



Full Length Research Paper

Implementing early childhood education in a rural primary school in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe: A view from the school head

*¹Ezron Mangwaya, ²Sylvan Blignaut and ²Shervani Pillay

¹Department of Educational Foundations, Midlands State University, Gweru Zimbabwe.

²School for Education Research and Engagement, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth South Africa.

Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on early childhood education implementation in a rural primary school in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. Adopting the case study research design, the article explores, through a semi-structured interview, a school head's perceptions of a rural primary school's state of readiness for the implementation of early childhood education. The study established that the school head was not prepared (inducted) for the introduction and implementation of early childhood education, early childhood education was taught by paraprofessionals and early childhood education was implemented with little or no resources. Consequently the teaching of early childhood education left a lot to be desired. The study recommends interventions that curriculum policy planners can utilize in order to create conditions that enable rural primary schools to be ready for installing, implementing and institutionalising early childhood education.

Keywords: School head, state of readiness, implementation, paraprofessionals, rural primary school.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all sub-Saharan countries have been involved in educational reforms, particularly in the introduction of new educational programmes (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008). While new programmes may have laudible aims, their implementation has not always measured up to expectations. There is now a common acknowledgement that policy makers need to view implementation as a critical stage and understand that all stages of the reform process are interdependent (O'Sullivan, 2002). Similar to other sub-Saharan countries, Zimbabwe has engaged in various educational reforms since independence in 1980. These reforms have largely been introduced as a result of recommendations from commissions of enquiry.

The Nziramasanga commission (1999) is one such driving force behind current education reform in Zimbabwe. One of the terms of reference (T.O.R.) of this commission was to identify areas in education and train-

ing that required long to short term reform. The commission identified early childhood education (T.O.R. 2.1.2) as a decisive area where the foundation of the basic principles and philosophy of Zimbabwe's education system was to be laid. This identification was premised on the commission's observation that there was an uneven distribution of early childhood education (e.c.e.) facilities between urban and rural schools. Additionally, because e.c.e. was provided by many varied stakeholders, the quality of e.c.e. largely depended on the provider's resource capacity. A new curriculum, planned by the Curriculum Development Unit (C.D.U.) was, through circular 14 of 2004, thus mandated to be introduced in all primary schools with effect from January 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2004). Circulars and mandates are tools used within the technical-rational/fidelity perspective of curriculum implementation. This article explores a school head's perceptions of a rural primary school's state of readiness for the implementation of e.c.e. in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. The school head's perceptions are better understood within the context of the implementation perspective adopted by a country.

*Corresponding Author E-mail: mangwayae@msu.ac.zw

Technical-rational/fidelity perspective

Since the mid-1970s implementation has been largely viewed through the fidelity/ technical – rational perspective (Fullan, 2007). As a country, Zimbabwe makes use of this perspective both in curriculum planning as well as in curriculum implementation. A brief tour of this perspective may thus assist us to understand e.c.e. implementation in a rural primary school in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. The technical-rational perspective, also known as the fidelity perspective, has been the most extensively used approach to understanding policy and programme implementation. The perspective places a premium on planning, organisation, coordination and control. A key presumption underlying this perspective is that “...authority and responsibility should flow in an unbroken line from the highest executive to the lowest operative” (Smits et al., 2010:241). This exemplifies what Elmore (2004) called forward mapping. The problem posed by this view of curriculum policy implementation is that it assumes that policy makers control the organisation as well as the political and technical processes that affect implementation. In this view the causal arrow of change travels in one direction – from active, thoughtful designers to passive, pragmatic implementers (Rogan and Grayson, 2003).

Tending to be top-down oriented, the technical-rational perspective attends to the administrative and procedural aspects of policy implementation while ignoring or downplaying the influence of context. Consequently, studies utilizing this perspective are likely to view local variation in implementation as a dilemma rather than as inevitable or potentially desirable (Snyder et al., 2002). In this perspective implementation is measured according to an objectified standard: fidelity to policy design. Furthermore, because it treats policy design and implementation as two distinct processes, it also neglects to assess the degree to which political and ideological differences embedded within the overall policy development affect policy implementation (Malen, 2006). Since the design phase is often left unproblematized, the failure of policy is placed on the implementation stage rather than the formulation of policy itself. There is an assumption in the implementation literature that execution, not the formulation of policy, is the root of unsuccessful outcomes; yet the formulation of policy can also be based on false or incomplete assumptions or understanding about the nature of the change, the curriculum, instruction and so forth (Ornstein et al., 2011). To be sure, it should be pointed out that there is an important distinction between successful policy execution and successful outcomes. A policy can be successfully implemented in terms of fidelity to procedures but executing policy faithfully does not mean that it will produce intended outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study makes use of a case study research design. A case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a programme (like early childhood education), an institution, a person, a process or a social unit. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, (the case), this design aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study, which is also known as an examination of an instance in action or interpretation in context is described by Bassey (1999:36) as an inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.” In this study, which adopted purposive sampling, the phenomenon that is being investigated is the school head’s perceptions of the rural primary school’s state of readiness for the implementation of early childhood education. E.c.e. was introduced in a particular context, namely primary schools. It is thus imperative to investigate what the gate-keeper (school head) says about his school’s state of preparedness for this innovation. To investigate the school head’ views this study relied on interviews and observations.

FINDINGS

School background

Established in 1944, this school, referred to as Charlie Pride in this study (pseudonym), is situated in the heart of Gweru rural district. While the rural district council has nominal jurisdiction over the school, parents in the local community are responsible for all school development activities. These parents depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. The school uses two store rooms as offices for the head and the deputy head. The teacher-in-charge (T.I.C.) – a teacher who supervises programmes and activities at early childhood level- does not have an office.

The school enrolls two classes for each grade from grade one to seven. It has fourteen classrooms and one additional storeroom which e.c.e. learners use when it is either raining or it is very cold. Under normal weather conditions e.c.e. pupils permanently learn under trees in the school playground. The staff complements stands at eighteen including the head, deputy head and the T.I.C. The T.I.C. teaches grade two. Included in the staff compliment are two specialist teachers, namely, one for Music and the other for Art Education. The school enrolment currently stands at eight hundred and fifteen pupils. Of these sixty five are e.c.e. pupils taught by two paraprofessionals.

School head's perceptions on state of readiness

I begin this section by describing the school head. The head is a forty eight year old male whose home language is Shona (a vernacular language). He holds a Master of Education degree in Sociology. He has taught in various primary schools for twenty two years, rising to the position of substantive head of Charlie Pride (a pseudonym) school in 2007. Before 2007 he was a substantive deputy head of a school which is not Charlie Pride. For all the years that he has been in the teaching profession, he has taught in rural schools.

Before commencing the interview the head asked me to wait for a while outside his 'office' as he wanted to attend to two members of the school development association who had just arrived. I took this opportunity to go round the school yard making observations. After a while the head came looking for me and we got into the 'office'. As soon as we settled down I introduced the subject of the interview. Immediately the school head indicated that he was only going to be able to respond to e.c.e. issues as they occurred from 2007 onwards. I understood the head's concerns since before 2007 he was not at Charlie Pride School. Thereafter we agreed to use English as a medium of communication in the interview.

The first question I posed to the school head was "How would you describe the state of e.c.e. at your school?" His response was:

At this school we have sixty five e.c.e. learners who have been divided into two classes taught by two paraprofessionals. To be honest, I am not sure whether I will be able to justify the existence of the two classes to an external person. We do not have classrooms, and teaching/learning materials for these learners. Parents depend on subsistence farming for their survival. Currently parents cannot even feed themselves. They have relied on food provisions from N.G.O.s for the last three years. We do not expect them to be able to raise fees and levies. In short, the state of e.c.e. is not encouraging.

(Interview, October 2010).

The school head's comments portray that very little is happening with respect to the implementation of e.c.e. at Charlie Pride School. Probed on what he meant by "I will not be able to justify the existence of the two classes to an external person," the head pointed out that if the district education officer (D.E.O) were to pay a visit to Charlie Pride he would have no option but to ask the school to suspend the programme. The school head attributes the deplorable state of e.c.e. at his school to parents' inability to raise fees and levies. According to the school head, families which constitute Charlie Pride's catchment area currently depend on non-governmental organisations (N.G.O.s) for food hand outs. Hence instead of focusing on improving e.c.e. their focus is on

basic survival needs. Asked how the state of e.c.e. at his school had gone so low when the Ministry of Education had organised capacity building workshops for school heads, T.I.C. and e.c.e. teachers, the head responded by saying that to his knowledge no such workshops had been arranged for school heads. He further remarked that the only time school heads talked about e.c.e. was (as his former head had reported in a meeting) when the D.E.O. distributed copies of a circular on the introduction of e.c.e. to school heads. I quote him verbatim: "We cannot say that school heads were ever prepared for the introduction of this innovation. They were just expected to deal with this group of learners in the same way they deal with other primary school classes." Asked how school heads should have been prepared for this innovation, he suggested that when introducing a programme that is implemented across the country it may be necessary to begin by holding a national conference of school heads. Such an approach, in the school head's view, could have laid a solid foundation for the introduction of this innovation.

Shifting attention from how school heads were prepared for e.c.e., I asked the head to comment on the availability of appropriate resources for use by early childhood learners at this school and this is what he had to say:

The school is one of the oldest, if not the oldest in this area. It looks like many people do not like to invest in an old school... (laughs). Seriously, the school does not have classrooms and furniture for e.c.e. pupils. We used to have a few picture reading books but now we do not have any. Children are supposed to draw everyday but stocks of newsprint can only allow them to draw twice per week. E.c.e. teachers would like the school to buy a teaching kit produced by Longmans but we do not have the money. We do not have swings, seesaws, slides and all other equipment which is found at a play centre. So you can see...our e.c.e. teachers and pupils operate in an environment devoid of essential teaching/learning resources.

(Interview, October 2010).

Getting to Charlie Pride every visitor cannot miss the beautiful sign post erected at the school entrance. At the bottom of the sign post is inscribed "Established 1944." It is indeed an old school and the classroom blocks tell the full story. Most of them have cracks and the roof on one block of classrooms needs attention if it is to avoid being a danger to pupils. The head's response, on availability of appropriate resources, points to lack of classrooms for e.c.e. learners. Asked what plans the school has with respect to constructing classrooms for e.c.e. learners the school head said:

As a school administration we are failing to repair the classrooms we currently have. That in itself shows that, unless we get a donor, we might not be able to put up structures for e.c.e. We have

discussed the issue with parents but considering that parents are failing to pay current fees and levies it would be pointless to ask them to contribute towards the construction of additional e.c.e. classrooms.

(Interview, October 2010).

From the foregoing there are no chances, at least in the short term, that e.c.e. learners at Charlie Pride will get classrooms of their own. Pressed on the issue of donors which he alluded to in his response, the school head indicated that the school administration had approached the daughter of a local chief, based in the United Kingdom, to source funds to put up e.c.e. structures. In turn the chief's daughter, who had been invited to Charlie Pride, took photos of e.c.e. pupils sitting under a tree so that she could use the photos to appeal to donors to fund the construction of e.c.e. classrooms at Charlie Pride School. There were, however, no signed agreements or time lines set for this possible funding. Notwithstanding the preceding comment the school head seemed to believe strongly that the proposed funding will materialise. For now, the reality is that e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride learn under trees in the open school playground.

Responding to a question on whether e.c.e. pupils have toilets exclusively set aside for them, the school head highlighted that while no such arrangement was currently in place he hoped that by the end of the year (2010) e.c.e. pupils would have their own toilets. Asked how this is possible when parents are not able to pay fees and levies the school head indicated that parents who could not pay fees were given two options, namely, some were asked to dig the toilet pit and others were asked to mould bricks. At the time of my field work at Charlie Pride I established that a deep toilet pit had been dug and about ten thousand bricks had been moulded. For roofing the school was planning to use gum poles from the school plantation and asbestos sheets which had not been severely damaged when a hailstorm destroyed the roof of one classroom block at Charlie Pride School. It can thus be assumed that, all things being normal, e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride may be able to use toilets exclusively set aside for them in the not too distant future.

Indoor teaching/learning resources are an important ingredient in the education of e.c.e. learners. These include, but are not restricted to, picture reading books, hoops, balls, learning kits, manila, magic markers, pencils, crayons, newsprint and drawing books. The availability of such resources enhances teaching and learning at this level of the primary school. Responding to a question on what indoor teaching/learning materials are available for use by e.c.e. teachers and pupils at this school, the school head stated that only plastic balls and ropes were available. According to the school head each grade zero pupil was asked to bring a ball and a rope from home. One other resource that is available is

newsprint. The school buys newsprint for use by the administration. It is from this allocation that e.c.e. pupils get a share. E.c.e. classes at Charlie Pride do not have picture reading books, teaching/learning kits, drawing books, manila and hoops which are essential to facilitate learning through play.

On outdoor teaching/learning materials, except for the football and netball pitches, where e.c.e. pupils can run and do exercises there are no other teaching/learning materials which these learners can use. The school does not have a play centre. I had established this point when the school head asked me to remain outside the 'office' when he attended to two, staff development association members. From the preceding description it appears that Charlie Pride is not yet ready for the introduction of e.c.e. with respect to availability of resources.

Besides resources, effective implementation of a programme, like e.c.e. is also dependent on the quality, amount and level of support provided to implementers. In any curriculum innovation, teachers, who are the foot soldiers in educational practice, need to be supported. Responding to the question, "What forms of support are provided to e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride?" this is what the school head said:

Since arriving at this school one workshop has been mounted for the T.I.C. and e.c.e. teachers. Permission has been granted for these to attend the workshops. I consider this as one way of supporting them. As noted earlier the two teachers we have are paraprofessionals and so we encourage them to register for 'O' level so that they can eventually end up in teacher training colleges to become qualified e.c.e. teachers. In fact, one of them has registered to write English and I am teaching her. I mark her English exercises without charging her. In addition the T.I.C. supervises these teachers as one way of providing support but its not as frequent as we would want.

(Interview, October 2010).

One form of support identified by the head is granting the T.I.C. and e.c.e. teachers permission to attend workshops organised by the district education office. Pressed on how this is a form of support, the school head pointed out that since these teachers are paraprofessionals, workshops would shed light on how teachers are supposed to operate when interacting with learners at that level. The school head acknowledges, however, that no follow up school-based workshops or staff development has ever been arranged.

Another form of support from the school head's point of view is encouragement of paraprofessionals to complete 'O' level with a view to later training as e.c.e. teachers. According to the school head, ever since this encouragement, the T.I.C. reports that paraprofessionals have developed in confidence when handling teaching and learning at e.c.e. level. They have suddenly realised that they are valued by the school administration hence

whenever they are in doubt they find out from the T.I.C. According to the school head this change of attitude and disposition is a direct result of the support rendered to the paraprofessionals who teach e.c.e. at Charlie Pride School.

Teacher supervision has been identified as another form of support provided to e.c.e. teachers. From the school head's point of view supervision assists, among other things, in the identification of an individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses. At Charlie Pride the T.I.C. usually discusses her observations with e.c.e. teachers. Such an approach to teacher supervision enables the supervisor and the supervisee to exchange ideas. It also enables the supervisee to seek clarification on issues raised in the supervision report. Looked at this way, as the school head pointed out, supervision becomes a useful way of supporting e.c.e. teachers.

Rivkin et al. (1998) observe that pupils learn more from experienced teachers than they do from less experienced ones. It is thus pertinent that the state of preparedness of e.c.e. teachers at Charlie Pride be explored so as to establish the school's state of readiness in this respect. To investigate this issue I asked the school head to comment on when the paraprofessionals were engaged, their educational qualifications and teaching experience. The school head pulled out a school log book and turned to the section on staff lists. He then showed me that the paraprofessionals had been engaged at different times. One of them was engaged in 2007 when the programme was introduced and the other was appointed in January 2009. At the time of conducting this study one paraprofessional was in her fourth year of teaching while the other was in her second year. Turning to the section in the log book indicating staff qualifications I was able to establish that the two paraprofessionals have an academic education of 'O' level. One had passed three subjects and the other had passed four subjects.

Evident from the above description is that none of the two paraprofessionals had studied how pupils at e.c.e. are taught and/or how teaching, in general, is conducted. Asked to comment on why Charlie Pride was not attracting qualified early childhood education teachers when the school is only thirty kilometres out of town and is serviced by a regular transport system the school head indicated that the first graduates from early childhood teacher education programmes were deployed into schools at the beginning of 2009. According to the school head, teacher training colleges are not producing many such teachers hence urban schools tend to attract these teachers more than rural schools. Given the above state of readiness of e.c.e. teachers, it is evident that Charlie Pride School is not yet ready for the introduction of this innovation.

Besides teacher state of preparedness, it is also important to establish the quality of teaching and learning e.c.e. pupils at Charlie Pride are subjected to as an indi-

cator of the school's state of readiness. Describing e.c.e. teaching and learning the school head highlighted the following:

- e.c.e. lessons are time tabled
- e.c.e. pupils have most of their lessons under trees in the play ground
- e.c.e. teachers draw up schemes of work and lesson plans from the E.C.E.C. syllabus and a textbook entitled "*Learning through play*," and
- the T.I.C. assists paraprofessionals to scheme, plan and teach.

Probed on what arrangements e.c.e. teachers make to enable them to handle indoor activities under trees, the school head pointed out that while these teachers have a time table they do not strictly adhere to it given conditions at their school. According to the head, it is expected by the district education office that there be time tables for this group of learners hence the school has one. The school head directed me to the T.I.C.'s grade two class if I wanted to have a look at the early childhood education time table. E.c.e. teachers at this school, who are paraprofessionals, mostly engage pupils in playing games and storytelling. Further probing on whether the e.c.e. syllabus content is ever fully covered, the school head was quick to point out that while some content was covered conditions in his school militated against full implementation of the e.c.e. curriculum. He went further to indicate that even the assistance rendered to paraprofessionals by the T.I.C. was minimal because the T.I.C. has a full teaching load.

From the foregoing it may be discerned that the school head is acknowledging that the quality of teaching and learning at e.c.e. level leaves a lot to be desired. The school head, however, justifies this lack of effective teaching on, among other factors, lack of classrooms, lack of qualified e.c.e. teachers and a teaching T.I.C. From the school head's perceptions, Charlie Pride School cannot be said to be ready for the introduction of this innovation with respect to the quality of teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above description it is evident that the rural school head was made aware of the introduction of early childhood education through a circular distributed by the District Education Officer (D.E.O). It is not uncommon that in centralized education systems, like in Zimbabwe, Ministry of Education policies are disseminated as directives or circulars that must be implemented without fail, in the schools. While such an approach to curriculum policy dissemination may ensure compliance, Ministry of Education officials should take into account the extent to which policy implementers have been prepared to operationalize the policy.

The technical-rational/fidelity perspective was adopted to implement early childhood education in all Zimbabwean primary schools, including rural schools. Tending to be top-down oriented the perspective focuses on administrative and procedural aspects while down playing the influence of context. Early childhood education was to be implemented in schools and the school head is a key player in this context. He, therefore, needed to be adequately prepared for the introduction of this innovation. Other than the announcement made by the D.E.O. the rural school head received no other preparation or training for executing his new roles. The school head was expected to supervise new early childhood education classes but as he aptly described his situation “I wonder how I am expected to supervise additional classes when I do not know how to handle these classes.” While the Ministry of Education expected the school head to introduce, manage and supervise these classes without preparation the school head, on the other hand suggested, in the interview that he required conferences, workshops and seminars on early childhood education well before the innovation was introduced in schools. According to the school head “I cannot say that I was ever prepared for the introduction of this innovation. I was just expected to deal with this group of learners in the same way I deal with other primary school classes.”

The above perceptions by the school head confirm the observation that in the fidelity perspective policy makers need to consider and plan for the implementation stage if reforms are to be successful. Indeed policy makers need to view implementation as a critical stage and understand all stages of the reform process as interdependent rather than as distinct from each other. Such an approach could have ensured that the policy on early childhood education was fully explained to the rural school head before it was implemented in schools. In the context of this study, to borrow Rogan’s (2007) terminology, the attention and energies of policy makers focussed more on the “what” of the desired curriculum change (introduction of e.c.e.) and neglected the “how” as shall be further shown in the next section of this discussion.

According to Fullan (2007) the principal (school head) is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas. The school head thus ensures that external plans, like the introduction of e.c.e. are implemented in the schools. If the school head is not prepared for innovation introduction he will not be able to facilitate and manage its implementation. In this study it would appear that the school head was expected to implement early childhood education without having been prepared for it. If indeed policy has to be put into practice and implemented fully, the Ministry of Education should have taken into account that policies are not transmitted in a vacuum by ensuring that the school head, was given a clear idea of the new behaviours required of him. Evident from the study is the fact that the rural school head was not clear about what he was expected to do

differently – what the change meant for him in practice. At least in the initial implementation of the early childhood education programme the school head should have been provided with concrete and tangible plans of how he was expected to operate as a way of providing clarity on the innovation. This need for clarity by the school head can be interpreted as an expression of a feeling of role ambiguity in a situation of uncertainty produced by new challenges of the innovation (e.c.e.) on the one hand and by his lack of competencies on the other.

Fullan (2007) adds to this key imperative of innovation clarity when he posits that the principal, (school head) should be a leader and facilitator in the implementation of curriculum guidelines. Within the school organisation, institutional leadership is critical in creating a cultural context that fosters innovation and helps in establishing organisational strategy, structure, and systems that facilitate innovation implementation. In fact, there is a growing acceptance that innovations in an organisation require a special kind of supportive leadership (Roberts, 2004). Other researchers contend that different stages of the innovation would require different types of leadership, for example the initiating phase would require a nurturing type of leadership while the implementation phase would require a championing type. An amplification of the above point by Donaldson (2001), which I fully subscribe to, is that effective school leadership mobilizes for moral support by fostering open, trusting, affirmative relationships, a commitment to mutual purposes and moral benefit and a shared belief in action-in-common. The school head, as observed by Leithwood (1992), thus supports and pushes development, creates and facilitates structures and monitors teacher commitment. A school head who is able to demonstrate the preceding qualities and capabilities clearly understands his roles in new innovation implementation. In this case study, because he was not given any preparation for the introduction of e.c.e., the school head was not able to provide leadership to the T.I.C. and the paraprofessionals who taught early childhood education classes at his school.

Put differently, the long term direction of a school is firmly the responsibility of its leader (school head) who should be able to interpret and visualize policies, and create a future for other teachers to follow – a clear indication that, in a school context, policies are transmitted through the school head. Vision building and sharing by the school head has the effect of focusing students and teachers towards meeting the requirements of a new program like early childhood education. This means that the school head is expected to spell out the common goals of the envisioned future towards which early childhood education implementation should be directed. Vision building and sharing in the context of this study would be difficult to achieve considering that the school head was not given any preparation and support for implementing the early childhood education programme. The innovation was, however, likely to have

been better assimilated into the primary school structure had its meaning and implications been clearly understood and shared by all key participants in the education system, including the school head.

To shed some light on why some key stakeholders in the school system seem to be treated peripherally in centralized education systems, Karwoski (2011) asserts that curriculum planning, development and analysis are usually removed from the hands of practitioners (school heads, teachers-in-charge and ordinary teachers) on the basis of technical rationality. In this rationality thinking is removed from implementation and the implementer is taken as a mere technician. Such an approach is consistent with the fidelity perspective of innovation implementation where authority and responsibility flow in an unbroken line from the highest executive (policy makers and planners) to the lowest operative (teachers) (Smits et al., 2010). As pointed out elsewhere in this study, the perspective relies heavily on forward mapping. It is, therefore, not sensitive to the culture of schools or the daily lives of teachers. One observation that can be made about taking such a stance in the context of this study is that sidelining the school head who is not only a key actor but also a gatekeeper in the school situation did not lead to the effective implementation of early childhood education in the rural school. As this study clearly demonstrates, this is one illustration of a focus on the “what” of the desired curriculum change and a neglect of the “how.” Thus the distinction between the object of change and the process of change was not taken into account.

An examination of the school head’s biographical data indicates that he holds a Master of Education degree. The Ministry of Education continues to treat such a highly educated school head as a mere technician. I am of the view that if properly engaged, involved and utilised this school head might actually assist those in provincial and district education offices to clarify ministry circulars like the one distributed to school heads without explanation by the D.E.O. Indeed successful programme implementation requires the personal engagement of participants. Thus, adopting a mutual adaptation perspective (Malen, 2006) where implementation depended on how individuals within the local context interpreted and enacted curriculum policy was likely to have produced better results with respect to the involvement of the school head and his understanding of how early childhood education was to be implemented. Rather than a top-down hierarchical view of e.c.e. implementation mutual adaptation underscores the importance of bottom-up interpretations and responses to policy intentions.

Early childhood education is a second order change (Fullan, 2007). Whereas first order changes are meant to improve an existing system without substantially altering the way children and adults perform their roles, second order changes are fundamental in that they are system

changing (Morrison, 2008). Second order changes are multidimensional in that they embrace changes in curricular aims and objectives, functions, structures, skills, beliefs and roles (Morrison, 2008). Second order changes require investments in institutions and school personnel. Such changes require the involvement of people like school heads. The introduction of early childhood education required the creation of new structures, setting new goals as well as the learning of new skills and roles by the school head. Karwoski (2011) points out that the level of complexity of an innovation determines the amount and depth of preparation required for implementers. For the school head the introduction of early childhood education meant learning new roles, knowledge and new skills. It also meant the creation of new structures and the adoption of new goals in the primary school. The school head at Charlie Pride received no capacity building in preparation for the installation of early childhood education at his school. His own perceptions are clear on the causes of his shortcomings with respect to his school’s state of readiness for the introduction of this innovation. Early childhood education was indeed a complex change which required the school head to have been adequately prepared for it. This lack of preparation of the school head for his new roles implies that the e.c.e. change was going to be shallow. In this study, because the school head was not sure of what new behaviours were expected of him it was difficult for him to be an effective change agent with respect to the introduction of e.c.e.

The school head clearly points out that sixty-five e.c.e. learners do not have classrooms and operate in an environment devoid of essential teaching/learning resources. The bare ground represents the “chairs and desks” for early childhood learners at this school. While acknowledging that innovations do not require huge resource inputs, still some sort of adequate and appropriate teaching/learning resources are needed to implement innovations effectively. Charlie Pride, a rural primary school, does not have any resources. Operating in a fidelity perspective the school was expected to introduce e.c.e. just like all other schools in Zimbabwe. Had context been taken into account this school could have benefitted from a policy of positive discrimination where the introduction of e.c.e. was to be deferred until conditions on the ground were ripe enough for this innovation.

In behaviourist terms learning is a connection between stimuli and response. A good environment reinforces the efforts of the e.c.e. teacher by providing a good stimulus for effective teaching and learning. Such a stimulus is not only provided by ensuring good physical facilities like classrooms but also through provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor teaching/learning resources. The total development of e.c.e. learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning can only take place in an environment that is conducive to teaching and

learning. A good environment where good working facilities exist is thus a catalyst for effective teaching and learning. Comfortable facilities will not only boost the morale of e.c.e. teachers and learners but will also contribute to the realization of e.c.e. objectives. Resource conditions at Charlie Pride demonstrate that all typical features that contribute to effective e.c.e. teaching and learning are conspicuous by their absence. Although e.c.e. was introduced in 2006 in all primary schools Charlie Pride is a clear illustration of programme non implementation. Notwithstanding this, and in an attempt to satisfy the government directive (circular 14 of 2004), Charlie Pride had two e.c.e. classes at the time this study was conducted. This once more is a clear sign that educational planners did not take into account the constrained resource conditions in rural schools. They seemed to be more concerned with the object of change and not the process of change.

Teacher support at Charlie Pride was minimal because the school did not have adequate material resources. Additionally, the school head and the T.I.C. who were supposed to provide support did not have both the pedagogical knowledge as well as the pedagogical content knowledge to be able to professionally guide and support the paraprofessionals who taught e.c.e. learners at Charlie Pride. Paraprofessionals are individuals who have not been trained as e.c.e. teachers. As a result they needed to first understand the meaning of e.c.e. before they could implement it at Charlie Pride. According to the school head the quality of teaching and learning at this school left a lot to be desired.

Basing on the preceding observations and conclusions the study recommends that given the complexity and unpredictability of innovation implementation an initial piloting followed by progressive implementation of e.c.e. could have helped policy planners to identify some of the challenges primary schools experience as they struggle to, not only install but also to implement e.c.e. Additionally, in matters of policy implementation school heads need to be granted considerable attention. The clearer their roles in the implementation process the better since ambiguity is often experienced as a threat. As a result the school head should be amongst the first practitioners to be re-oriented, retrained and well informed about the introduction and implementation of new innovations, such as early childhood education in primary schools. Instituting pre-implementation programmes for school heads would go a long way towards developing programme ownership.

Curriculum policy implementation is shaped by broad forces of consultation of stakeholders on the nature and

direction of the change that is perceived to be desirable. Such dialogue fosters more commitment from school heads and gives them a sense of programme ownership. This study thus recommends that curriculum policy planners engage practitioners, like school heads as a way of ensuring that the phenomenology of change, that is, how they actually experience change, is taken care of in the process of implementation. Additionally, the Ministry of Education is recommended to provide adequate capacity development and material resources in order for all schools, including rural primary schools, to be ready for installing and implementing early childhood education.

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