Secret of Values: The Roles of Values and Axiology in Project Research. *Project Management Journal*, *47*(3), 139–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/875697281604700312

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2018). Classroom assessment and pedagogy. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *25*(6), 551–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2018.1441807

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2021). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (8th ed.). Pearson. https://za.pearson.com/

Bouter, L. (2024). Why research integrity matters and how it can be improved. Accountability in Research, 31(8), 1277–1286. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2023.2189010

Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2021). *The matic Analysis: A Pratical Guide*. SAGE Publications. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1035719X211058251

Brown, C., Davis, L., & Shlafer, R. J. (2020). Are We Meeting Their Needs? Well-child, Dental, and Mental Health Care for Youth in Juvenile Correctional Facilities in Minnesota.

Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, *31*(1), 171–184. https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2020.0016

Brown, G. T. L. (2022). The past, present and future of educational assessment: A transdisciplinary perspective. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*(2022), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1060633

Brown, R., Werbeloff, L., & Raven, R. (2019). Interdisciplinary Research and Impact. *Global Challenges*, *3*(4), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.201900020

Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. Neurological Research and Practice, 2(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z

Campbell, K., Orr, E., Durepos, P., Nguyen, L., Li, L., Whitmore, C., Gehrke, P., Graham, L., & Jack, S. (2021). Reflexive Thematic Analysis for Applied Qualitative Health Research. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(6), 2011–2028. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5010

Casula, M., Rangarajan, N., & Shields, P. (2021). The potential of working hypotheses for deductive exploratory research. *Quality & Quantity*, *55*(5), 1703–1725. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01072-9

Cekić-Jovanović, O. D., & Gajić, N. Z. (2022). Attitudes of Primary School Teachers about the Importance, Place and Role of Modern Technology and Mathematics in STEAM Education. *Узданица*, *XIX*(v), 183–197. https://doi.org/10.46793/Uzdanica19.S.183CJ

Chand, S. P. (2025). Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations, and Document Analysis. Advances in Educational Research and Evaluation, 6(1), 303–317. https://doi.org/10.25082/AERE.2025.01.001

Chase, M. K. (2019). Critical Assessment: A Student-Centreed Approach to Assessment. Papers on Postsecondary Learning and Teaching, 3(1), 32–37. https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/pplt.v3Y2019.52922

Chen, Y. (2023). The Relevance of Dewey's Educational Theory to 'Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century.' *Studies in Social Science & Humanities*, *2*(4), 65–68. https://doi.org/10.56397/SSSH.2023.04.06

Chigbu, U. E., Atiku, S. O., & Du Plessis, C. C. (2023). The Science of Literature Reviews: Searching, Identifying, Selecting, and Synthesising. *Publications*, *11*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications11010002

Chigonda, G. K., Phatudi, N., & Phala, T. (2025). Strengthening early childhood development (ECD) programmes in post- COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. *Perspectives in Education*, *43*(3), 108–124. https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v43i3.9052

Chikwiri, E., & Musiyiwa, J. (2017). Challenges and gaps in childrens transition from early childhood development to grade one in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, *9*(7), 91–102. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEAPS2017.0510

Chimbi, G. T., & Jita, L. C. (2021). Policy Failures with Learner-Centred Pedagogy: Case Studies from the Zimbabwean Experiment on Project-Based Learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, *15*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.14434/ijpbl.v15i1.29268

Chinhara, H. (2021). Strategies used in inclusive early childhood development classes attached to primary schools in the South Eastern district in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *V*(V), 432–441.

Chinhara, H., & Kuyayama, M. (2021). Exploring the Readiness of Early Childhood Development Environments to Integrate ICT: Assessing Stakeholder Capacity. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12944/CRJSSH.8.1.08

Chowdhury, M. F. (2015). Coding, sorting and sifting of qualitative data analysis: Debates and discussion. *Quality & Quantity*, *49*(3), 1135–1143. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-014-0039-2

Conti, M., & Krever, M. K. (2021, July). Preparing the Early Childhood Learning Environment. *Community Playthings*. https://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/preparing-the-early-childhood-learning-environment

Crain, W. C. (2015). *Theories of development: Concepts and applications* (Sixth edition). Routledge. www.pearsoned.co.uk

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Fifth edition). SAGE. https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/search?searchCode=LCCN&searchArg=2017044644&searchType=1&permalink=y

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Fifth). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://www.sage.com/https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book266033

Daniel, B. K. (2019). Using the TACT Framework to Learn the Principles of Rigour in Qualitative Research. Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, 17(3), 118–121. https://doi.org/10.34190/JBRM.17.3.002

Dhlomo, T., & Mawere, P. (2020). Curriculum reform in Zimbabwe: An analysis of early childhood development centersâ€™ state of readiness to embrace the new curriculum. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12(3), 104-114. https://doi.org/10.5897/JASD2019.0566

Dixson, D. D., & Worrell, F. C. (2016). Formative and Summative Assessment in the Classroom. *Theory Into Practice*, *55*(2), 153–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1148989

Dooly, M., Moore, E. and Vallejo, C. (2017) Research Ethics. In: *Qualitative Approaches to Research on Plurilingual Education*, Research-publishing.net, 351-362. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.emmd2016.634

Dube, T., Ncube, S. B., Mapuvire, C. C., Ndlovu, S., Ncube, C., & Mlotshwa, S. (2021). Interventions to reduce the exclusion of children with disabilities from education: A

Zimbabwean perspective from the field. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *7*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1913848

Ebidor, L.-L., & Ikhide, I. G. (2024). Literature Review in Scientific Research: An Overview. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, *7*(2), 179–186. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.7.2.1909

Elhami, A., & Khoshnevisan, B. (2022). Conducting an Interview in Qualitative Research: The Modus Operandi. Mextesol Journal, 46(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v46n1-3

Egwunatum, B. N., & Atakpo, T. E. (2025). Exploring Effective Management Strategies for Improving Early Childhood Education in Delta State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*, *X*(I), 378–384. https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.1001029

Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and Society*. Norton and Company.

Esmonde, I. (2016). Power and Sociocultural Theories of Learning. In *Power and Privilege in the Learning Sciences* (1st ed., p. 22). Routledge.

Faizah, N., Wijayati, N., & Widiatningrum, T. (2022). The Influence of Project Based Learning Model on Students' Problem-Solving Competence in Learning of Acid-Base. *Journal of Innovative Science Education*, *11*(3), 334–339. https://doi.org/10.15294/jise.v11i1.56478

Farrukh, A., & Sajjad, A. (2024). An exploratory study of barriers to sustainable development: Evidence from the New Zealand flexible packaging industry. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, *24*(3), 663–681. https://doi.org/10.1108/CG-05-2023-0221

Forbes, M. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, *22*(2), 132–135. https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X211058251

Friesen, N., & Su, H. (2023). What Is Pedagogy? Discovering the Hidden Pedagogical Dimension. *Educational Theory*, *73*(1), 6–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12569

Gasva, D., & Phiri, R. J. (2020). Interrogating the adoption of the updated primary school curriculum in Zimbabwe: Implications for staff development and quality education.

International Journal of Education and Learning, *2*(2), 86–95. https://doi.org/10.31763/ijele.v2i2.99

Ghorbani, A., & Matourypour, P. (2020). Comparison of Interpretive Description and Qualitative Description in the Nursing Scope. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, *73*(1), 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2019-0339

Gilleard, C. (2020). The final stage of human development? Erikson's view of integrity and old age. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, *14*(2), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.1471

Githinji, S., Orodho, J. A., & Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Kenyatta University Kenya. (2018). Relationship between Early Childhood Play Activities and Holistic Development of the Learner in Pre-schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. *Greener Journal of Educational Research*, *8*(3), 047–054. https://doi.org/10.15580/GJER.2018.3.041318058

Gjems, L. (2017). Learning about concepts through everyday language interactions in preschools. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, *10*(4), 33–44. https://doi.org/10.11621/pir.2017.0404

Gökce, K. (2019). Observing young children's play: A brief review. Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat, 7(2–3), 20–27. https://doi.org/10.31074/2019232027

Goldsmith, L. (2021). Using Framework Analysis in Applied Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(6), 2061–2076. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5011

Gunbayi, I. (2023). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Action Qualitative & Mixed Methods Research*, *2*(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7763207

Habimana, I. R. (2024). Holistic Education Approaches: Nurturing the WholeChild. *Research Output Journal of Education*, *3*(3), 11–15. https://rojournals.org/roj-education/

Handley, M., Bunn, F., Lynch, J., & Goodman, C. (2020). Using non-participant observation to uncover mechanisms: Insights from a realist evaluation. *Evaluation*, *26*(3), 380–393. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389019869036

Hildebrand, D. L. (2022). John Dewey. In S. F. Aikin & R. B. Talisse, *The Routledge Companion to Pragmatism* (1st ed., pp. 26–34). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315149592-6

Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence*. (A. Parsons & S. Milgram, Trans.). Basic Books. https://doi.org/10.1037/10034-000

Irshad, S., Maan, M. F., Batool, H., & Hanif, A. (2021). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): An evaluative tool for language learning and social development in early childhood education. *Multicultural Education*, *7*(6), 234-242.http://ijdri.com/me/

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A Review of the Quality Indicators of Rigor in Qualitative Research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, *84*(1), 138–146. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2020). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (Seventh edition). SAGE.

Jones, S. M., McGarrah, M. W., & Kahn, J. (2019). Social and Emotional Learning: A Principled Science of Human Development in Context. *Educational Psychologist*, *54*(3), 129–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1625776

Kakar, Z. U. H., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A., & Akhter, S. (2023). Criteria For Assessing and Ensuring The Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. International Journal of Business Reflections, 4(2), 150–173. https://doi.org/10.56249/ijbr.03.01.44

Kankam, P. K. (2019). The use of paradigms in information research. *Library & Information Science Research*, *41*(2), 85–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2019.04.003

Karaya, N. N. (2022). *A Case Study Examining How Teachers and Parents Provide Strategies that Nurture the Academic and Social Development of Young Black Children in Low-Socioeconomic Communities* [Liberty University]. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4452&context=doctoral

Karmina, S., Dyson, B., Watson, P., & Philpot, R. (2021). Teacher Implementation of Cooperative Learning in Indonesia: A Multiple Case Study. *Education Sciences*, *11*(218), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050218

Karppinen, K., & Moe, H. (2019). Texts as Data I: Document Analysis. In H. Van Den Bulck, M. Puppis, K. Donders, & L. Van Audenhove (Eds.), The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research (pp. 249–262). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16065-4_14

Kepceoğlu, G. Z., & Pektaş, M. (2023). Thematic Analysis of Theses on Distance Education in Science Education. İnsan ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 6(Education Special Issue), 587–598. https://doi.org/10.53048/johass.1356593

Khatri, D. K. (2023). Research Paradigms in English Education: A Brief Overview. *Surkhet Journal*, *2*(1), 21–29. https://doi.org/10.3126/surkhetj.v2i1.58744

Kilroy, A., & Fincham, L. (2023). *Analytical Framework: Digital Agriculture Landscape Assessment Toolkin*. International Fund for Agricultural Development. https://www.ifad.org/en/where-we-work

Kivunja, C. (2018). Distinguishing between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework: A systematic review of lessons from the field. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 7(6), 44–53. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v7n6p44

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education, 6*(5), 26- 41. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. European Journal of General Practice, 24(1), 120–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kristanto, Y. D., & Padmi, R. S. (2020). Using network analysis for rapid, transparent, and rigorous thematic analysis: A case study of online distance learning. *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, *24*(2), 177. https://doi.org/10.21831/pep.v24i2.33912

Kroger, J., & Marcia, J. E. (2021). Erikson, the Identity Statuses, and Beyond. In M. Bamberg, C. Demuth, & M. Watzlawik (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Identity* (1st ed., pp. 215–238). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108755146.012

Lalani, A. P. (2020). *Play-based Curriculum and the Holistic Development of the Child* [Master's thesis, Bethel University]. Spark Repository. https://spark.bethel.edu/etd/379

Langermeier, M., & Bauer, B. (2017). Generic EA Analysis Framework for the Definition and Automatic Execution of Analyses: *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on Enterprise Information Systems*, 316–327. https://doi.org/10.5220/0006379003160327

Li, Y., Wu, C., & Wang, J. (2024). Enhancing Early Childhood Education: Integrating Theory and Practice. Communications in Humanities Research, 32(1), 202–207. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/32/20240071

Lim, W. M. (2023). Choosing a good research topic for premier journals. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, *42*(2), 5–8. https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.22187

Liu, J., McBride, R. E., Xiang, P., & Scarmardo-Rhodes, M. (2018). Physical Education Pre-service Teachers' Understanding, Application, and Development of Critical Thinking. *Quest*, *70*(1), 12–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2017.1330218

Lochmiller, C. (2021). Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(6), 2029–2044. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008

Lubis, S. I. A. (2021). The Role of School and Teaching Method Through Maria Montessori and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi`s view. *International Journal of Economic, Technology and Social Sciences (Injects)*, *2*(1), 87–92. https://doi.org/10.53695/injects.v2i1.238

Luft, J. A., Jeong, S., Idsardi, R., & Gardner, G. (2022). Literature Reviews, Theoretical Frameworks, and Conceptual Frameworks: An Introduction for New Biology Education Researchers. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, *21*(3), rm33. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.21-05-0134

Lunga, P., Esterhuizen, S., & Koen, M. (2022). Play-based pedagogy: An approach to advance young children's holistic development. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1133

Mabasa-Manganyi, R. B. (2023). Factors influencing foundation phase rural teachers' understanding and practices in selecting inclusive teaching strategies. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v13i1.991

Machost, H., & Stains, M. (2023). Reflective Practices in Education: A Primer for Practitioners. CBE—Life Sciences Education, 22(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-07-0148

Madondo, F. (2020). Perceptions on Curriculum Implementation: A Case for Rural Zimbabwean Early Childhood Development Teachers as Agents of Change. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *35*(3), 399–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2020.1731024

Madondo, F., & Tsikira, J. (2022). Traditional Children's Games: Their Relevance on Skills Development among Rural Zimbabwean Children Age 3–8 Years. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *36*(3), 406–420. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2021.1982084

Maera, J., & Manzunzu, N. (2025). Teachers' experiences in implementing the Zimbabwe school health policy in early childhood development classes: Barriers and drivers. *Eureka: Journal of Educational Research*, *3*(2), 153–162. https://doi.org/10.56773/ejer.v3i2.66

Makwana, D., Engineer, P., Dabhi, A., & Chudasama, H. (2023). Sampling Methods in Research A Review. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, *7*(3), 2456–6470. www.ijtsrd.com

Manas, G M. (2020). A Study on Child Developmet in Early Stage. *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(59). ISSN 2278-8808, SJIF 2019 = 6.380, www.srjis.com

Manik, K. N., Nababan, I. A., Sai, Y. H., Ginting, S. A., & Sari, W. (2024). Study of Ontological, Epistemological and Axiological Principles in Final Academic Assignments for Dissertation Scientific Papers: Philosophical Values in Scientific Writing. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, *5*(1), 330–338. https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.01.29

Manti, S., & Licari, A. (2018). How to obtain informed consent for research. *Breathe*, *14*(2), 145–152. https://doi.org/10.1183/20734735.001918

Manzuzu, N. (2019). *Early childhood development teachers` understandings of indigenous knowledge and how they incorporate it in their pedagogical practices.* [University of the Witwatersrand]. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/30166

Manzunzu, N., & Manzuzu, G. (2021). Early Childhood Development teachers` perceptions of assessment of learners: A case of Mutare District, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *V*(I), 184–191. www.rsisinternational.org

Manzuzu, N., & Mutovosi, O. (2023). Preparedness for inclusive education in early childhood Development (ECD): A survey of Gweru district ECD centres. *International Journal of Education Humanities and Social Science*, *4*(1), 197–213.

Margolis, A. A. (2020). Zone of Proximal Development, Scaffolding and Teaching Practice. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, *16*(3), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2020160303

Mason, J. (2021). *Qualitative Researching*. SAGE. https://www.sage.com/

Maxwell, J. A. (2021). The importance of qualitative research for investigating causation. *Qualitative Psychology, 8*(3), 378–388. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000219

Mazambani, D., & Tapfumaneyi, N. T. (2024). Zimbabwe's educational curriculum reforms from 2015 to 2024: Human rights implications to learners, educators, parents and guardians. *African Human Rights Yearbook / Annuaire Africain Des Droits de l'Homme*, *8*(1), 437–457. https://doi.org/10.29053/2523-1367/2024/v8a16

Mazuruse, G., Nyagadza, B., & Makoni, T. (2022). Inclusive Education Implementation Challenges Facing Selected Primary and Secondary Schools in Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, *6*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/9690

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. Medical Teacher, 41(9), 1002–1006. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149

McLeod, S. A. (2018). Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. *Simply Psychology*. https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

McLeod, S. A. (2020). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. *Simply Psychology*. http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

McLeod, S. (2024). Piaget's Preoperational Stage (Ages 2-7). *Simply Psychology*. https://www.simplypsychology.org/preoperational.html

Memon, M. A., Thurasamy, R., Ting, H., & Cheah, J.-H. (2024). Purposive Sampling: A Review and Guidelines for Quantitative Research. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, *9*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.9(1)01

Meng, Q., Lin, M.-S., & Tzeng, I.-S. (2020). Relationship Between Exercise and Alzheimer's Disease: A Narrative Literature Review. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, *14*(131), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2020.00131

Middleton, F. (2019). *Reliability vs. validity in research | Difference, types and examples*. Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2015). *Early Childhood Development Curriculum Framework*. https://www.mopsemashwest.gov.zw/Site/Curriculum_Framework.html

Mligo, I., Mitchell, L., & Bell, B. (2016). *Pedagogical Practices in Early Childhood Education and Care in Tanzania: Policy and Practices*. *7*(33), 83–92. https://www.iiste.org/

Mohajan, D., & Mohajan, H. K. (2022). Constructivist Grounded Theory: A New Research Approach in Social Science. *Research and Advances in Education*, *1*(4), 8–16. https://doi.org/10.56397/RAE.2022.10.02

Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, *7*(1), 23–48. https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571

Moher, D., Bouter, L., Kleinert, S., Glasziou, P., Sham, M. H., Barbour, V., Coriat, A.-M., Foeger, N., & Dirnagl, U. (2020). The Hong Kong Principles for assessing researchers: Fostering research integrity. PLOS Biology, 18(7), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000737

Monday, T. U. (2020). *Impacts of Interview as Research Instrument of Data Collection in Social Sciences*. *1*(1), 15–24. https://doi.org/10.33847/2712-8148.1.1_2

Morgan, D. L., & Nica, A. (2020). Iterative Thematic Inquiry: A New Method for Analyzing Qualitative Data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920955118

Moyo, Z. (2024). Significance of cultural context in shaping female school leadership and management in Zimbabwe. *African Identities*, *22*(1), 60–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2021.1994853

Mpofu, J., & Sefotho, M. M. (2024). Challenges of competency-based curriculum in teaching learners with learning disabilities. *African Journal of Disability*, *13*(a1268). https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v13i0.1268

Mugweni, R. M. (2017). Issues of Access, Equity, and Quality in Early Childhood Development Programmes in Zimbabwe. *Sociology Study*, *7*(6), 315–324. https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5526/2017.06.002

Mulenga, I. M., & Mukaba, B. (2018). Policy and Practice: Roles of the Guidance and Counseling Teachers in the Implementation of the Girls' Reentry Policy in Selected Schools in Lusaka, Zambia. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *9*(20), 57–67. https://www.iiste.org/

Munsaka, T. (2023). *Discuss Piaget's 4 stages of cognitive development in the context of Zimbabwe.* Academia. https://www.academia.edu/98977238/Discuss_Piagets_4_stages_of_cognitive_development_in_the_context_of_Zimbabwe

Murray, J. (2015). Early childhood pedagog *ies*: Spaces for young children to flourish. *Early Child Development and Care*, *185*(11–12), 1715–1732. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1029245

Musweweshiri, O. (2024). The impacts of culture and religious diversity on Early Childhood Development (ECD) learners a case of primary schools in Mudzi District of Mashonaland

East Province, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Contemporary Society and Education*, *4*(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.69778/2709-8338/4.1/a4

Mutandagai, E. V., Manzunzu, N., & Maera, J. (2024). Factors influencing early childhood development learners' langauage literacy development: Teachers' perspective in Zvishavane District. *Edukasiana: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan*, *3*(3), 354–366. https://doi.org/10.56916/ejip.v3i3.759

Mutasa, C., 2020, *Brief: A brief history of land in Zimbabwe: 1890–today*, viewed 31 January 2020, from http://www.focusonland.com/countries/a-brief-history-of-land-in-zimbabwe1890Today/.

Muzembe, H. P., Machaba, M., & ModiSe, M. R. (2021). Implementing the updated Early Childhood Development curriculum in Zimbabwean primary schools: Social Validity Based on Practitioners' Views. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, *9*(4), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.17478/jegys.1011035

Muzilikazi, S., & Mawere, V. H. (2020). Development of ECD Policies from Colonial Period to Independence Era in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research in Education Humanities and Commerce*, *1*(3), 55–63. www.ijrehc.com

Mwaruta, F., Muchandiona, C., & Rumbidzai Machiridza, E. (2025). Culturally Relevant Play-Based Pedagogy as a Panacea for Early Childhood Development Curriculum Implementation: A Synopsis of Zvishavane District. *International Journal of Research Publications*, *176*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001761720258259

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*, 16094069231205789. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789

Nardo, A. (2021). Exploring a Vygotskian Theory of Education and Its Evolutionary Foundations. *Educational Theory*, *71*(3), 331–352. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12485

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2019). *Advancing equity in early childhood education*. Position statement. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity

Nazim, M., Alzubi, A. A. F., & Fakih, A.-H. (2024). Teachers' attitudes towards student-centered pedagogy and assessment practices: Instruction efficacy in perspective. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, *13*(2), 1276–1286. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v13i2.28139

Ndlovu, B., Okeke, C., Nhase, Z., Ugwuanyi, C., Okeke, C., & Ede, M. (2023). Impact of play-based learning on the development of children in mobile early childhood care and education centres: Practitioners' perspectives. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147- 4478)*, *12*(3), 432–440. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i3.2358

Neuman, M. J. (2021). Global trends in early childhood education policy. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-021-00087-5

Niazi, A. (2025). Education is the Foundation of Individual Growth and Social Progress. *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, *5*(4), 80–83. https://doi.org/10.55544/ijrah.5.4.11

Nikolopoulou, K. (2022). Online Education in Early Primary Years: Teachers' Practices and Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Education Sciences*, *12*(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12020076

Ningsih, T. Z., Aman, A., Nasrulloh, A., Ofianto, O., Erniwati, E., Asri, Z., Judijanto, L., & Firza, F. (2025). Enhancing communication and collaboration skills through discovery, cooperative and problem-based learning models in Social Studies education. *Cogent Education*, *12*(1), 2500110. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2500110

Noble, H., & Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples. *Evidence Based Nursing*, *22*(3), 67–68. https://doi.org/10.1136/ebnurs-2019-103145

Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2025). Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research. Evidence Based Nursing, 28(4), 206–208. https://doi.org/10.1136/ebnurs-2024-104232

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Nyarambi, A., & Ntuli, E. (2020). Piaget's theory of cognitive development and its implications for early childhood education in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 10(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v10n1p1

Nyoni, T., Steiner, J. J., Okumu, M., Orwenyo, E., Tonui, B. C., Lipsey, K., & Mengo, C. (2023). The Use and Effectiveness of the Whole School Approach in School-Based Interventions Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *24*(5), 3615–3628. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221134296

OECD. (2021). *Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en

Oranga, J., & Matere, A. (2023). Qualitative Research: Essence, Types and Advantages. *OALib*, *10*(12), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111001

Oribhabor, C. B., & Anyanwu, C. A. (2019). Research Sampling and Sample Size Determination: A practical Application. *Federal University Dutsin-Ma Journal of Educational Research*, *2*(1), 47–56. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336723498_Research_Sampling_and_Sample_Size_Determination_A_practical_Application

Otto, S., Evans, G. W., Moon, M. J., & Kaiser, F. G. (2019). The development of children's environmental attitude and behavior. *Global Environmental Change*, *58*(2019), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.101947

Pakombwele, A., & Nkomo, B. (n.d.). *Exploring Challenges and Gaps of Preparing Inclusive Early Childhood Development Teachers in Zimbabwean Teacher Training Colleges*. *24*(5), 1–14. Retrieved https://journalspress.uk/index.php/LJRHSS/article/view/713/3633

Paley, J. (2016). *Phenomenology as Qualitative Research: A Critical Analysis of Meaning Attribution* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623979

Pangeti, F. F., Mapolisa, T., & Chisaka, B. C. (2023). Inclusive Early Childhood Education: To What Extent is Inclusion of Academic Benefit to ECD Learners with Intellectual and Learning Disabilities? *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, *10*(4), 233–242. https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.104.14500

Parlina, A., Ramli, K., & Murfi, H. (2020). Theme Mapping and Bibliometrics Analysis of One Decade of Big Data Research in the Scopus Database. *Information*, *11*(2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.3390/info11020069

Partelow, S. (2023). What is a framework? Understanding their purpose, value, development and use. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, *13*(3), 510–519. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-023-00833-w

Pawar, N. (2024). Types of research and Type Research Design. In D. Gore, Y. Patne, & S. Surse (Eds.), *Research Methodology: An Overview* (First, pp. 46–57). Prabhakar Publication.

Phillips, D. C. (2000). *The Expanded Social Scientist's Bestiary: A Guide to Fabled Threats to, and Defenses of, Naturalistic Social Science*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. https://doi.org/10.5771/9780742579392

Pholphirul, P. (2017). Pre-primary education and long-term education performance: Evidence from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Thailand. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *15*(4), 410–432. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X15616834

Piaget, J. (1950). *The psychology of intelligence* (First). Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (2000). *The Psychology of the child*. Basic Books. https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/imprint/basic-books/ (Original work published 1969)

Rabindran, J., & Madanagopal, D. (2020). Piaget's Theory and Stages of Cognitive Development- An Overview. *Scholars Journal of Applied Medical Sciences*, *8*(9), 2152–2157. https://doi.org/10.36347/sjams.2020.v08i09.034

Rajkumar, R. V. (2020). Prevalence of Outward Deviation of Feet in Human Gait: A Non-Participant Observation. *International Journal of Physiotherapy and Research*, *8*(1), 3378–3387. https://doi.org/10.16965/ijpr.2020.101

Rammal, H. G. (2023). Systematic Literature Reviews: Steps and Practical Tips. In S. Rana, J. Singh, & S. Kathuria (Eds.), *Review of Management Literature* (pp. 27–35). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2754-586520230000002002

Rawiadji, C. V., & Limanta, L. S. (2021). Children's Picture Book Series on Exploring Children's Development of a Balanced Identity. *K@ta Kita*, *9*(2), 113–119. https://doi.org/10.9744/katakita.9.2.113-119

Remorosa, M. M. R., Capili, S. R., Decir, E. G. B., Balase, M. M. H., & Escarlos, G. S. (2024). Vygotsky's Social Development Theory: The Role of Social Interaction and Language in Cognitive Development. *International Journal Of All Research Writings*, *6*(6), 10–13. https://www.ijarw.com/

Rogers, A. P. (2021). Exploring secondary teachers' perspectives on implementing competency-based education. *The Journal of Competency-Based Education*, *6*(4), 222–232. https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1265

Roostin, E. (2018). Family influence on the development of children. *PrimaryEdu - Journal of Primary Education*, *2*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.22460/pej.v1i1.654

Rosairo, H. S. R. (2023). Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Agricultural Sciences – Sri Lanka*, *18*(3), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.4038/jas.v18i3.10526

Sabar, G., & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, N. (2017). 'I'll sue you if you publish my wife's interview': Ethical dilemmas in qualitative research based on life stories. *Qualitative Research*, *17*(4), 408–423. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116679727

Sadguna, K., & Sundari, T. T. (2024). Resilience and Psychosocial Wellbeing for the Holistic Development of Vulnerable Children: A Review. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, *6*(3), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.23693

Salawu, M. O., Shamsuddin, S. M., Bolatito, S. A., et al. (2023). Conceptual and theoretical frameworks in research: A systematic review. *Journal of Academic Research and Sciences, 12*(4), 45-60. https://doi.org/10.6000/1927-5129.2023.19.07

Salcedo Mosquera, J. D., Urriago Fontal, J. C., Romero, A., & Martinez, H. (2022). The Theoretical Framework in Research: Meaning, Functions, Structure and Example for its Design. *Russian Law Journal*, *X*(4), 877–884. https://doi.org/10.52783/rlj.v10i4.4450

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed). SAGE.

Salemink, I., Dufour, S., & Van Der Steen, M. (2020). A vision on future advanced data collection. Statistical Journal of the IAOS, 36(3), 685–699. https://doi.org/10.3233/SJI-200658

Samsanovich, A. (2021). Theory and Diversity: A Descriptive Study of Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages. *Thesis*, 48. https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2383&context=etd

Santrock, J. W. (2019). *Children* (Fourteenth edition). McGraw-Hill Education. https://www.mheducation.com

Saracho, O. N. (2023). Theories of Child Development and Their Impact on Early Childhood Education and Care. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *51*(1), 15–30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01271-5

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (Ninth edition). Pearson.

Schunk, D. H. (2020). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (Eighth Edition). Pearson. https://www.pearson.com/

Sellars, M., & Imig, D. (2021). Pestalozzi and pedagogies of love: Pathways to educational reform. *Early Child Development and Care*, *191*(7–8), 1152–1163. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1845667

Shabani, K. (2016). Applications of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach for teachers' professional development. *Cogent Education*, *3*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1252177

Shukia, R., & Marobo, S. (2022). Early Childhood Education Pedagogical Transformation in Tanzania: Innovations, Challenges and Prospects for Marginalised Children. IntechOpen. https://doi: 10.5772/intechopen.105413

Shukla, S. s. (2018). *Methodology and Statistics*. Satishprakash S. Shukla Ahmedabad. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328638618_Research_Methodology_and_Statistics

Sibanda, P. (2018). Situation analysis of the early childhood development (ECD) programme in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. *Scientific Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences*, *7*(3), 751–761. https://doi.org/10.14196/sjpas.v7i3.2522

Smagorinsky, P. (2018). Deconflating the ZPD and instructional scaffolding: Retranslating and reconceiving the zone of proximal development as the zone of next development. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, *16*(1), 70–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.10.009

Smit, N. A., Van Der Linde, J., Eccles, R., Swanepoel, D. W., & Graham, M. A. (2021). Exploring the Knowledge and Needs of Early Childhood Development Practitioners from a Low-Resource Community. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *49*(2), 197–208. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01063-3

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, *104*(2019), 333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education, 44*(1), 26-28. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45381095

Subhash, P. D. (2022). Early Childhood Play: A Medium for Holistic Development. *RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, *7*(2), 107–110. https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2022.v07.i02.018

Sulistiawati, S. (2024). The Relevance of John Dewey's Philosophy of Education in Early Childhood Development in the Digital Age. *Journal of Childhood Development*, *4*(2), 522–531. https://doi.org/10.25217/jcd.v4i2.3902

Suri, H. (2020). Ethical Considerations of Conducting Systematic Reviews in Educational Research. In O. Zawacki-Richter, M. Kerres, S. Bedenlier, M. Bond, & K. Buntins (Eds.), *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research* (pp. 41–54). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_3

Suryani, A., & Fleer, M. (2025). Theory-informed beliefs in early childhood education: Contradictions in child development theories and models of play. *Oxford Review of Education*, *51*(4), 507–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2024.2331180

Taherdoost, H. (2022). What are Different Research Approaches? Comprehensive Review of Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Research, Their Applications, Types, and Limitations. *Journal of Management Science & Engineering Research*, *5*(1), 53–63. https://doi.org/10.30564/jmser.v5i1.4538

Tajik, O., Golzar, J., & Noor, S. (2025). Purposive Sampling. *International Journal of Education Language Studies*, *2*(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.22034/ijels.2025.490681.1029

Takahashi, A. R. W., & Araujo, L. (2019). Case study research: Opening up research opportunities. *RAUSP Management Journal*, *55*(1), 100–111. https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-05-2019-0109

Talbi, M., & Van Woerden, R. (2025). Reflections on interdisciplinary research in practice: Epistemological conflicts. *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, *15*(4), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-025-00685-x

Thacker, L. R. (2020). What Is the Big Deal About Populations in Research? Progress in Transplantation, 30(1), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1177/1526924819893795

Thomas, G. (2016). *How to do your case study* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications

Tovey, H. (2022) An Introduction to Froebel, Children and Nature. Available at: https://www.froebel.org.uk/ uploads/ documents/ An-introduction-to-Froebel-children-and-nature.pdf

Van Der Werf, W. M., Slot, P. L., Kenis, P. N., & Leseman, P. P. M. (2021). Inclusive practice and quality of education and care in the Dutch hybrid early childhood education and care system. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, *15*(1), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-020-00079-x

Vasileva, O. (2019). The influence of values and beliefs on children's learning and thinking. Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology, 9(2), 112- 125. https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v9n2p112

Vasileva, O., & Balyasnikova, N. (2019). (Re)Introducing Vygotsky's Thought: From Historical Overview to Contemporary Psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*(2019), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01515

Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J. G., Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., & García Coll, C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory Revision: Moving Culture From the Macro Into the Micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *12*(5), 900–910. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617704397

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (M. Cole, V. Jolm-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Vygotsky, L. S., & Rieber, R. W. (1997). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 4: The history of the development of higher mental functions.* (Vol. 4). Plenum Press.

Wangila, V. M. (2017). *The Challenges Facing the Implementation of Early Childhood Development and Education Policy in Bungoma County, Kenya*. *8*(15), 217–223. www.iiste.org

Wasmuth, H. (2020). *Fröbel's Pedagogy of Kindergarten and Play: Modifications in Germany and the United States* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429059278

Whang, S. E., Roh, Y., Song, H., & Lee, J.-G. (2023). Data collection and quality challenges in deep learning: A data-centric AI perspective. The VLDB Journal, 32(4), 791–813. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00778-022-00775-9

Whichello, C., Van Overbeeke, E., Janssens, R., Schölin Bywall, K., Russo, S., Veldwijk, J., Cleemput, I., Juhaeri, J., Levitan, B., Kübler, J., Smith, M., Hermann, R., Englbrecht, M., Hueber, A. J., Comanescu, A., Harding, S., Simoens, S., Huys, I., & De Bekker-Grob, E. W. (2019). Factors and Situations Affecting the Value of Patient Preference Studies: Semi-Structured Interviews in Europe and the US. *Frontiers in Pharmacology*, *10*(1009), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2019.01009

Wicks, P. G. (2017). Thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Research Practice*,), Article O1. http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/582/505

Widodo, A., Angga, P. D., Syazali, M., & Umar, U. (2023). Development of Observation Instruments for Partnership Model-Based Learning Activities in Distance Learning in Elementary Schools. Journal on Education, 5(3), 5930–5943. https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v5i3.1357

Willie, M. M. (2024). Population and Target Population in Research Methodology. Golden Ratio of Social Science and Education, 4(1), 75–79. https://doi.org/10.52970/grsse.v4i1.405

Wilson, J. H., & Joye, S. W. (2017). *Research Methods and Statistics: An Integrated Approach*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802717

Wood, L., Sebar, B., & Vecchio, N. (2020). Application of Rigour and Credibility in Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt from a Case Study. *The Qualitative Report*, *25*(2), 456–470. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4240

Yambi, T. (2020). Moving beyond cognitive assessment in early childhood development. *Journal of African Educational Evaluation, 4*(1), 56-70. https://doi.org/10.4314/jaee.v4i1.5

Ylimaki, R. M., & Brunderman, L. A. (2022). Going Deeper into Curriculum and Pedagogical Activity. In R. M. Ylimaki & L. A. Brunderman (Eds.), Evidence-Based School Development in Changing Demographic Contexts (Vol. 24, pp. 73–79). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76837-9_6

Yong, W. K., Husin, M., & Kamarudin, S. (2021). *Understanding Research Paradigms: A Scientific Guide*. *27*(2), 5857–5865. https://cibg.org.au/

Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. (2021). High-quality early childhood assessment: Learning from states' use of kindergarten entry assessments. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/early-childhood-workforce-status-report

Zhou, X. (2024). Sociocultural Theory in Early Childhood Education. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, *51*(1), 190–196. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/51/20240981

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Unisa Research Ethics Approval

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/11/08

Ref: **2023/11/08/67129633/02/AM**
Name: Ms BS Chimbidzikai
Student No.:67129633

Dear Ms BS Chimbidzikai

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2023/11/08 to 2028/11/08

Researcher(s): Name: Ms BS Chimbidzikai
E-mail address: 67129633@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: + 263773002508

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr RSS Mphahlele
E-mail address: emphahrs@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124294941

Name: Prof Masello Phajane
E-mail address: phajamh@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124292002

Title of research:

Investigating the effectiveness of the Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD in Zimbabwean primary Schools

Qualification: PhD Early Childhood Development

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/11/08 to 2028/11/08.

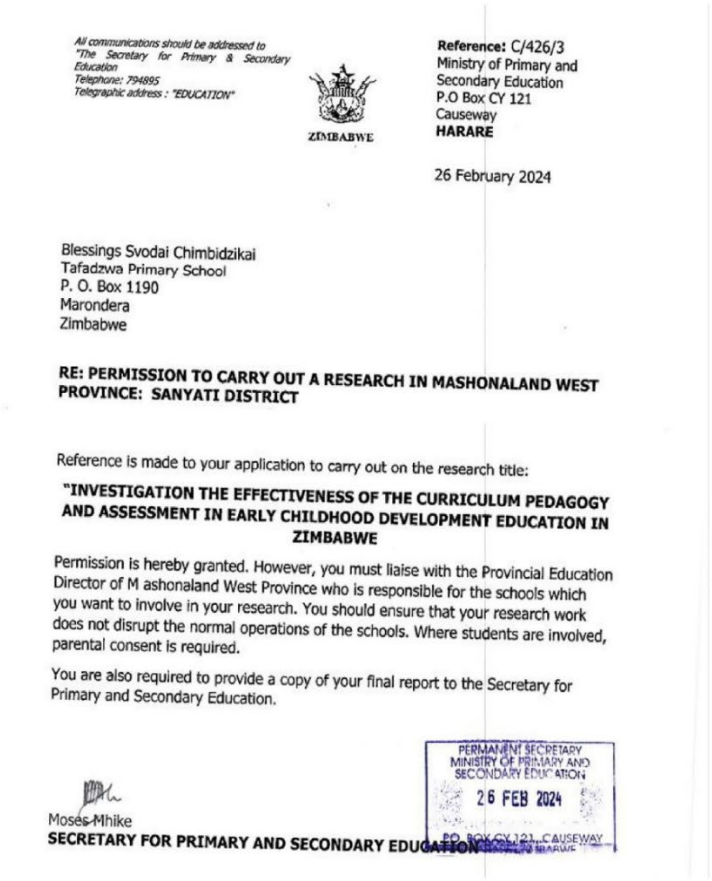
*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/11/08 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

Appendix B: Permission Letter from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe



All communications should be addressed to "The Secretary for Primary & Secondary Education"
Telephone: 794895
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"

ZIMBABWE

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

26 February 2024

Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai
Tafadzwa Primary School
P. O. Box 1190
Marondera
Zimbabwe

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN MASHONALAND WEST PROVINCE: SANYATI DISTRICT

Reference is made to your application to carry out on the research title:

"INVESTIGATION THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRICULUM PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

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

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

PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
26 FEB 2024
P.O. BOX CY 121, CAUSEWAY HARARE

Moses Mhike
SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Appendix: C Schools Permission Request Letter

The School Head
Address of school

Date
Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at
……Primary School

I, Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai, am doing research under the supervision of Doc S. Mphahlele, a Doctor in the Department of Early Childhood Development Education, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa. We are inviting your school to participate in a study entitled "Investigating the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Early Childhood Development Education in Zimbabwe" The study participants are one ECD class at your school and their class teacher who is the key informant and sole interviewee.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Early Childhood Development Education in Zimbabwe. An in-depth study of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD as a case for the study will illuminate the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies used by teachers to enhance the growth of the aspects of child development. The findings of the study will inform teachers on effective strategies to be used to prepare primary school learners to become proficient and also to use effective assessment strategies to benchmark their learners' aspects of development skills.

The study is qualitative in nature and the methodology for the study is influenced by philosophical assumptions of the Constructivist paradigm. Multiple case study is the research design for the study and qualitative methods of data collection comprising document analysis, non-participant observation and interviews will be used. The researcher will analyse documents such as the class

timetable, the school syllabus, the scheme-cum-plan, social record book and developmental checklist record book and other documents that will be availed to the researcher by the class teacher to gain insights into policy issues to do with the curriculum, teaching and assessment in ECD and to get access to information about past learner behaviour and development which can be compared with what will be happening in the classroom to track changes that took place and progress that was made. The study also involves the researcher in observing learning activities for a month at the sample schools and conducting semi-structured interviews with the class teachers who are the key informants after every week of observing lessons. The interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate capturing of data. Thematic analysis will be employed in data analysis.

It is anticipated that no risks or harm would befall the participants during the study and that findings of the research will provide significant insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. An electronic copy of the research findings will be made available to your school. The participants will not receive any incentives or reimbursements for taking part in the study. The name of the school and the learners will remain anonymous and will not appear anywhere in the reporting of the findings.

The UNISA Ethics Approval Board and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe granted clearance and permission respectively for the collection of data for the study.

Yours sincerely
Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai

UNISA Student (Student number 67129633)

Appendix D: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Permission Request Letter

The Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
Ambassador House
P O Box CY 121
Harare

26 February 2024
Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to carry out a study using ECD classes in three schools in Sanyati District, Kadoma, in Mashonaland West Province.

Title: Investigating the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Early Childhood Development Education in Zimbabwe

I, Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai, am doing research under the supervision of Doc S Mphahlele, a Doctor in the Department of Early Childhood development Education, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Zimbabwean ECD Primary Schools. I intend to undertake an in-depth study of the Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the teaching and learning of ECD learners as a case for my study so as to gain knowledge and understanding about the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies used for assessing the development of ECD learners. This study therefore is crucial to illuminate the syllabi interpretation, teaching methods and assessment strategies used by teachers to assess their learners in enhancing the aspects of child development. The findings of the study will inform curriculum designers and teachers on effective strategies to be used to prepare

ECD learners for holistic child development and also to use effective assessment strategies to benchmark their learners' developmental skills.

The study is qualitative in nature and the methodology for the study is influenced by philosophical assumptions of the Constructivist paradigm. Multiple case study is the research design for the study and qualitative methods of data collection comprising document analysis, non-participant observation and interview will be used. The researcher will analyse documents such as the class timetable, the school syllabus, the scheme-cum-plan, social record book and developmental checklist record book and other documents that will be availed to the researcher by the class teachers to gain insights into policy issues to do with the curriculum, teaching and assessment of ECD learners and to get access to information about past learner behaviour and performances which can be compared with what will be happening in the classroom to track changes that took place and progress that was made. The study also involves the researcher in observing learning activities for a month at the sample schools and conducting semi-structured interviews with the class teachers who are the key informants after every week of observing lessons. The interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate capturing of data. Thematic analysis will be employed in data analysis.

It is anticipated that no risks or harm would befall the participants during the study and that findings of the research will provide significant insights into the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. An electronic copy of the research findings will be availed to the Ministry of Education and the sample schools.

I humbly request that permission to carry out the research study at three primary school as articulated above be granted.

Yours Sincerely

Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai

UNISA Student (Student number 67129633)

Appendix E: Consent Letter for The Parents

CONSENT FOR THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS (Return slip)

I, _____ (parent/guardian name), confirm that the person asking my consent for my child to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or has been explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information letter.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to have my child participate in the study.

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my child's participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree that my child attends ECD lessons which will be observed by this person at the school. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Parent/Guardian Name & Surname (please print) _____

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) _____

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix F: Participant's Information Sheet

Date :

Title: Investigating the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Early Childhood Development Education in Zimbabwe

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai and I am doing research under the supervision of Doc RRS Mphahlele, a Doctor in the Department of Early Childhood Education, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Investigating the effectiveness of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Early Childhood Development Education in Zimbabwe".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could lead to the proposal of a framework for the curriculum pedagogy and assessment in ECD which will inform curriculum designers and teachers on effective strategies to be used to develop learners.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are being invited to participate in the study as a primary school ECD teacher with experience in teaching and assisting learners at the infant level to develop the aspects necessary for holistic development in ECD. Your expertise and experience as a classroom practitioner at this level will provide rich data to inform the research on the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. The class which you teach was selected as the cultural group for this study, and automatically you become the key informant being the class teacher. I got your name and contact details from the Kadoma District Education Inspector. You are one the interviewees to provide detailed information for the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

This study is a multiple case study and it situates me as the researcher in the classroom setting where I will collect data through document analysis, lesson observations and interviews. I will be interested in observing learning activities that you teach. You will follow your normal timetable and conduct your lessons as usual. I will attend lessons as a non-participant observer and I will just be taking down field notes without disrupting normal proceedings. I will also conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews with you. A total of 5 interviews will be conducted; one at the

beginning of fieldwork before data collection and the rest will be done after every week of observing lessons. I will ask semi-structured questions related to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and you will be expected to respond freely to the questions. The interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes. I request that you grant me permission to audio-record the interviews. I will also request that you provide me with documents such as the class timetable, the scheme-cum-plan, developmental checklist record book and learners' portfolios, and other relevant documents which I will examine so as to gain insights into policy issues to do with the teaching and assessment of reading and to get information on past learner performances.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have the freedom to choose whether or not to participate in this study. You are also free to withdraw from the study should you decide to do so any time during the course of data collection. If you agree to participate in this study, I will request that you read and familiarize yourself with information herein and then sign a consent form.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could lead to the proposal of a framework for the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ECD. I will undertake an in-depth study of the process of curriculum implementation, pedagogical methods and assessment strategies as a case for my study so as to gain knowledge and understanding on how this is carried out in the ECD classrooms. This study therefore is crucial to illuminate the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies used by teachers in developing the aspects that are necessary for child development. The findings of the study will inform teachers on effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies to be used to enhance holistic development of ECD learners.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Besides having to put up with the presence of the researcher for a whole month as you deliver lessons as well as sparing time amidst your weekend schedules for interviews, it is anticipated that there are no risks or harm which you may incur for participating in the study.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You are assured of confidentiality and anonymity in this study. Your name will not be disclosed in this study and the information that you provide will not be associated with it. The data for the research will be used in the research report, conference presentations or publications, but your name will not appear in those, a pseudonym or a code will be used where reference to the interviewee is made. Your answers may however be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. The research report will be submitted for publications, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

All hard copies of field notes from document analyses, observations and interviews will be put in a folder which will be stored in a lockable cabinet in my office at Maranatha Christian School where I work. Electronic copies of the field notes and interview transcriptions will be filed and saved in folders according to sources on an external hard drive and on an encrypted Universal Serial Bus flash drive, and the same will also be saved on a compact disk. These data saving gadgets and the audio-recorder will also be secured together with hard copies of the field notes in a lockable steel cabinet at my workplace. I will abide by the UNISA Research policy to keep the data for five years after which I will incinerate hard copies of field notes and erase all electronic files from data saving gadgets.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be remunerated or receive incentives for participating in this study since there is no funding for the research and you will not incur any costs relatable to the study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

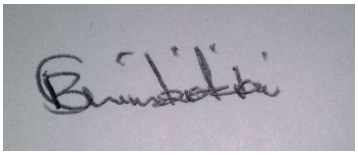
The Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, UNISA has given me approval in writing to conduct the research. Should you wish to see a copy of the approval letter, I can avail it to you.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai on +263773002508 or chimbidzikaib@gmail.com. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact me on +263773002508 on chimbidzikaib@gmail.com. If you have questions about this study or concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may conduct Doctor S Mphahlele, Department of Early Childhood Development, College of Education, University of South Africa on +27738987987 or at Emphahrs@unisa.ac.za.

I thank you for taking time to go through this information sheet and for agreeing to participate in this study.

Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai



UNISA Student (Student number 67129633)

Appendix G: A Sample of Document Analysis Form

DOCUMENTS TO BE ANALYSED	ASPECTS FOR ANALYSIS	OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS
Timetable	-Total number of learning activities on the timetable - Duration of the lesson	
School syllabus	-Availability of the school syllabus	

	-Teaching and assessment, aims and objectives -Relatedness of topics selected and sequenced for the term -Content breakdown -Methodologies -Assessment strategies -Resources	
Scheme-cum-plan	-Topic/content -Aims and objectives -Activities for learning and assessment -Teaching methods used -Resources-learning aids and content material -Assessment strategies used -Evaluation – comments	
Developmental Checklist record book	-Aspects taught and assessed -Frequency of administering assessments -Teacher's comments on learner performance -Intervention strategies employed to assist learners facing challenges	

Appendix H: A Sample of Lesson Observation Checklist

Date of observation:

Lesson period:

Observations will be recorded in accordance with headings in the table below.

Activity	Observations
Aspects component(s) and skills to be developed	
Objectives covered	
Previous knowledge/assumptions	
Teaching method(s) employed	
Resources used	
Play activities	
Learner participation and classroom interaction	
Catering for diverse needs of learners during teaching	
Assessment strategies used	
Teacher interpretation and use of assessment data	

Catering for diverse needs of learners during learning	
Any other observations	

Comments

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

Appendix I: A Sample of Interview Schedule Transcript

I thank you very much for your cooperation in agreeing to participate in this study as the sole interviewee. The questions in this interviewee guide are meant to solicit your views on the effectiveness of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in enhancing the aspects of development in ECD. I kindly request you to feel free to respond to all questions and to give honest responses. Your input will go a long way in providing useful information on effective curriculum, teaching methods and assessment practices in the ECD classroom.

Section A

Preliminary interview questions

1. What is your mother tongue?

2. What are your professional qualifications?

3. For how long have you been teaching ECD?

4. What percentage of learners in your ECD class use their home language?

5. Is the lesson time allocated for each learning activity adequate?

6. Can you briefly tell me about learner characteristics in terms of abilities and pre-school exposure.

7. Are there any challenges that you encounter in teaching the ECD learners

Section B

Post-observation interview questions

1. What was your rationale for enhancing the aspects of development during the past week?

2. What teaching strategies did you use during the past week? Why did you choose to use those strategies?

3. How often do you use these strategies?

4. In what way did the strategies used cater for learner diversity?

5. To what extent do you think the strategies used were effective in relation to your choice of components taught?

6. What kind of feedback did you get from the assessment strategies used?

7. How effective were the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies that you used in giving feedback to you and the learners?

9. How did you address the diverse needs of learners in assessments?

10. What challenges did you experience in the teaching of the curriculum and assessment of child aspects during the past week?

11. In your view how best can the development of the child aspects be enhanced?

12. Is there anything concerning the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that you wish to discuss with the researcher?

Thank you for committing your time to respond to questions during this interview session. I am grateful for your cooperation in contributing invaluable information for this study.

**These interview questions are provided as guidelines to control the discourse between the researcher and the interviewee. I will remain flexible in asking these questions and may be prompted by observations made to modify questions or formulate new ones in order to get further clarifications and explanations from the interviewee.*

Appendix J: Turnitin Certificate

Similarity Report

PAPER NAME	AUTHOR
67129633 Final Thesis .docx	**BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI**

WORD COUNT	CHARACTER COUNT
71045 Words	**440474 Characters**
PAGE COUNT	FILE SIZE
239 Pages	**2.7MB**
SUBMISSION DATE	REPORT DATE
Feb 16, 2026 4:15 PM GMT+2	**Feb 16, 2026 4:19 PM GMT+2**

27% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

- 14% Internet database
- 22% Publications database
- Crossref database
- Crossref Posted Content database
- 14% Submitted Works database

Excluded from Similarity Report

- Manually excluded sources

Open Rubric

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

by

BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

in the

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF RSS MPHAHLELE

SEPTEMBER 2025

DECLARATION

NAME: BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI

STUDENT NUMBER: 67129633

QUALIFICATION: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

TITLE: INVESTIGATING THE CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE

This thesis is an original work of **Blessings Svodai Chimbidzikai.** It has not been showcased at any academic institution, and all **used** or **cited** sources have been appropriately acknowledged in the reference list. **She** also **confirms** that **she entered** the thesis through Turnitin to **certify** that it **mollifies** the established standards for originality of the University of South Africa.

Signature: 

Date: September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I am very grateful to my supervisor, Prof Ramashego Shila Mphahlele, for the mentorship, the focus and the encouragement she offered for this research to be completed. Her knowledge, astute criticism, unshakeable commitment and supervision have improved the calibre of this work and elevated my academic and work experiences, for which I am sincerely thankful. Your loss of sleep over this research is greatly appreciated, I salute you Prof Mphahlele.

I am also greatly indebted to the UNISA student Bursary Fund for the financial assistance that enabled me to complete this research.

My gratitude also goes to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Mr Mhike for granting me permission to carry out this research. In addition, I thank all the heads of different schools who allowed their educators to participate in this study.

I sincerely appreciate the educators who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their time, knowledge and expertise played a crucial role in advancing our understanding of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment in Early Childhood Development. Their thoughtful contributions have contributed significantly to developing and refining the findings presented in this work.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr Nicky Tjano for invaluable assistance in editing and refining this thesis. Her meticulous attention to detail, insightful feedback and dedication to ensuring clarity and coherence have greatly enhanced the quality of this work.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my mother, Doctor Gamuchirai Charumbira, whose expertise, unwavering support and priceless guidance have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of this study.

To my children, Praise Rudaviro, Tafadzwa and Princess Kelly, tie up your shoes, tighten your belts and follow on this academic path. Yes, you can.

Lastly, Glory is to the Heavens for seeing me through this research. God's grace has consistently given me consolation and certainty, reminding me of the bigger picture beyond my academic achievements, God, you are my God.

Appendix K: Language Editing Cetificate



Contact number:0839383265
Whatsapp:0658888129
Email: rbrtncky@yahoo.com

This serves to confirm that we've duly edited a **Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Development** *titled*:

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

by

BLESSINGS SVODAI CHIMBIDZIKAI

UNISA

Balican Consulting Solutions is a professional language and technical editing academy, and our clients include students from University of South Africa (UNISA), Wits, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Mancosa, Unisa School of Business leadership (SBL), GIBS, and various other entities in South Africa.

NB! All editing and technical formatting are executed with recommended Track Changes on the Microsoft Word processor, and we therefore have no control or influence over what the author accepts or rejects. Furthermore, we have no control over additional text done at a later stage.

Should there be any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us on the details provided above.

Yours sincerely
Dr RN Tjano

22/01/2026
Balican Consulting Solutions!

Open Rubric