EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MALAWI

CASE STUDY OF FOUR PRE-SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA DISTRICT

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the text of this thesis entitled EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MALAWI: CASE STUDY OF FOUR PRE-SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA DISTRICT is substantially my own work and has not been presented for any other award at the University of Malawi or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Early literacy is a key to all future learning for children in all environments, including pre-school and Early Childhood Development settings in general. However, the development of literacy has been challenging in Sub-Saharan Africa, and more specifically, Malawi. The thesis' main argument is that to a large extent, literacy development problems at primary school level have their roots in the way children are prepared before they join formal schooling. Consequently, any effort to develop literacy skills without the appreciation of the key role pre-primary learning experiences play is bound to be less effective in addressing issues of literacy development at school and the general societal level.

This case study examined the extent of provision of early literacy experiences in rural pre-schools in Malawi. To achieve this purpose, the study answered four major questions, namely: (1) What capacity do rural pre-schools have to help children to develop early literacy skills? (2) Do pre-school–community links exist between rural pre-schools and their immediate communities? If so, what influence do such links have on children's early literacy development? (3) What learning experiences do rural pre-schools provide to facilitate children's early literacy development? and (4) How appropriate are the learning experiences provided as far as early literacy development is concerned?

The study used case study design and utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods for collecting data. These included semi-structured interviews, observations, questionnaire and checklist.

The findings of the study suggest that provision of early learning experiences in the pre-school settings involved is inextricably linked to the contextual expectations of parents and guardians. Consequently, provision of early learning experiences was characterised by different layers of tensions, especially in terms of the roles of pre-schools in relation to the community and national ECD policy implementation. For instance, tensions exist between pre-schools and community expectations; pre-schools and the National ECD Policy intentions; and (though beyond the scope of this study) national and international ECD expectations, where the latter tend to hugely influence the national policy intentions.

The results have further shown that poverty, mainly in terms of household economic hardships threatening the survival of families, is a big issue and largely influences communities' and children's participation in ECD/pre-schooling in the rural areas, raising crucial questions of the extent to which many children may be benefiting from the pre-schools, given the fact that the majority of the rural communities may not take pre-schooling as a priority.

In terms of provision of actual early literacy experiences, the pre-schools involved in this study provided limited quality early literacy development opportunities. Although the results have shown that some attempt to create opportunities for early literacy development was made, there were many cases in which caregivers provided such

opportunities by "accident". This suggests that children may not be benefiting much from the general early learning experiences provided, since they are not exposed to deliberately-planned early literacy experiences as is generally expected in pre-school settings. Furthermore, the results show that lack of proper guidelines and general lack of human capacity at pre-school level have implications for early literacy development, as caregivers have difficulties meaningfully manipulating the environment for children's early literacy development.

In conclusion, the study makes a number of recommendations for the different levels of the pre-school/ECD system, such as at community level; the pre-school pedagogy (processes of teaching, care and learning); and at the national ECD level in terms of policy implementation.

DEDICATION

To God who holds my future and freely gives wisdom to succeed in life; to my family; and to the vulnerable children of Malawi who need hope for the future; and to all those working towards the improvement of children's lives all over the world.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract v

Dedication viii

Acknowledgements ix

Chapter 1 Introduction and Background Information **1**

1.0 Chapter overview 1

1.1 Contextual background to early childhood development in Malawi 1

1.1.1 General background to Malawi 1

1.1.2 An overview of the status of early childhood development in Malawi 4

1.2 Statement of the problem 23

1.3 Purpose of the study 24

1.4 Significance of the study 25

1.5 Limitations of the study 26

1.6 Definition of terms 27

1.7 Thesis structure 29

1.8 Chapter summary 30

Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature **31**

2.0 Chapter overview 31

2.1. Early childhood development in the global context 31

2.1.1 Early childhood development: complexities in ECD conceptions..... 34

2.1.2 Rationale for the provision of early childhood development..... 36

2.1.3 Theoretical frameworks to early childhood development..... 39

2.1.4 Rationale for and implementation of Integrated early childhood development..... 46

2.2 ECD policy development in the Sub-Saharan Africa..... 51

2.3 ECD policy issues in Malawi 55

2.3.1 ECD policy planning and implementation in Malawi..... 55

2.3.2 Framework of the national policy on ECD in Malawi..... 56

2.3.3 Orientation of ECD policy and practice in Malawi: developmentally appropriate or contextually appropriate?..... 64

2.3.4 Issues and implications of ECD national policy choices for Malawi..... 70

2.4 Early literacy development in pre-school settings..... 72

2.4.1 Definition of literacy..... 73

2.4.2 Centrality of early literacy development..... 79

2.4.3 Issues in early literacy development and the pre-school learning environment 84

2.4.4 Key components in the development of early literacy skills..... 89

2.5 Challenges to early literacy development in Malawi..... 90

2.6 Major issues and implications for early literacy development in different ECD contexts..... 95

2.7 Chapter summary..... 97

Chapter 3 Research Methodology..... 98

3.0 Chapter overview..... 98

3.1 Study design..... 98

3.1.1 Overall approach and rationale..... 100

3.2 Population of interest..... 103

3.3 Initial selection decisions Sampling)..... 103

3.3.1 Selection of pre-schools..... 104

3.3.2 Selection of parents and guardians..... 105

3.4 Access negotiations..... 106

3.5 Data collection..... 108

3.5.1 Qualitative interviews..... 108

3.5.2 Observations..... 110

3.5.3 Questionnaire..... 116

3.5.4 Checklist..... 118

3.6 Data management..... 119

3.7 Data analysis..... 120

3.7.1 Quantitative data analysis..... 123

3.7.2 Qualitative data analysis..... 123

3.7.3 Challenges of data analysis..... 127

3.8 Role of researcher 127

3.9 Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of the study..... 130

3.10 Ethical considerations 131

3.11 Chapter summary..... 134

Chapter 4 Results (a): The Context of the Research Sites 135

4.0. Chapter overview..... 135

4.1. The community around the four pre-schools..... 135

4.2 Organisation structure of the four pre-schools..... 136

4.3. General characteristics of the four pre-schools..... 138

4.3.1 Purposes of the four pre-schools..... 138

4.3.2 Pre-school A..... 140

4.3.3 Pre-school B..... 143

4.3.4 Pre-school C..... 145

4.3.5 Pre-school D..... 147

4.4. Summary of similarities and differences among the four pre-schools 149

4.5 Chapter summary..... 150

Chapter 5 Results (b): Capacity Issues and the Role of the Community..... 151

5.0 Chapter overview. 151

5.1 Community perceptions of pre-schooling. 151

5.1.1 Characteristics of parents and guardians involved in the study..... 152

5.1.2 Sending children to pre-school..... 154

5.1.3 Perceptions of the importance and role of pre-schools..... 157

5.1.4 Perceptions of the provision of opportunities for children's learning and development..... 159

5.2 Pre-school–community linkages: perceptions of specific roles by parents and guardians in the four pre-schools..... 163

5.2.1 Existence and necessity of pre-school–community links..... 163

5.2.2 The nature of pre-school–community links..... 165

5.2.3 Specific roles played by communities..... 169

5.3. Pre-school capacity: nature and level of resources in the four pre-schools. 171

5.3.1 Pre-school enrolments and attendance patterns..... 171

5.3.2 Staffing: recruitment, qualifications and training..... 180

5.3.3 Infrastructure and general facilities 191

5.3.4 Funding sources and challenges..... 202

5.4 Chapter summary. 204

Chapter 6 Results (c): Early Literacy Development Experiences 207

6.0 Chapter overview. 207

6.1 Overall daily organisation of care and education experiences in the four pre-schools 208

6.1.1 Preliminary activities in the four pre-schools..... 208

6.1.2 Main lesson activities (Part 1)..... 209

6.1.3 Break time activities 212

6.1.4 Main lesson activities (Part 2) 213

6.1.5 Medium of instruction during pre-school activities 215

6.2 Overall learning experiences provided in the four pre-schools..... 216

6.2.1 Learning experiences and attempt at holistic development of children..... 217

6.3 Early literacy development experiences provided in the four pre-schools 224

6.3.1 Alphabetic principle..... 228

6.3.2 Phonic awareness..... 233

6.3.3 Print awareness..... 235

6.3.4 Writing development..... 238

5.3. Pre-school capacity: nature and level of resources in the four pre-schools. 171

5.3.1 Pre-school enrolments and attendance patterns..... 171

5.3.2 Staffing: recruitment, qualifications and training..... 180

5.3.3 Infrastructure and general facilities 191

5.3.4 Funding sources and challenges..... 202

5.4 Chapter summary. 204

Chapter 6 Results (c): Early Literacy Development Experiences 207

6.0 Chapter overview. 207

6.1 Overall daily organisation of care and education experiences in the four pre-schools 208

6.1.1 Preliminary activities in the four pre-schools..... 208

6.1.2 Main lesson activities (Part 1)..... 209

6.1.3 Break time activities 212

6.1.4 Main lesson activities (Part 2) 213

6.1.5 Medium of instruction during pre-school activities 215

6.2 Overall learning experiences provided in the four pre-schools..... 216

6.2.1 Learning experiences and attempt at holistic development of children..... 217

6.3 Early literacy development experiences provided in the four pre-schools 224

6.3.1 Alphabetic principle..... 228

6.3.2 Phonic awareness..... 233

6.3.3 Print awareness..... 235

6.3.4 Writing development..... 238

5.3. Pre-school capacity: nature and level of resources in the four pre-schools. 171

5.3.1 Pre-school enrolments and attendance patterns..... 171

5.3.2 Staffing: recruitment, qualifications and training..... 180

5.3.3 Infrastructure and general facilities 191

5.3.4 Funding sources and challenges..... 202

5.4 Chapter summary. 204

Chapter 6 Results (c): Early Literacy Development Experiences 207

6.0 Chapter overview. 207

6.1 Overall daily organisation of care and education experiences in the four pre-schools 208

6.1.1 Preliminary activities in the four pre-schools..... 208

6.1.2 Main lesson activities (Part 1)..... 209

6.1.3 Break time activities 212

6.1.4 Main lesson activities (Part 2) 213

6.1.5 Medium of instruction during pre-school activities 215

6.2 Overall learning experiences provided in the four pre-schools..... 216

6.2.1 Learning experiences and attempt at holistic development of children..... 217

6.3 Early literacy development experiences provided in the four pre-schools 224

6.3.1 Alphabetic principle..... 228

6.3.2 Phonic awareness..... 233

6.3.3 Print awareness..... 235

6.3.4 Writing development..... 238

6.3.5 Oral language skills 247

6.4 Some key issues on provision of early literacy experiences in the four pre-schools 265

6.5 Chapter summary 268

Chapter 7 Summary, Conclusion and Implications 269

7.0 Chapter overview 269

7.1 Different layers of tension in the provision of early learning experiences 272

7.1.1 Pre-school versus community tension 275

7.1.2 Pre-school versus national ECD policy tension 276

7.1.3 Poverty as an issue: is community involvement a reality for holistic development of children? 277

7.2 Issues of early literacy experiences 279

7.2.1 Community participation in early learning and literacy development 280

7.3 Recommendations 281

7.3.1 Recommendations related to the community 282

7.3.2 Recommendations related to pre-school pedagogy: early literacy development 284

7.3.3 Recommendations related to policy documents and on information management system in general 288

7.4 Areas for further research 289

References 291

Appendices 314

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Types of ECD programmes in Malawi (0-8 years).....	12
Table 1.2	ECD provision by district as at July 2004 and September 2005.....	16
Table 1.3	Number of children participating in ECD in Malawi by district as at July 2004 and September 2005.....	18
Table 1.4	Number of ECD caregivers and training status by district as at July 2004 and September 2005.....	19
Table 1.5	Key players in ECD in Malawi.....	22
Table 2.1	Key documents on integrated early childhood development for Malawi.....	65
Table 2.2	Dimensions of language	78
Table 2.3	Five key components in early literacy development.....	90
Table 3.1	Qualitative interview participants.....	109
Table 3.2	Summary of the observations per pre-school.....	114
Table 4.1	Some general characteristics of the four rural pre-schools.....	139
Table 4.2	Similarities and differences among the four pre-schools (basic information at the time of the study).....	149
Table 5.1	Sex of respondents.....	152
Table 5.2	Level of education.....	153
Table 5.3	Respondents' religion.....	154
Table 5.4	Respondents' sources of support in meeting daily needs.....	154
Table 5.5	Sending and not sending children to pre-school.....	155
Table 5.6	Can or cannot send children to pre-school of another religion.....	156
Table 5.7	Reasons for sending children to pre-school run by another religion.....	156

Table 5.8	Reasons for NOT sending children to pre-school by another religions	157
Table 5.9	Communities' reasons for sending children to pre-school	158
Table 5.10	Communities' understanding on the establishment of the pre-school	158
Table 5.11	Communities' reasons for good preparation of children in the four pre-schools	160
Table 5.12	Whether pre-school–community link is necessary	164
Table 5.13	Why pre-school–community link is necessary	165
Table 5.14	Nature of pre-school–community links	166
Table 5.15	Specific roles played by communities	169
Table 5.16	Children's enrolment in the four rural pre-schools	172
Table 5.17	Challenges faced by parents and guardians in pre-schooling	173
Table 5.18	Caregiver: child ratios in the four rural pre-schools	181
Table 5.19	Knowledge of procedures and guidelines for pre-school staff recruitment	184
Table 5.20	Criteria for staff recruitment according to community members	184
Table 5.21	Caregivers' levels of education and training in the four rural pre-schools	186
Table 5.22	Summary of facilities in the four rural pre-schools	192
Table 6.1	Learning experiences employed at each pre-school and child development aspects emphasised	226
Table 6.2	Early literacy experiences employed at the four rural pre-schools according to the five key components in early literacy development	228
Table 6.3	Major activities for oral language skills development and pre-schools which employed them	248

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Integrated early childhood development	48
Figure 3.1	Data analysis process	122
Figure 3.2	Sample concept map during analysis	125
Figure 4.1	Organisation structure for CBOs in Pre-schools A, B, and C	137
Figure 4.2	Pre-school A classroom block	142
Figure 4.3	Part of Pre-school B classroom block	145
Figure 4.4	Pre-school C classroom block	146
Figure 4.5	Pre-school D premise (church building)	149
Figure 5.1	Age of respondents	153
Figure 6.1	Caregiver and children singing the Malawi National Anthem during assembly	210
Figure 6.2a	Pre-school A seating arrangement	211
Figure 6.2b	Pre-school B seating arrangement	211
Figure 6.2c	Pre-school C seating arrangement	212
Figure 6.2d	Pre-school D seating arrangement	212
Figure 6.3a	Caregiver helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school C	218
Figure 6.3b	Caregivers helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school D	218
Figure 6.4	Children eating together during break time at Pre-school A	219
Figure 6.5	Children reading from an alphabetic chart at Pre-school D	231
Figure 6.6	Children playing with books during break at Pre-school C	237
Figure 6.7	Children drawing on the ground at Pre-school A	239
Figure 6.8	A child writing numbers 1-20 on the chalkboard at Pre-school D	242

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Integrated early childhood development	48
Figure 3.1	Data analysis process	122
Figure 3.2	Sample concept map during analysis	125
Figure 4.1	Organisation structure for CBOs in Pre-schools A, B, and C	137
Figure 4.2	Pre-school A classroom block	142
Figure 4.3	Part of Pre-school B classroom block	145
Figure 4.4	Pre-school C classroom block	146
Figure 4.5	Pre-school D premise (church building)	149
Figure 5.1	Age of respondents	153
Figure 6.1	Caregiver and children singing the Malawi National Anthem during assembly	210
Figure 6.2a	Pre-school A seating arrangement	211
Figure 6.2b	Pre-school B seating arrangement	211
Figure 6.2c	Pre-school C seating arrangement	212
Figure 6.2d	Pre-school D seating arrangement	212
Figure 6.3a	Caregiver helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school C	218
Figure 6.3b	Caregivers helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school D	218
Figure 6.4	Children eating together during break time at Pre-school A	219
Figure 6.5	Children reading from an alphabetic chart at Pre-school D	231
Figure 6.6	Children playing with books during break at Pre-school C	237
Figure 6.7	Children drawing on the ground at Pre-school A	239
Figure 6.8	A child writing numbers 1-20 on the chalkboard at Pre-school D	242

Figure 6.9 Caregiver helping a child to write numbers on the chalkboard..... 243

Figure 7.1 Levels of tension in early learning provision in rural pre-schools..... 274

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1.1	Key aspects of Community Based Child Care (CBCC) in Malawi	13
Box 2.1	Descriptions/definitions of ECD	36
Box 2.2	Rationale/goals for ECD	37
Box 2.3	Contextual framework	44
Box 2.4	ADEA-WGECD guidelines on ECD policy formulation	54
Box 2.5	Malawi ECD national policy guiding principles	59
Box 2.6	Policy objectives	60
Box 2.7	Key principles in the delivery of ECD services as adopted by the IECD programme in Malawi	68
Box 5.1	Sharing concerns of pre-school affairs: some specific issues mentioned by parents and guardians	166
Box 5.2	Some specific roles played by parents and guardians	170
Box 6.1	Catalogue of all activities observed in the four rural pre-schools	225

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Questionnaire for parents and guardians	314
Appendix 2a	Interview schedule for pre-school directors and administrators.....	317
Appendix 2b	Interview schedule for caregivers	319
Appendix 2c	Interview schedule for policymakers and NGOs	321
Appendix 3a	Observation schedule	322
Appendix 3b	Video analysis tool	324
Appendix 4	Checklist	325
Appendix 5a	Permission letter to the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS).....	328
Appendix 5b	Permission letter to the District Social Welfare Office.....	329
Appendix 5c	Permission letter to pre-school directors	330
Appendix 5d	Letter from the MoGCS granting permission to carry out the study.....	331
Appendix 6	Catalogue of songs and nursery rhymes frequently sung in the four pre-schools during the study.....	332
Appendix 7a	Sample interview transcript (with caregiver- Chichewa version).....	334
Appendix 7b	Sample interview transcript (with caregiver-English version)	340
Appendix 8	Sample video transcript (on Pre-school D).....	346
Appendix 9	Strategies for promoting children's early literacy development (based on the five key components in early literacy development).....	351

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ADEA-WGECD	Association for the Development of Education in Africa – Working Group on Early Childhood Development
AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
APPM	Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi
CBCC-ECD	Community Based Child Care – Early Childhood Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Children
CSC	Christian Service Committee
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DSWO	District Social Welfare Office
ECCD	Early Childhood Care for Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECDVU	Early Childhood Development Virtual University
EFA	Education For All
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
FPE	Free Primary Education
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GoM	Government of Malawi
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

IEC	Information Education and Communication
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development
IEQ	Improving Educational Quality
IHS	Integrated Household Survey
IMCI	Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
MoGCS	Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services
MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population
MPRSP	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
NAC	National AIDS Commission
NEC	National Economic Council
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIECD	National Integrated Early Childhood Development
NSO	National Statistical Office
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
PIF	Policy Investment Framework
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RDC	Rural Development Centre
RQ	Research Question
SAAT	Southern African Aids Trust
SGD	Survival Growth and Development

TA	Traditional Authority
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCEFA	World Conference on Education For All

TA	Traditional Authority
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCEFA	World Conference on Education For All

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background Information

1.0 Chapter overview

Over the years, the development of literacy skills at both pre-primary and primary levels has not been easy for Malawi's education system. This is mainly due to lack of a properly organised and conducive environment for children, which would prepare them for more formal aspects of the education system. At primary school level, there is research evidence which suggests that the development of literacy is problematic, with schools in rural areas being the most disadvantaged. The main purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine opportunities for early literacy development that pre-schools in the rural areas of Malawi provide to 3-5 year-old children. This chapter begins with a discussion of the contextual background, followed by the statement of the problem, purpose, significance and limitations of the study.

1.1 Contextual background to early childhood development in Malawi

The first part of this section briefly presents the general background to Malawi in terms of its geography and population, socio-economic status and education structure. This is followed by an overview of the status of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Malawi. ECD is generally considered to subsume pre-school, as will be discussed later in the chapter and in Chapter 2.

1.1.1 General background to Malawi

Malawi lies to the south of the equator in Africa and has an estimated population of 12 million. The country is 901 kilometres in length and within a range of 80 to 161

kilometres in width. Administratively, Malawi is divided into three regions and has a total of 28 districts (6 in the Northern Region; 9 in the Central Region and 13 in the Southern Region). Each district is subdivided into Traditional Authorities (TAs) presided over by chiefs. The Traditional Authorities are further subdivided into villages, which are generally considered to be the smallest administrative units. The villages are presided over by village heads. Generally more formal pre-schools are found in urban areas, but recently attempts have been made to establish ECD centres in the villages as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Malawi, whose economy is predominantly agriculture-based, is among the 16 poorest countries of the world. According to the 1998 Integrated Household Survey (IHS), 63.3% of the population is poor[1] (in GoM, 2002). In terms of spatial distribution, generally poverty is considered to be more prevalent in the rural than the urban areas, where about 91% of Malawi's population is said to live (NSO, 2002). It has been estimated that 63.5% of the rural masses live in poverty compared to 54.9% for the urban population (GoM 2002). As will be discussed later in the thesis, poverty is an important issue in the context of ECD provision, and has huge bearing on the extent to which communities participate in the provision of early learning experiences (see Chapters 5 and 6).

According to the National Statistical Office (NSO, 2002), the adult literacy rate[2] in Malawi is at 61%, with the male adult literacy rate standing at 74%, and that of

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[1] The working definition of 'poverty' adopted by the Government of Malawi is that it is "a state of continuous deprivation or a lack of the basics of life", which include economic, social, psychological and physiological requirements (GoM, 2002, p.5).

[2] Adult literacy was defined as "the ability of the persons aged 15 years or more to read and write a simple statement in any language" (NSO, 2002, p. 10). It is claimed by NSO that adult respondents were asked to demonstrate literacy by reading from a card with a simple sentence in one of the three languages of Chichewa, Chitumbuka, and English. In 2002 EdData Survey, the following statement read from the card was: "Where do you get your drinking water?" (NSO, 2003, p.22).

female adults at 49%. Generally adult literacy levels were reported to be significantly higher in urban areas (91%) than rural areas (59%).

Malawi is among the countries most seriously affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Garbus, 2003; UNAIDS, 2004). According to the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2004), Malawi is the world's 8th hardest hit country with a prevalence rate of 14.2% at the end of 2003. This figure is within the estimated range reported by the Malawi National AIDS Commission (NAC), which puts HIV prevalence among adults of 15-49 years at 12-17% (NAC, 2003). This means that about seven hundred thousand to one million Malawians in the economically productive age group were infected with HIV at the time of the sentinel surveillance of 2003. Prevalence is higher in urban areas (19-28%) than rural areas (10-15%) (NAC, 2003, p.4). An increase in the number of orphans[3] in Malawi is one of the most serious consequences of AIDS deaths of men and women in their prime child-bearing ages. It is estimated that there are over 800 000 orphans in Malawi, 40% of which are due to death of their parents through AIDS. Also another 30 000 children are vulnerable mainly because of the sickness of one or both of their parents, who are therefore not able to properly care for them (NAC, 2003, MoGCS, 2003b).

In terms of the education system, Malawi uses an 8-4-4 system, that is, 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary and 4 years of tertiary education. The official age range for primary schooling is 6 to 13 years. Pre-schooling and adult classes are considered to be part of non-formal education (NSO, 2003) but recently there are some attempts being made to formalise it so that it becomes part of the formal education system (MoE, 2001).

Thus over the years the education system in Malawi has by default not formally recognised pre-schooling as one of the important levels in the basic education cycle, although this appears to be changing. According to Malawi DHS Education data survey of 2002, less than 10% of primary school going children (6-14 years) attended pre-school before starting primary school, spending an average of 1.7 years in pre-school. In urban areas, 39% of such children attended nursery school before starting primary school while only 6% of the children in rural areas did so (NSO, 2003, p.48). The following section presents more specific background to the status of pre-school/ECD in Malawi.

1.1.2 An overview of the status of early childhood development in Malawi

This section presents an overview of the status of ECD in Malawi, paying particular attention to the main drivers of ECD, issues of access, participation, technical and financial support to ECD in general. This is critical in order to bring more meaning to the discussion of the key issues in the remaining chapters.

1.1.2.1 Trends in pre-school development in Malawi

In Malawi, ECD in the form of Pre-school Play Groups was an initiative of Christian churches and other church-related organisations in the late 1960 in response to the needs of a few full-time employed women in the urban areas, who needed designated places for the care and recreation of their children while they were at work (Padambo *et al*, 1996; Padambo, 1986). The first pre-school was opened in 1966 at Blantyre Mission of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP). The number of pre-schools had increased in Blantyre and other towns by 1969, but lacked proper co-

[3] The Government of Malawi defines an orphan as a child under age of 18 that has lost one or both parents (MoGCS, 2003b, p.1).

ordination and direction. Consequently, collaborative efforts among various interested groups and organisations in Blantyre, such as the University of Malawi, the City of Blantyre, Blantyre Mission, and some Social Workers, led to the creation of a co-ordinating body known as the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Blantyre (APPB) in 1970. APPB was in 1974 renamed the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) (Padambo *et al*, 1996).

Apart from co-ordinating pre-school services in Malawi, the APPM's other roles included the training of child caregivers as well as mobilising communities on pre-schooling. At that time all these developments influenced the Malawi Government to recognise the need for pre-schooling, and therefore to some degree, in the 1970s it began to support activities related to the development of early childhood education through the then Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare. In general, however, the government of Malawi played a very low key role, as evidenced by the relatively low budgetary support of pre-schooling (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001). It should also be pointed out that at this stage, most of the pre-schools were operating in the urban areas and this was to have huge implications for the development of pre-schools in the rural areas.

The 1980s saw increased interest in pre-school development from international organisations, especially UNICEF, to help establish rural pre-schools in some parts of Malawi, through Rural Development Centres (RDC) such as Thekerani, Ekwendeni and Mponela. However, the rural pre-schools did not succeed due to lack of community sensitisation on the advantages of pre-schooling, as well as the fact that fees were attached to them. Nonetheless, the lessons from these attempts led to a number of surveys in various districts in order to determine the situation of the

children (see NSO, 2000; Evans, 1994; GoM & UNICEF, 2000b). It was therefore established that children's welfare was at risk due to poor health, poverty, huge domestic and farm demands, lack of education among parents and unfavourable childcare practices. Furthermore it was found that there were 1.4 million under-five children in Malawi, and that out of these 1.2 million lived in rural areas without access to pre-schools. Consequently in order to improve childcare, the Government of Malawi, through UNICEF, launched the Community Based Child Care (CBCC) Program in 1989 in three districts of Mzimba, Salima and Chikwawa. Once again, the child care centres in the three districts were not sustained, among other reasons due to lack of meaningful community involvement in running the child care centres (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001). However, with the increased negative impact of HIV/AIDS on Malawian communities, the idea of CBCC was to become an important element in the Government of Malawi's future strategies in child care in general, and early childhood development in particular.

Due to the HIV epidemic and the escalation in numbers of orphan children, the Government of Malawi's main strategy in handling the problem of orphans has been to promote and support community based programmes. Therefore the government by 1992 adopted a communal approach to orphan care (MoGCS, 2003b). CBCC, therefore became an important strategy for orphan care as communities and individuals began to establish their own CBCC centres. In 1999, UNICEF introduced a new approach to ECD called Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth and Development (ECC-SGD) (see Table 1.1). The focus of the new form of ECD was promotion of household and community child care practices using community dialogue strategy, in which caregivers were taught good child practices (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001). The project was piloted in rural areas of Mzimba, Kasungu, Lilongwe,

Mwanza and Blantyre. Chalamanda *et al* claim that various stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, private individuals and the communities in the five districts, were working together to implement the programme.

1.1.2.2 Overall driving forces to ECD in Malawi

In order to understand the development of pre-school education/ECD in Malawi, more specifically in the rural areas, it is important to look at a number of issues that have led to its emergence, such as the adoption of multiparty democracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and general international trends in the promotion of the welfare of children worldwide.

Malawi's adoption of multiparty democracy in 1994 resulted in the introduction of a free market economy which allowed private individuals and NGOs to participate in activities which were previously the monopoly of government and a few private individuals. This explains why after 1994 Malawi experienced an expansion in privately owned learning institutions, including pre-schools (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001). These private institutions are generally considered to be important to the expansion of education provision in Malawi (MoE & UNESCO, 2004).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has led to the increase of orphans and vulnerable children in Malawi, has also played a major role in the expansion of rural pre-schooling (ECD centres) as government, private individuals and NGOs came in to provide care and education services for the orphans, since most of these orphans do not have conducive immediate environments for their development or future learning (Binauli & Chipeta, 2000). For instance, at the end of 1997, it was estimated that 6% of the children under the age of 15 were orphans, most of them as a result of the death of parents through HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 1999; Association Francois-Xavier

Bagnoud, 2000). An increasing number of orphanages and Day Care Centres have been established, which range from those that are poorly organised to those that are reasonably organised in both urban and rural settings (Mpinganjira & M. Chimombo, 2004; Chalamanda *et al*, 2001).

International trends in the promotion of the rights of children (UNESCO, 2004; Pence, 2004; Evans, 2004; UNICEF, 2002) regarded education as a right for every child, hence the need to promote Universal Primary Education (UPE). The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Malawi in 1994 was a direct response to such international trends. It was also considered to be a strong indication of the government's commitment to the 1990 Jomtien declaration on Education for All (EFA) (MoE & UNESCO, 1996). It should be pointed out that one of the central aims of FPE (UPE) is to reduce illiteracy within the societies concerned: "'Education for All' implies 'reading [literacy] for all'" (Williams, 1998, p.1). This is in line with Malawi's fundamental objective for primary education, which is to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills in children (Ministry of Education & UNESCO, 1996).

FPE in Malawi expanded access to primary school education opportunities for children, although at the same time it had a negative impact on the quality of provision (MoE, 2001; Rose, 2003b; Kadzamira *et al*, 2004). Consequently, the general need for quality learning meant that there was great demand for pre-school services, which were seen as a better way of ensuring that children are well prepared for formal schooling since the teaching and learning conditions in primary schools were unfavourable. Private individuals and NGOs therefore began to establish ECD centres to seemingly meet this need, though other motivations for opening such centres could not be ruled out.

In some cases, the motivations for opening such centres or pre-schools were not necessarily to improve children's learning but to raise money for the proprietors through school fees. However, it has also been argued that, despite such motivations, in general, children are benefiting from such establishments which otherwise could not be provided by government alone (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001). While such an argument makes sense when the realities on the ground are considered, there is also the other side of the argument, which goes beyond access to look into issues of the nature and quality of provision and how it is facilitating children's development (see Chapter 2).

Further international trends seem to be moving towards the universalisation of ECD to address issues relating to children from 0 to 8 years, instead of only focussing on the latter part of early childhood (3-6 years). In addition, there tends to be more emphasis on ensuring that children's other needs apart from education are well attended to (Betram & Pascal, 2002; Smith, 2004; Barnet, 1995). In some ways therefore, the recent interest in ECD in Malawi is a direct response to both national and international agendas, which in many ways could impact on the level and quality of pre-school provision, especially in rural areas. At the local level, the involvement in the establishment of pre-schools centres by private individuals and Community Based Organisations (local NGOs) cannot be downplayed as they have their own implications for provision of learning and care opportunities for the children. Similarly, the major international organisations, in their attempt to implement international agendas, will have a huge inescapable influence on the choice of pre-school/ECD model for Malawi and therefore the way pre-schools should be organised and run, especially in the rural areas. This raises interesting issues on the extent to

which such influences will be contextually appropriate in addressing both short and long-term challenges of rural children in Malawi (see Chapters 2).

1.1.2.3 Major types of pre-school programmes in Malawi

Up until the early 1990s, conventional forms of pre-school were the most common in Malawi, and included nursery schools, kindergartens, playgroups, and crèches. These were mostly privately owned by a few individuals and organisations in the urban areas (Padambo, 1986). The private owners charged fees to run the pre-schools. By 1992, the Government of Malawi's adoption of Community Based Child Care (CBCC) as a strategy for the care of orphans and other vulnerable children, which eventually became a form of pre-schooling in the rural areas (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003d), meant that the financing of this new form of pre-school was to be different from the more conventional ones in the urban areas, bearing in mind the prevailing poverty in the rural setting. Although generally formal fees are not charged for children's attendance at CBCCs, communities are expected to mobilise resources for the pre-schools (see Box 1.1).

The local and international trends in early childhood development discussed in the previous section (1.1.2.2) seem to have led to the adoption of a new understanding of 'pre-school education' in Malawi: an integrated approach/model to early childhood development, specifically called National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, d). It is claimed that such a model is holistic in addressing children's needs as it consolidates all the services meant for the development of the child under one major programme (Table 1.1). The rationale is that the needs of the child go beyond education (preparing children for formal schooling in primary school), which is often considered to be the major preoccupation

of mainstream pre-schools (see Chapter 2). The Ministry of Gender and Community Services (MoGCS) therefore adopted the following definition of Integrated Early Childhood Development:

> ...[A]n integrated set of programmes that provides synergy of care, protection, development and participation for children and other caregivers for their adequate health, nutrition, psychosocial, and cognitive development. IECD combines elements of infant stimulation, health and nutrition, early childhood education and early learning, community development, psychology, sociology, anthropology, child development, economics, spirituality and cultural development (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, p.11).

This definition is also advocated by large international organisations in the ECD discourse (Evans, 2000; OECD, 1998, 2001). Given the international trends highlighted in the previous section (1.1.2.2), this suggests that such organisations have influenced Malawi's choice of the integrated model of ECD (see Chapter 2).

Following the adoption of the holistic approach, the ECD system in Malawi has a wide range of programs all claimed to be part of ECD (Table 1.1). Pre-school, which also has its own subcategories (Table 1.1), is therefore housed within this broad conception of early childhood development.

Overall, it is claimed that Malawi uses two approaches to providing ECD Services. The first strategy is *Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres*, which includes pre-schools, nursery schools, crèches, day care centres, and playgroups. The second approach, *Community Based Childcare Centres (CBCC)*, is informal ECD or rural/village pre-school care. According to the MoGCS & UNICEF (2003d), CBCC "is a community-based parent-childcare service administered by parents ... [and] is designed to address childcare problems and needs in the rural communities where pre-school/ECD services are not available" (p.21). It is claimed that this approach utilises

strategies of Survival Growth and Development (SGD) and Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003d, pp.6, 21-22) (see Table 1.1), and that communities take an active role in the initiation, establishment and implementation of the CBCC centres.

Table 1.1 Types of ECD Programmes in Malawi (0-8 Years)

	Type of programme	Focus	Provider
1	Antenatal	Pregnant mothers who are encouraged to visit antenatal clinics at least four times before giving birth. This is because most clinics are very far from communities	Hospitals and clinics
2	Under-five clinics	Immunisation of children, growth and monitoring, and provision of counselling to mothers.	Offered in hospitals, clinics and ECD centres in communities
3	**Pre-school**	**Children from 3-5 years. The most popular ECD programme in Malawi. Provided in various categories: *Nursing* (for babies 0-2 years); *Nursery schools* (0-4 year-olds); *Kindergarten* (4year-olds); *Playgroups* (3-5 year-olds); *Crèches* (Day Care minder, for infants whose parents are employed); *Community-Based Child Care* (CBCC) (for children needing care and attention, administered by parents at community level)**	**Offered/run by NGOs, individuals, communities and the government** *[Emphasis added]*
4	Supplementary Feeding	Undernourished, malnourished and stunted children from birth to 8 years. Parents are taught how to prepare adequate nutritious food for children	Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), and Communities. Communities contribute food to the Community Based Child Care (CBCC) Centre where children are fed.
5	Family Planning	Helps in child spacing	MoHP
6	Water and sanitation	Provision of safe, clean water to communities in order to save children's lives. Safe, clean water is considered to promote the holistic development of the child	Ministry of Water and Development and its partners such as UNICEF, Christian Service Committee (CSC), PLAN International, World Vision, Save the Children UK, among others
7	(IMCI)	Focuses on children from 0-3 years. Targets mothers, lactating women, young children, households and communities. Project started in 1999, piloted in five districts of Mwanza, Blantyre, Kasungu, Lilongwe and Mzimba	Government of Malawi, UNICEF
8	ECCD*	Similar focus to ECC-SGD/IMCI programme	Government of Malawi, UNICEF

Source: Adapted from Chalamanda *et al*, 2001.

† Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth and Development (ECC-SGD) and Integrated Management of Childhood Illness

* Early Childhood Care and Development

Within the CBCC there is also provision of pre-school elements to cater for the cognitive development of children (often called 'early stimulation for learning' in the MoGCS discourse). Box 1.1 provides an overview of the important aspects of CBCC services in Malawi.

Box 1.1: Key aspects of community based child care (CBCC) in Malawi

Consists of a manageable number of children under the care of a child minder/caregiver who is a volunteer. The caregiver is trained and supervised by an extension worker(s) of the area.

Objectives of CBCC

The main objective of the CBCC is to evolve a self-sustaining community based childcare system in order to improve the life expectancy of children. It involves: Equipping mothers with appropriate basic know-how in care and growth of children; improving child nutrition, stimulation and development; developing linkages between community and government and other services; and mobilising communities for social action

Principles of CBCC

The two main principles of Community Based Child Care services....

1. ***Community Participation***
   The community is involved right from inception, in planning and implementation stages of the project. This encourages ownership. The community understands that its children's problems can best be solved by mobilising its own resources. As a result of this, community members strive for it to succeed. In practical terms, it implies: the need to establish a CBCC group is accepted by the community; decision-making in the day-to-day running of the CBCC is in the hands of the community; and area extension workers are there to give technical support and also mobilise the community.
2. ***Multisectoral approach***
   Extension workers from different organisations/departments work as a team. Various services whose target is a child can be assured to have synergistic impact if they work as a team

Organisational structure of the CBCC

This is a framework for the provision of community-based childcare services. The structure helps to ensure smooth and effective running of CBCC groups. The structure is as follows:

1. ***Children (0-8 years)***
   These are beneficiaries of the ECD services.
2. ***Parents (Community)***
   They organise, run and support the delivery of childcare services in the group. They send children to village ECD Centres and contribute food and non-food items.
3. ***Area, parent or village child care committee***
   This is a committee elected to look into the smooth running of the groups, e.g. mobilising resources and ensuring community participation. They also ensure proper care and development in the households and community. Such committees shall be registered in the Office of the District Social Welfare officer with the support of other extension workers.
4. ***Area extension workers***
   These are all government and nongovernmental organisations' extension personnel in the areas such as Social Welfare Assistants, Community Development Assistants, Adult Literacy Instructors, Health Surveillance Assistants, Forestry Assistants, Teachers, Agricultural Extension Development Officers, etc. They are expected to provide their services for the benefit of the child care services. They also play an advisory role to the various committees, including the volunteers themselves. The coordinator of the project shall be from the Department of Social Welfare.
5. ***District level team***
   This team is composed of various government and non governmental organisations. Its main role is to support the area extension workers and co-ordinate ECD activities.
6. ***Central level team***
   Different relevant services are drawn together at this level. Their role is to guide implementation of ECD activities and co-ordinate and interpret policy at ministerial level.

Source: Adapted from MoGCS, 2003d, pp.21-22

It appears therefore that over time, the original idea of pre-schooling is being replaced with a more generic understanding of 'pre-school', which takes into consideration health and other social issues in the rural communities (MoGCS, 2003a, MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, d). This multi-dimensional approach to ECD might entail complexities in the way it is delivered, and hence have implications for preparation of children for school as was originally intended. Therefore, the extent to which such an approach is realistic for the rural communities is an interesting debate which needs more attention (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, the concept of CBCC as an approach to pre-schooling raises interesting issues about equity in the provision of pre-school/ECD services between the urban and rural contexts. While the creation of CBCCs provides a safety net (school preparation in some ways) for disadvantaged children in the rural areas, especially in a situation where there was almost no provision previously, there is also the question of whether rural children are being provided with the same quality of ECD as those from the first approach (ECD Centres). It may be necessary to consider whether, by having two approaches, certain communities are not being further disadvantaged in terms of socialisation and preparation for formal schooling, which seems to be central in a context where quality of education is at stake, as well as where education is often a determinant to children's future socio-economic status (see Chapters 2, 4 and 5).

In addition, the problems of community capacity in promoting the development of the child, such as lack of training for the majority of carers and pre-school teachers (see Table 1.4), lack of infrastructure as well as lack of basic resources (Mpinganjira & M.

Chimombo, 2004; Chalamanda *et al*, 2001), are key factors which may increase inequalities in the promotion of children's development in rural and urban ECD centres.

1.1.2.4 Provision of, access to and quality of pre-school services

Statistics on pre-schooling in Malawi are not readily available, apparently due to the fact that ECD has just began to receive considerable attention. The MoGCS Headquarters was at the time of the study making efforts to develop reliable national records on ECD centres in Malawi. The figures presented here are based on raw data from MoGCS as at July 2004 and September 2005. According to MoGCS (personal communication) the data is based on reports from District Social Welfare Offices (DSWOs), which sometimes do not provide adequate and accurate statistics. Although these raw figures help us to have a rough estimate of the ECD national statistics, they should therefore be treated with some level of caution as some inconsistencies are likely to exist given that they (figures) are not based on a systematic survey of ECD centres in Malawi.

It is estimated that by 1999 Malawi had 1,631 Early Childhood Education Centres (MoGCS, 2003a). However, most of these were concentrated in urban areas, so the majority of the children in rural areas did not have access to these facilities and hence very few children below the age of five years had the opportunity to attend pre-school before enrolling in primary school (MGCS, 2003a: 6). By 2004 however, with the advent of Community Based Child Care (CBCC) programmes, the number of ECD centres at national level increased to approximately 3625, over 100% increase from the 1999 estimates.

The number of ECD centres as at September 2005 show further increase (see Table 1.2). Despite the increase, the reality is that the available ECDs cater for only a small percentage of the total population of 1.2 million rural children eligible for pre-schooling (see section 1.1.2.1).

Table 1.2: ECD provision by district as at July 2004 and September 2005

District	2004	2005				
	Total for all ECD types in 2004	CBCCs	Pre-school (Urban and semi-urban)	Creches	Baby Day Care Centres	Total for all ECD types in 2005
Balaka	84	76	35	4	3	118
Blantyre	427	233	301	11	11	556
Chikwawa	69	97	32	3	10	142
Chiradzulu	199	152	31	3	3	189
Chitipa	49	81	11	2	3	97
Dedza	110	102	34	3	4	143
Dowa	51	53	21	3	2	79
Karonga	69	44	33	2	1	80
Kasungu	197	189	47	3	2	241
Likoma	11	7	5	0	0	12
Lilongwe	453	218	281	14	17	530
Machinga	100	106	34	2	2	144
Mangochi	99	163	42	3	2	210
Mchinji	130	240	50	1	3	294
Mulanje	54	61	28	3	1	93
Mwanza	69	42	12	2	1	57
Mzimba	89	87	19	1	2	109
Mzuzu*	281	149	114	4	4	271
Neno	25	55	5	1	1	62
Nkhata Bay	170	149	11	1	1	162
Nkhotakota	78	85	18	2	0	105
Nsanje	45	43	14	0	1	58
Ntcheu	60	62	18	3	1	84
Ntchisi	50	73	11	1	0	85
Phalombe	39	34	9	4	0	47
Rumphi	59	37	17	1	3	58
Salima	70	56	21	2	1	80
Thyolo	210	144	61	4	15	224
Zomba	278	112	139	6	5	262
Total	**3 625**	**2 950**	**1 454**	**89**	**99**	**4 592**

Source: Adapted from MoGCS, 2004 and 2005 data *Mzuzu is part of Mzimba District

According to MoGCS officials, part of the explanation for the increase is due to the fact that some organisations and government departments are also supporting the

introduction of ECD centres at community level, the Malawi National AIDS Commission (NAC) being a major one. Another explanation is that in order to have more reliable data from ECD centres, the MoGCS was reported to be continuously making efforts to do some systematic surveying of the centres at district level instead of just relying on figures provided by the District Social Welfare Offices. According to an official from MoGCS (personal communication) this exercise seemed to yield important findings in that some nonlisted ECD centres were being discovered. Apart from other factors, perhaps the lack of reliable records explains why, despite the remarkable national increase in ECD centres, in some of the districts such as Chiradzulu, Mwanza and Zomba, the 2005 figures show a decrease rather than an increase (see Table 1.2).

1.1.2.4.1 Children's participation

Based on the September 2005 data, about 305328 children from both urban and rural areas of Malawi were involved in various ECD programmes. Though it is difficult to generalise the patterns of participation based on the two sets of figures, both the 2004 and 2005 figures seem to generally indicate that at national level more female than male children were participating in ECD in Malawi, despite the fact that in some individual districts the pattern appears different (see Table 1.3). If the figures are to be relied upon, then the increase in female children's participation in ECD centres is a way forward for Malawi's education system, especially at a time when girls' education needs to be promoted (Kadzamira & Chibwana, 2000; J. Chimombo *et al*, 2000; Maluwa-Banda, 2003), supposing that the majority of these children do not eventually drop out later at this level. However, as argued elsewhere in this chapter, it is also important to consider whether these female children are being provided with

quality learning experiences to propel them to the next level of the education system. Furthermore, it may be appropriate to consider whether the majority of these children are actually entering standard 1 of primary school.

Table 1.3 Number of children participating in ECD Centres in Malawi by District (as at July 2004 and September 2005)

District	July 2004			September 2005		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Balaka	989	866	1 826	11 216	11 044	22 260
Blantyre	2 983	2 786	5 769	13 688	12 881	26 569
Chikwawa	2 166	1 003	3 169	2 511	1 440	3 951
Chiradzulu	1 211	987	2 198	1 330	1 004	2 334
Chitipa	1 120	856	1 976	1 120	987	2 107
Dedza	3 122	2 980	6 102	13 511	13 244	26 755
Dowa	1 243	1 622	2 865	1 844	1 971	3 815
Karonga	1 310	1 003	2 313	1 645	1 122	2 767
Kasungu	1 891	2 011	3 902	13 109	15 011	28 120
Likoma	344	345	689	412	367	779
Lilongwe	7 112	6 720	13 832	27 661	16 933	44 594
Machinga	988	899	1 887	1 003	988	1 991
Mangochi	1 101	1 287	2 388	3 877	2 961	6 838
Mchinji	4 911	5 199	10 110	5 311	5 612	10 923
Mulanje	781	666	1 447	871	710	1 581
Mwanza	388	450	838	435	512	947
Mzimba	2 221	2 018	4 239	10 813	7 018	17 831
Mzuzu	6 559	6 739	13 298	11 822	9 988	21 810
Neno	1 646	2 100	3 746	1 985	2 411	4 396
Nkhata Bay	3 144	1 944	5 088	13 411	9 133	22 544
Nkhotakota	718	515	1 233	817	812	1 629
Nsanje	401	379	780	542	406	948
Ntcheu	1 233	1 117	2 350	2 354	2 122	4 476
Ntchisi	278	312	590	324	322	646
Phalombe	815	678	1 493	815	678	1 493
Rumphi	918	819	1 737	1 121	998	2 119
Salima	914	817	1 731	987	888	1 875
Thyolo	6 734	8 124	14 858	6 931	9 132	16 063
Zomba	10 219	9 111	19 330	12 396	10 771	23 167
Total	**67 460**	**64 353**	**131 813**	**163 862**	**141 466**	**305 328**

Source: Adapted from MoGCS, July 2004 and September 2005 Data

1.1.2.4.2 ECD caregivers' participation

In terms of the nature of caregivers who participate in ECD in Malawi, the general trend in the 2004 and 2005 figures was that in almost every district more women than men were participating as ECD caregivers (Table 1.4). Furthermore only a small

percentage of the caregivers were trained; 26% and 24% in 2004 and 2005 respectively (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 Number of ECD caregivers and training status by district as at July 2004 and September 2005

District	ECD Caregivers in 2004				ECD Caregivers in 2005			
	Female	Male	Total	Trained (%)	Female	Male	Total	Trained (%)
Balaka	112	12	124	19%	214	22	236	47%
Blantyre	785	5	790	13%	1422	7	1429	15%
Chikwawa	63	6	69	36%	433	8	441	13%
Chiradzulu	147	8	155	23%	502	14	516	9%
Chitipa	58	1	59	34%	311	32	343	10%
Dedza	132	12	144	24%	422	55	477	12%
Dowa	342	N	342	56%	156	10	166	13%
Karonga	99	16	115	41%	220	21	241	27%
Kasungu	214	6	220	59%	433	8	441	33%
Likoma	33	2	35	43%	56	9	65	85%
Lilongwe	344	26	370	46%	1244	52	1296	15%
Machinga	76	8	84	18%	401	23	424	8%
Mangochi	122	6	128	20%	377	14	391	14%
Mchinji	118	77	195	21%	422	77	499	9%
Mulanje	90	35	125	24%	231	35	266	17%
Mwanza	101	76	177	40%	101	76	177	50%
Mzimba	88	6	94	47%	317	12	329	15%
Mzuzu	821	12	833	31%	821	12	833	36%
Neno	266	51	317	27%	266	51	317	27%
Nkhata Bay	160	4	164	18%	271	4	275	21%
Nkhotakota	86	7	93	74%	188	24	212	45%
Nsanje	18	4	22	45%	132	15	147	30%
Ntcheu	191	12	203	15%	191	12	203	22%
Ntchisi	99	12	111	27%	99	12	111	50%
Phalombe	59	1	60	42%	86	21	107	32%
Rumphi	43	4	47	38%	114	15	129	43%
Salima	215	32	247	16%	215	32	247	49%
Thyolo	671	12	683	10%	671	12	683	47%
Zomba	273	9	282	14%	364	31	395	11%
Total	**5826**	**462**	**6288**	**26%**	**10 680**	**716**	**11 396**	**24%**

Source: Adapted from MoGCS, July 2004 and September 2005 data

The participation of more women than men in ECD centres raises the question of whether doing ECD-related work is perceived as a gender issue. In other words, to what extent is ECD work seen to be women's and not men's responsibility at community level? If not, one wonders then why most men disappear from the scene.

It might also be important again to consider the criteria that are used to employ pre-school caregivers as has been discussed later in the thesis (see Chapter 5). It may therefore be argued that gender could be an important issue in pre-school education in Malawi. Perhaps this is because traditionally society assumes that women are better at care than men and therefore ECD centres end up engaging more women than men (Evans, 1994). Given the fact that the national literacy rate among female adults is lower (49%) than that of adult males (74%) (NSO, 2003), and that it is even lower for women in rural areas, this puts CBCCs at a disadvantage. The situation is further worsened by the general lack of training for the majority of the caregivers, as Table 1.4, indicates, and as is discussed in Chapter 5.

Although it may be argued that general care for the children at rural ECD centres may easily be offered by the caregivers despite their education levels, questions may still be raised as to the extent to which the caregivers may consciously engage children in experiences that would allow them to adequately develop early literacy skills. Furthermore, based on both the 2004 and 2005 figures (Tables 1.3 and 1.4), the child:caregiver ratio may be generally large (21:1). Given that young children need more attention at this stage, caregivers might not effectively address all individual children's other needs as is assumed in the integrated model of ECD being advocated in Malawi (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a). In such cases, therefore, it may be suggested that the level of care and education could be compromised in some ways, as is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis.

When all these factors are taken into consideration, the need to address quality of provision in the promotion of ECD in Malawi is as critical as the issue of access. The provision of ECD experiences that will promote children's development of early

literacy skills is one such area that needs more attention. Given that illiteracy is very high in the rural areas, it can be argued that any model of ECD adopted should realistically aim at addressing related issues which are at stake in the context of ECD provision (see Chapter 2).

1.1.2.5 Technical and financial support for ECD and implications

There are a number of key players in ECD in Malawi in terms of financial and non-financial support, such as individuals, NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs), government departments, and donors (MoGCS, 2003a, pp.15-18). Table 1.5 summarises the different key players and their expected specific responsibilities. It seems clear that while parents, households and communities in general are expected to support ECD by providing mostly non-financial resources (although implicitly financial issues may be involved, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5), NGOs and donors are explicitly given the responsibilities for sponsoring and funding. NGOs and donors are also expected to provide technical support such as development of ECD materials and training of caregivers (Table 1.5). Accordingly, Government of Malawi financially supports ECD through its various ministries, with ECD co-ordination responsibilities given to Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS, 2003a). Having been traditionally responsible for social welfare and community services at national level, the MoGCS is to be considered to be the appropriate ministry to co-ordinate ECD activities in Malawi.

Table 1.5 Key players i

Key Player	Re
Children	▪
Parents	▪
Households and families	▪
Communities	▪ Provide infrastructure (church buildings, individual homes, etc). ▪ Provide counselling to young fathers and mothers. ▪ Provide play materials. ▪ Form committees that manage/run the affairs of the ECD centres. ▪ Establish and manage ECD centres. ▪ Develop teaching/learning materials from locally available resources. ▪ Support the development of curriculum. ▪ Provide food and volunteers. ▪ Mobilise resources. ▪ Protect the children. ▪ Act as role models. ▪ Disseminate information on ECD activities. ▪ Ensure equity – no discrimination. ▪ Assess vulnerability
Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Religious Organisations, NGOs, Donors	▪ Mobilise resources ▪ Sponsor and secure funding ▪ Conduct needs assessment studies ▪ Conduct trainings for ECD caregivers and trainers ▪ Implement ECD services ▪ Develop materials for ECD ▪ Monitor and evaluate ECD activities ▪ Advocate and protect children's rights ▪ Design ECD programmes. ▪ Network on ECD.
Government Departments	▪ Government of Malawi mandated the Department of Social Welfare, by Acts of Parliament to co-ordinate all ECD activities. Other government departments taking part in ECD are the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Education, Water, Justice, Local Government, People with Disabilities and others that offer ECD services.

Sources: Adapted from Chalamanda *et al*, 2001, n.d; MoGCS, 2003a, pp.15-18

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inancial support for ECD and implications

key players in ECD in Malawi in terms of financial and non-

h as individuals, NGOs, Community Based Organisations

epartments, and donors (MoGCS, 2003a, pp.15-18). Table 1.5

nt key players and their expected specific responsibilities. It

promotion and development.

In general therefore, financing of ECD is done in partnership between government and other interested partners, mainly major international organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, UNDP, UNFPA, and Save the Children-USA (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a). For the NIECD programme, a detailed action plan and budget were developed to facilitate its implementation, with the possibility of substantial financial support from the international organisations (MoGCS, 2003a). Such international support should be sincerely appreciated, especially bearing in mind that pre-schooling in Malawi has not made much headway in the past, with the majority of the children in the rural areas having to suffer the consequences. However, as has been reiterated elsewhere in this chapter, given that these major international organisations make such substantial financial and material contributions to the development of ECD in Malawi, the possibility of their huge influence on the designing and running of the NIECD programme cannot be ruled out (also see Chapter 2).

In the following section, the statement of the problem, purpose, significance and limitations of the study are discussed, before providing working definitions of some of the key terms used in this study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Research evidence has generally shown that there are challenges in pedagogical literacy development practices at primary school level in Malawi, which need to be addressed, more especially by researching underlying factors. Although it can be argued that there could be a number of factors contributing to these challenges at primary school level, such as lack of teaching and learning resources and lack of professional staff, the poor literacy levels in primary school children seem to be a

reflection of poor language and literacy background preparation that the children may have before joining formal schooling. Whereas the challenges in literacy development at primary level have been reasonably established by research studies, there is scanty evidence on early literacy development practices in pre-schools in Malawi to help us understand the implications for the subsequent levels of the education system, especially early primary school. Bearing all these issues in mind, this study therefore sought to research early literacy development practices at pre-school level in order to provide a deeper understanding of the critical pedagogical issues shaping pre-school practice, which have a more or less direct impact on the future development of literacy skills in the upper levels of the education system in Malawi.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to find out the extent to which rural pre-school children were provided with opportunities for early literacy development, which is key to their future learning. The appropriateness of such opportunities or experiences was also central to the study. Furthermore, in an attempt to understand what was happening in the four rural pre-schools, the study was interested in exploring the immediate context of the pre-schools by getting the views and perceptions of the community members surrounding the rural pre-schools involved in this study. Specifically, the study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What capacity do rural pre-schools have to help children to develop early literacy skills?

2. Do pre-school–community links exist between rural pre-schools and their immediate communities? If so, what influence do such links have on children's early literacy development?

3. What learning experiences do rural pre-schools provide to facilitate children's early literacy development?

4. How appropriate are the learning experiences provided as far as early literacy development is concerned?

1.4 Significance of the study

Currently there is very limited research on pre-schooling and ECD in Malawi and even less in the area of early literacy development within the pre-school setting. This study comes at a crucial time when there is growing interest at policy level to promote early learning and development in children across the country and internationally. Thus it cannot be overemphasised that this study is critical especially in providing more understanding of practice in rural ECD settings, and the subsequent implications for national ECD policy implementation by the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS) and other key ministries and partners such as Ministry of Education. For instance, policy intentions to scale up pre-school and ECD provision in general need an in-depth inventory of the realities of the rural pre-schooling context, which this study attempts to provide. Furthermore the findings will not only assist MoGCS but also the private sector and teacher training institutions to consider how they may effectively contribute to the development of ECD in general, and literacy in particular, in Malawi.

1.5 Limitations of the study

Throughout the process of carrying out the study, a number of limitations were observed which might have had some implications for the outcomes. Some of the major limitations were related to the data collection procedures, especially the recording of pre-school activities. In the first place, the use of the video camera to record the activities taking place in the four rural pre-schools produced reactivity from the participants. This may have influenced, in one way or another, the outcomes of the study although efforts were made to reduce reactivity (see Chapter 3). Similarly, four weeks of observations in four rural pre-schools, translating into five observations per pre-school, meant that some important observation data from the four rural pre-schools could have been missed. There was need for more observations in order to capture as many experiences as possible. Of course having used a number of data collection techniques meant some of the weaknesses in the observation data were made up for.

The genereal lack of reliable record-keeping in the four pre-schools was another major limitation of the study. Prior to fieldwork, the researcher had assumed that he would find records on various aspects of the pre-schools for the various years since their establishment. However, this was not the case and as a result the researcher had to make some methodological adjustments in the field. Such adjustments may have influenced the findings of the study although the researcher made an effort to reduce the influences (see Chapter 3).

Finally the fact that this study limited itself to four rural pre-schools in only one district meant that it was only possible to make cautious generalisations on the findings of the study within the context of the four pre-schools involved in the study.

It is however important to note that despite the difficulties of generalisation there are possibilities of relatability of the findings to similar ECD contexts in Malawi and beyond.

1.6 Definition of terms

A number of terms need to be defined in order to allow for a clear understanding of the context in which they have been used and therefore the overall interpretation of key issues in the thesis.

Early Childhood Development (ECD): In this study, ECD refers to a wide range of services catering for the holistic development of children from conception to 8 years. ECD thus includes early socialisation, education and readiness for school, basic health care, nurturing and stimulation in a particular caring environment (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). Although sometimes the term 'ECD' is used interchangeablly with 'pre-school', this is cautiously done, bearing in mind the fact that pre-school is subsumed under ECD.

It should also be pointed out that ECD is open to a diversity of terminology adopted by international agencies and academics – for example, Early Childhood Care for Development (ECCD) by the World Bank; Early Childhood Development (ECD) by UNICEF; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) by UNESCO; and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) – by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Although each one of the above terms has its own connotations in terms of emphases by the different organisations that use them, it is generally accepted that they all talk about the same thing – holistic approaches to child development. Thus any of the terms above could have been used to refer to ECD

Capacity level in this study refers to the degree to which ECD/pre-school environment has the ability (professionally, materially or resource-wise) to facilitate children's stimulation or learning.

1.7 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction and background information. This is followed by a review of related literature in Chapter two. Specifically Chapter two discusses the rationale for the provision of ECD, theoretical frameworks for ECD in general, and key issues in early literacy development. The chapter ends with a discussion of the major issues that have been raised with regard to the development of early literacy in the context of ECD practice in general. For purposes of contextualising the discussion on related literature, the chapter further examines and analyses Malawi's ECD policy and its implementation with reference to the two theoretical frameworks guiding the study, namely Developmentally Appropriate and Contextually Appropriate. Chapter three outlines the methodology adopted by the study and the approach used to sample, collect and analyse data.

The main findings of the study are presented and discussed in Chapters four to six. In order to put into perspective the discussion of the main findings, Chapter four describes in detail the four rural pre-schools involved in the study. This is followed by a discussion in Chapter five of capacity issues in the four rural pre-schools and the role of the surrounding communities in the enhancement of pre-school development. This leads to discussion of the actual early literacy development experiences provided in the four rural pre-schools in Chapter six, which is guided by the two theoretical frameworks used in this study. Finally, Chapter seven concludes the thesis by raising

and dissussing the major issues that have come out of the study. Towards the end of the chapter, recommendations are made based on the key issues raised by the study findings.

1.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter the background to the study in terms of the general background to Malawi as well as the trends in the development of ECD in Malawi have been discussed. Specifically, the discussion on the ECD trends focused on the overall driving forces, access, participation and funding for ECD. Locally, the adoption of democracy and the subsequent introduction of a free market economy, as well as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have led to the expansion of ECD services in Malawi. International trends such as the promotion of children's rights and therefore the universalisation of primary education are some of the major factors that have led to the development of ECD in Malawi. Furthermore the chapter has discussed the major types of ECD in Malawi, paying particular attention to the CBCC (village pre-school), which is the main focus of this study. In the final section of the chapter, issues of technical and financial support have been discussed, and it has been reiterated that financing of ECD is done in partnership between the Government of Malawi and international organisations, with the latter providing the bulk of the support, often translating into huge international influence on local ECD programming and practice. The following chapter presents a reviews of related general literature on early childhood development and early literacy development, in order to appreaciate how Malawi locates itself internationally in terms of the ECD theories, provision and practice.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

2.0 Chapter overview

In this chapter, related literature is discussed in two major parts. The first part looks at more general issues surrounding Early Childhood Development (ECD)[4] in terms of its development and practice globally, then in Africa, and in particular, Malawi. Underlying theoretical frameworks reflecting the global discourse and practice of early childhood development have also been discussed. The second part of the review more specifically discusses the development of early literacy in ECD settings by exploring the assertions that have been made with regard to what is often assumed to be good practice in ECD provision. This is crucial because in the literature, pre-primary education, and therefore early literacy development is often constructed within the context of Early Childhood Development (ECD). The chapter concludes by discussing some of the major implications for early literacy development in the context of ECD practice in different contexts, such as that of Malawi.

2.1 Early childhood development in the global context

In the global context, universal education is considered to be a global right for children according to the 1989 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fact, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), in which education and

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[4] Different international organisations use different terms. The World Bank uses Early Childhood Care for Development (ECCD); UNICEF uses Early Childhood Development (ECD); UNESCO refers to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE); and OECD uses Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

the issues of children are reemphasised, were framed based on two of the United Nations' principle documents namely the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) and *A World Fit for Children* (UN, 2002). Education "is generally regarded as one of the most powerful tools for enhancing children's quality of life" (Woodhead, 2000, p.15). The 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) was convened for the purposes of improving education more especially in developing countries. Central to the conference therefore was the message that "developing countries and international agencies should confront the problem of illiteracy and educational decline by concentrating energies and investment in basic education" (Bennet, 1994, p.1). In order to achieve this, the WCEFA developed a "Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs" in which national basic education would comprise four pillars:

- a four-year concentrated, primary cycle for all children which would provide basic reading, writing, numeracy and life skills, both family and environmental;
- non-formal education for children and adults not reached by schools, especially women;
- **expansion and improvement of early child development, care and educational services**[5];

[5] Emphasis added.

- further teaching e reemphasised, were framed based on two of the United through the use ients namely the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* 2) *or Children* (UN, 2002). Education "is generally regarded as l tools for enhancing children's quality of life" (Woodhead, The Jomtien conferenc Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) vulnerable members c rposes of improving education more especially in developing programmes. (Adamopc ie conference therefore was the message that "developing (Jomtien) international nal agencies should confront the problem of illiteracy and 2000, promotion of earl concentrating energies and investment in basic education" vulnerable children (Pe to achieve this, the WCEFA developed a "Framework improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003, p.15).

Although as a consequence there appear to be concerted efforts to develop programmes aimed at promoting early childhood development throughout the world, even more so in developing nations, the levels of provision, access and quality are varied and still a big challenge (Penn, 2000; Woodhead, 2000). The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) (2005) indicates that, although for the past decade some progress has been made towards increasing access to children at primary school level, the pace is still slow. In terms of early childhood development and education, the Report similarly indicates that progress towards wider access remains very slow, and that the situation is even worse in Africa and other 'least-developed' countries where participation is as low as below 10%, mainly due to the effect of high levels of poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic (UNESCO, GMR 2005, p.85).

2.1.1 Early childhood development: complexities in ECD conceptions

In what it claims to be a holistic approach to early childhood development, Bernard van Leer Foundation defines early childhood as "the period of a child's life from conception to age 8" (n.d., p.1). The Foundation gives two justifications for such a definition:

> First, this time frame is consistent with developmental psychology's view of the continuum of children's development. Second, the international definition of early childhood includes the early primary years (6-7) because of the importance of the transition for children either from home or from pre-school programmes into primary school. (Bernard van Leer foundation, n.d., p.1)

Similary, Hyde and Kabiru (2003) state that the definition of ECD is generally broad, and encompasses formal, family and community contexts within which care for the child (0-8 years) can be provided. They thus argue that ECD "includes early socialisation, education and readiness for school, as well as the provision of basic health care, adequate nutrition, nurturing and stimulation within a caring environment" (p.15).

Literature distinguishes early childhood development and pre-school education. According to Penn (2004), ECD is "an umbrella term for a variety of interventions with young children and their carers/families, including health and nutrition, childcare, education and parent support" (p.iv). The 'education' intervention within ECD is often connected to pre-schooling rather than the generic conception of ECD; and pre-schooling is considered by some quarters of the research community as being exclusive of the other interventions such as care and health (OECD, 2001; Kamerman, 2003; Pence, 2002; Hadad, 2002). In general therefore, pre-school education is seen to

be just one element of ECD. Drawing from developmental psychology, the Bernard van Leer Foundation distinguishes ECD from pre-school education:

> ...it needs to be understood that early childhood development (ECD) is not synonymous with pre-school education.... Early Childhood Development combines elements from the fields of child development, early childhood education, infant stimulation, health and nutrition, community development, parents and families support, women's development, and economics. It combines all essential supports a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the supports a family and community need to promote children's healthy development. This includes integrating health, nutrition, and intellectual stimulation, providing opportunities for exploration and active learning, as well as providing the social and emotional care and nurturing a child's needs in order to realise his or her potential and play an active role in their families and later in their communities. (Bernard van Leer Foundation, n.d., pp.1-2)

It has been noted elsewhere that the definition and description of 'early childhood development' or 'early childhood interventions' is therefore often referred to in a blanket way (Penn, 2004). Penn summarises various broad definitions of ECD and is quick to point out that the definitions overlap and are not always clear in terms of the interventions involved. She also reiterates that broadly the definitions may mean one or a combination of the seven definitions she has provided (Box 2.1).

The blanket way in which ECD has been defined reflects the complexity of the ECD field. Furthermore it can be argued that comprehension of particular elements of practice in early childhood development, such as provision of early literacy development to pre-school children, may require serious consideration of the various conceptions and expectations of the particular ECD programme in the environment of practice or the local conditions (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Box 2.1 Descriptions/definitions of ECD

- School based nursery education, usually for children aged three to six, delivered by trained teachers in school premises, with an agreed curriculum or programme, either on a part time or full time basis. Nursery education is most likely to be publicly funded, with parents only paying peripheral costs such as uniforms (if any) or stationery. This provision meets agreed national standards and is regulated through an inspectorial system.
- Community based pre-schools or playgroups, usually part time, often provided in a multipurpose church hall or other community facilities. Staff, who tend to be local women, often serve on a voluntary rota basis, and provide relatively low key play activities. It may or may not be regulated. Fees are likely to be minimal, but there is some cost recovery.
- Centre-based childcare, usually for children aged between nought and three or nought and six, delivered by a variety of personnel, many of whom are likely to be untrained, in a variety of regulated or unregulated premises, to cover the working hours of mothers. Centre-based childcare is usually delivered on a cost recovery basis by profit or non profit organisations, but may attract some state subsidies.
- Home-based childcare, usually for children aged between nought and three or nought and six, delivered mostly by untrained or minimally trained women working in their own homes, to cover the working hours of mothers. Home-based childcare is usually delivered on a cost recovery basis by the private operator offering the care, but may attract some state subsidies.
- Supplementary feeding programmes usually administered by paramedics, but often delivered in one of the above.
- Home visiting parent education/support is usually delivered by para professionals whose expenses are met by the state or a non profit agency.
- Health programmes including health monitoring, vaccinations and treatment against illness and disease, also provided by paramedics, sometimes delivered as a stand alone health service, sometimes as part of other ECD services.

Source: Adapted from Penn, 2004, p.2.

2.1.2 Rationale for the provision of early childhood development

> From the moment of birth children are learning; human genes carry this capacity and recreation of experience. This capacity is the key to both education and socialisation, which is a miraculous process of humanity. This process, mismanaged, is responsible for the terrible tension between war and peace, oppression and liberty, and misery and well-being. Well managed, it opens up the possibility of a peaceful, responsible humanity, egalitarian and diverse, reaping the tangible and intangible benefits of the world. (Garriga, 2000, p.75)

Mostly based on child development psychology, literature on early childhood development is clear about the benefits of early childhood development not only for children but also for the nation and the world at large (Garriga, 2000). Therefore provision of ECD is usually rationalised on several premises according to the advocates (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). According to the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), early childhood development[6] must be seen as a necessary public good just as other essential services such as education and health, as it allows equitable participation of women in the workforce as well as enabling children to learn and socialise (OECD, 2001). More specifically, arguments for early childhood development have revolved around common goals according to Penn (2004) (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2 Rationale/goals for ECD

- help prepare children for school and therefore enable them to perform better at school.
- provide childcare for working mothers.
- enhance children's nutritional status by improving mother's feeding, health and childcare practices, and through the distribution of nutritional supplements.
- provide a focus for community development and community cohesion.
- enable mothers and caregivers to rear children better than they would without such assistance.
- enable children to socialise with their peers (a more pressing goal in the North where children are more likely to be brought up in small isolated family units, than in the South where household arrangements are more flexible).

Source: Penn, 2004, pp.2-3

While it is generally agreed that ECD helps prepare children for school and therefore enables them to perform better at school (UNESCO 2004; Sammons *et al*, 2004; Bloch, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Paulu, 1992; Tompkins, 2003; Adamopoulo, 2002) there are also issues of whether the pre-school provides better preparation for schooling than the home, especially if the pre-school does not provide quality material and human resources. In the Sub-Sahara African context, studies on child rearing practices in Namibia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria and Zambia, have shown that within the traditional and community settings, there are mechanisms for preparing and supporting children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development through traditional games, stories, toys, songs, and ways of playing that are passed on from the older to the younger children (Evans, 1994, p.8). The extent to which pre-

[6] Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

schools will utilise or adapt themselves to some of the already existing practices to enrich children's' experience in the pre-school setting appears therefore to be one of the most challenging agendas:

> .... [T]here is little recognition by the formal school system of the knowledge, skills and beliefs that children bring to school. This is not a problem of the traditional culture, it is a problem with current practice. The formal school system, most often implicitly, assumes that children lack knowledge and skills in relation to problem-solving, reasoning, maths and language when they come from a 'traditional' setting. Little is done to assess what children already know, how they think, and what they have experienced. Teachers are assuming they are dealing with a 'blank slate' when in fact children arrive at school with a wealth of experiences behind them that need to be recognised and built upon. (Evans, 1994, p. 25)

The rationale that ECD enables working mothers and caregivers to rear children better than they would without such assistance also needs to be cautiously applied. The assumption in this rationale seems to be that care centres, including pre-schools, will provide better child rearing practices than the working mothers. It can be argued that this may be more applicable in the North than in the South because rearing of the child in most societies in the South is a communal rather than an individual responsibility, more especially in the rural areas. The mother in the African setting is not the sole carer of the child as it grows; members of the immediate family as well as others outside the family also play direct or indirect roles in raising the child (Evans, 1994). Citing Swadener *et al* (2000), M. Chimombo and Söderbergh (2005) question whether communities will continue to raise the child, bearing in mind the high levels of poverty in Malawi and Africa in general, as well as the growing number of vulnerable children due to among other factors, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has greatly hit Africa.

2.1.3.1 Child development ("developmentally appropriate") framework

The developmentally appropriate perspective has had huge influence, both explicitly and implicitly, on the current understanding and practice of early childhood development, although it has recently come under heavy criticism. Central to this perspective is the idea of the child going through stages of development as it grows towards adulthood. It is therefore argued by the proponents of this approach that curriculum and learning experiences must be matched to the age and the individual abilities of the child and that child learning programmes should be based on the idea that children learn most effectively through a concrete, play oriented curriculum (Bredekamp, 1987, cited in Miller, 2000b, p.19; Wood & Attfield, 2005). This theoretical framework has mostly influenced early child development in the North, with subsequent influence in the South often associated with the work of international organisations who have attempted to introduce ECD programmes there (Penn, 2004; Woodhead, 1988, 1999, 2000).

One of the major criticisms of the "developmentally appropriate" approach to early childhood development is that it applies universal norms or principles to early childhood development as if all childhood contexts were homogenous. It has often been argued that the framework leans heavily on USA research and is informed by implicit Euro-American assumptions:

> What is taken as 'scientific evidence' about child development is mostly drawn from the results of observations and experiments with white middle class children in North America and Europe, and assumed to be applicable to all children in all circumstances. If indeed there are universal underpinnings for child development, then at the very least the evidence base needs to be considerably widened. Where detailed evidence has been obtained from the South, some of the conventional understandings of child development have been profoundly challenged. (Penn, 2004, p.4)

Ochs and Schieffelin (1984, cited in Penn, 2004) explored verbal interactions between mothers, other caregivers, and children in a number of communities in the South and found that some of the child rearing patterns are different from the general patterns highly valued by Euro-American societies. Similarly, LeVine *et al* (1994), after systematically comparing early childhood experiences across the North and South, found that there were some clear differences in upbringing experiences between them. The study found, for instance, that there was little or no explicit existence of caregiver focus on the development of word games or language (although there may well be bilingualism or multilingualism) in many parts of the South, unlike North America or Europe, yet in the South there are alternative ways of making up for communicative development such as productive participation in the daily household chores.

Although, therefore, the mainstream child development agenda is still strong, there have been major shifts in current thinking about professional practice and research in Early Childhood Development (Whitehead, 1997; Drury *et al* 2000; Penn, 2004; Hall *et al* 2004). There is a recognition that social context is an essential component in understanding childhood experiences. Kessen (1983, cited in Miller, 2000, p.18) argues that childhood experience is "domain specific", in other words, that all children's actions and their rationalisations are influenced by the context in which they take place. It is this thinking that led to the development of another theoretical perspective on early childhood development, "sociocultural or contextual approach", whose main advocate is Woodhead (1988, 1999, 2000). It is important, though, to point out that the "developmentally appropriate" perspective cannot entirely be ignored in early childhood development thinking and practice, as it has in many ways been instrumental in shaping our understanding of early childhood learning experiences as well as in informing professional practice, despite the fact that in its

original form it tended to downplay the important role of the social context of childhood experiences.

2.1.3.2 Sociocultural (contextually appropriate) framework

The sociocultural or contextual approach to early childhood development is generally seen as a response by sociologists and anthropologists to the assumptions of the child development approach, and Woodhead (1998, 2000) is among the prominent advocates of the approach. Woodhead made a comparison of the 'quality' of ECD programmes in France, India, Colombia and Kenya and concluded that "quality should be judged by the best of what is available locally, using criteria of staffing ratios, curriculum, premises, and so on" (cited in Penn, 2004, p.21). He further argues that within the global trends, where quality in early education is concerned, there is no one way (European or American) forward, and that it is essential that quality definitions and principles should be based on the context rather than using measures based on Europe and North America.

The origins of the sociocultural view can be traced back to the work of L.S. Vygotsky, who recognised child development as a social process historically and culturally relative (Woodhead, 2000; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Central to the sociocultural approach to early childhood development, therefore, is the context in which the children's behaviour, thinking, social relationships and adaptation are culturally as much as biologically constituted (Woodhead, 2000, p.24). Woodhead further argues that:

> ... [C]hild development is naturally cultural....every child is born into a social-cultural-historical context. Infants are by nature attuned to engage with the social and cultural environment of activities and meanings. There is nothing fundamentally natural about environments for childcare, either at home or within a pre-school setting. All environments are culturally constructed, shaped by generations of human activity and creativity and

> mediated by complex belief systems, including about the 'proper' way for children to develop. The most significant features of any child's environment are the humans with whom they establish close relationships. These individuals (usually family) are themselves cultural beings. (Woodhead, 2000, pp.22-23).

One of the implications of the sociocultural approach is that early childhood programmes can be looked at as entities geared at achieving specific targets in terms of what they envisage children needing to learn. Thus in the words of Woodhead (2000), "early childhood programmes can [then] be understood for what they are: highly specialised environments with quite distinctive characteristics linked to their goals and priorities for children's learning" (p.24). This further suggests that any evaluation of early childhood care and education programmes in terms of whatever aspect (quality, for instance) cannot be done in isolation from the cultural context in which the programmes exist. Indicators or benchmarks of evaluation in this case have to be based on extrinsic rather than intrinsic factors, and cannot therefore be fixed, but must be negotiable within the context. In evaluating quality provision in early childhood development, Woodhead (2000) argues that alterations are likely to be made to the frameworks of such evaluations if the social cultural approach is used as a guiding tool:

> A social cultural perspective alters frameworks of quality evaluation too. The 'developmental appropriateness' of children's experiences and the 'harmfulness' or benefits of their environment, cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives, their prior learning experiences and future prospects. (Woodhead, 2000, p.24)

It is argued that the sociocultural framework offers a more inclusive approach to understanding child development, particularly by understanding a range or diversity

of perspectives on the goals and processes of child development among various key players in a variety of contexts. Therefore, according to Woodhead (2000), the perspectives of the various stakeholders in the context need to be made explicit by asking three major questions (this is especially applicable where an evaluation of quality of provision of early childhood development programmes and activities is being made) (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 Contextual framework

Who has a perspective on 'quality'?	Numerous different interest-groups (or stakeholders) are involved in any early childhood programme, each with their own perspective on quality; for example, programme managers, teachers, parents, community leaders and child development experts, and not forgetting children themselves.
Who do these stakeholders perceive as beneficiaries of 'quality'?	While programmes are first and foremost for children, most stakeholders would recognise other beneficiaries, notably parents, who are freed of care responsibilities, the care-workers or teachers, who gain employment, and the community leaders, who gain prestige. For some care programmes, older children are seen as major beneficiaries, because they are no longer required to care for their youngest siblings.
What do they take to be indicators of 'quality'?	Judgements about quality can focus on any number of things. Indicators range from basic standards (for example, physical space, staffing ratios, hygiene and nutrition), and resources for play activities and learning (for example, toys, and materials), to the quality of adult-child relationships, flexibility to parent's working patterns, notions of cost-effectiveness and many more.

Source: Woodhead, 2000, p.25

The contextual framework has its own weaknesses. It has been criticised for being too open-ended and relativist, and therefore likely to undermine the essential process of standard setting in early childhood development programmes. In other words, as a relativist approach, it has been criticised as legitimising poor early childhood services for poor communities (Penn, 2004). Consequently there remain a lot of unanswered questions when we try to apply the "contextually appropriate" framework to ECD.

For instance, it is questionable whether through the contextual approach much lower standards of ECD services should be acceptable in poor communities of developing countries when one is likely to find services for the elite that match the best in Europe or America within the same country (Rosemberg, 2003 in Penn 2004, p.21). Of course in his reaction, Woodhead, while acknowledging some of the loopholes in the framework, nevertheless warns:

> ....adopting a more inclusive, contextual framework does not undermine efforts to improve quality in the lives of young children. Acknowledging diverse contexts and multiple perspectives is not the end of the story: it is the starting point for debate and for research, including carrying out rigorous evaluations, in ways that make more explicit the criteria on which one feature or another of children's environment, teaching or behaviour is taken to be an indicator of 'quality'. (Woodhead, 2000, p.27)

Despite its relativism and open-endedness, the sociocultural approach seems attractive to the current study especially when considerations are made on the need to understand the quality of early literacy-related opportunities that pre-schools provide for children in the rural areas. Of particular interest is the linkage between what pre-school caregivers look at as 'universally' accepted activities for early literacy development and those activities that are inherent in the children's culture (which may be critical especially that we are dealing with rural communities).

However, it is also acknowledged that the child development framework helps shape our understanding of the various stages children undergo as they develop, and this was useful for the current study, especially in understanding certain characteristics and criteria for pre-schools' use and manipulation of certain 'developmental' activities in and outside the classrooms. It was therefore deemed necessary to make decisions in terms of not only the relevance but also on the activities' levels of

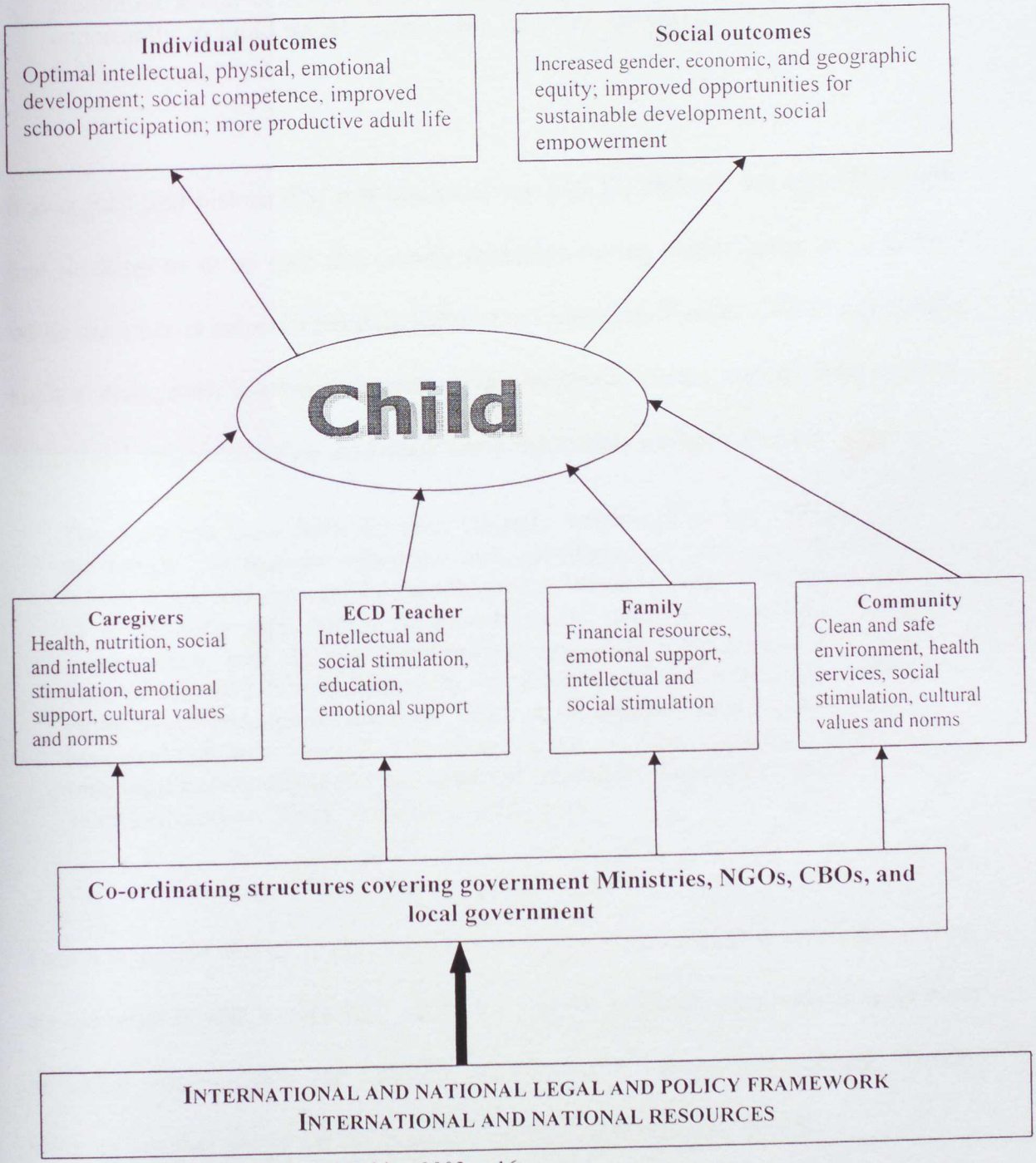
difficulty/challenge for the children. Such decisions presumably benefited from the child development perspective (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, most ECD programmes in Malawi might have implicitly been primarily influenced by the child development approaches with a possibility of some recognition of the social context (MoGCS, 2003; MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a; MoGCS & UNICEF, 1989). Therefore in such a situation, understanding and application of some of the developmentally appropriate practices were useful in understanding the perspective from which the pre-schools provide early literacy development opportunities to the children.

The current study therefore utilised both the "developmentally appropriate" and the "contextually appropriate" theoretical frameworks (of course with emphasis on the latter) as this was ideal for the nature of this study, whose target was to develop a deeper understanding of practices in rural pre-schools in relation to early literacy development (see Chapters 1 and 3). The use of both frameworks ensured some level of complentarity with regard to explaining the issues under study, more especially in a country (Malawi) where ECD has for the most part been influenced by the developmentally appropriate perspective as will be discussed later in the chapter. Of course using two frameworks may pose its own challenges in the process, especially in terms of how to create a balance between the two levels of thinking in looking at early literacy development opportunities in rural pre-schools; in which case the likelihood of emphasising one at the expense of the other was one of the difficult issues to reconcile in the study.

2.1.4 Rationale for and implementation of integrated early childhood development

Literature clearly shows that the influencial approach to the implementation of ECD services favoured by organisations and governments is the Integrated Early Childhood

Figure 2.1: Integrated early childhood development



Source: Adapted from Hyde and Kabiru, 2003, p.16

> with great potential for fostering social and gender equality as well as for promoting social cohesion by providing underprivileged families with an opportunity to build social support and informal networks. (Haddad, 2002, p.15)

It is argued that historically, two blocks of services for children are identified, with one focusing more on care and usually operating during longer hours of each day, while the other is more deliberately focused on education. Haddad (2002) argues that such a dichotomy has been determined by historical forces arising from cultural beliefs and values regarding the family's and the mother's responsibilities in caring:

> The dominant view from the past, strongly influenced by the "ideology of the family", is that the education and upbringing of young children is a private affair and not a public responsibility. While regarded as a family task or a mother's task, public responsibility is minimal or limited. As a consequence, two sharply distinguished rationales have arisen. The first regards society's role as limited to interference in exceptional cases, when children are endangered due to a 'lack' of family care, thus supporting the historical childcare "block". The other regards the state's resources as being only legitimately applied in the sphere of education, thus supporting the pre-school education "block". (Haddad, 2002, p.3)

Thus it is argued that in most countries the current status of ECD is in transition from the old order in which pre-school education was the emphasis, to a more holistic view in which responsibility for ECD is shared among various stakeholders, thereby bringing together the social and educational dimensions (Pence, 2004).

While I generally accept the ideas of the 'holistic' view to ECD, there are also issues of general interest that need our attention before universally applying the model. A critical look at the driving social forces behind the adoption or embracement of such a philosophy in countries that have adopted it, as well as identification of the conditions

> with great potential for fostering social and gender equality as well as for promoting social cohesion by providing underprivileged families with an opportunity to build social support and informal networks. (Haddad, 2002, p.15)

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for success, are necessary steps before applying it in other contexts such as the Sub-Saharan Africa.

It seems to me that the 'holistic' view of ECD is a consequence of diverse understanding of the notion of how children's transition to primary school is understood, and therefore should be addressed (Neuman, 2000). Therefore, it can be argued that the way ECD service is provided, whether in the form of IECD or pre-school, depends on what society sees as the best way to address its concerns about children. This raises the fundamental issue of whether IECD is feasible in the African context, given the social and economic realities on the ground. Given that ECD services in Africa are still in their infancy, unlike in most of the developed countries, the extent to which African countries should seek to promote children's multi-dimensional development and learning, in the process perhaps de-emphasising preparation of children for formal schooling, needs careful consideration.

Furthermore, where governments are still struggling with access issues to early childhood development and education in developing countries, (UNESCO, 2004), it seems essential to consider whether 'holistic' delivery of ECD services is more feasible than a purposefully organised conventional pre-school which caters reasonably for children's other needs apart from education. Bearing in mind that in most African countries where the need for quality access to education, especially for children, is great (UNESCO, 2004), questions need to be raised as to whether by taking the focus away from education through IECD services we might not end up aggravating the situation of some of the already disadvantaged children especially in rural areas in terms of opportunities for learning specific skills for their survival in the changing global society. This is in line with the implicit assumptions of IECD, that

there will be capacity in terms of human and material resources to address all the aspects of the child's development when such an approach is preferred. This may not be realistic, especially in the rural settings which are often educationally resource-constrained, as well as the challenges of having to meet daily needs such as food by the communities (Durston & Nashire, 2001; Rose, 2003b; Bray, 2003), (Also see Chapters 5 and 6).

Therefore, consideration of early childhood related matters as a social investment to which society as a whole is committed to contribute (i.e. IECD) has its own challenges, and such should be realistically brought to the fore if effective ECD policy formulation and implementation is to be achieved, especially in the developing world. It is interesting to note that arguments on the model for early childhood development still remain unresolved even in countries which have had more experience of ECD such as the USA and the UK (Moss, 2003; Kamerman, 2003; Neuman, 2000). Literature and research therefore appears to be clear about the need to consider the prevailing conditions and requirements for each context before applying any model for early childhood development.

In the following sections I briefly discuss general issues related to ECD policy development and implementation in Africa before specifically moving on to the practical issues pertaining to ECD policy and practice in Malawi.

2.2 ECD policy development in the Sub-Saharan Africa

ECD policy planning and development process in the Sub-Saharan Africa provides a

common framework which African countries have tended to adopt in the long run[7]. Generally, events in ECD policy development in the Sub-Saharan Africa have been driven by external forces, more specifically efforts to meet the international agenda on Education for All (EFA). Furthermore, policy planning and development has emphasised holistic or integrated approaches to ECD, discussed in the previous section.

Developments in ECD in Africa in the early 1970s culminated in general awareness, recognition and embracing of ECD as a field in its own right by many governments.[8] Two major contributions to ECD policy development in Africa are recognised and these are the work of the International African ECD seminars (1997, 1998), which led to the development of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU)[9] between 2001 and 2004; and work of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (formerly known as Donors for African Education, DAE), which is considered to have prepared the ground for ECD policy development in Africa.

Through its Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) carried out two

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[7] Background information regarding ECD policy development and implementation in Africa is generally scarce. Recently, the work of Pence (2004) is a major comprehensive profiling and discussion of ECD policy development and implementation, and therefore this section has drawn extensively on his work.

[8] Kenya is considered as a special case; it was the first African country to develop a comprehensive ECD policy. In 1971 the Kenyan Ministry of Education with the help of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, launched the Pre-school Education Project at Kenya Institute of Education. It is argued that this project has had great positive impact on the Kenyan basic education system for many years. (Kipkorir, 1993)

[9] ECDVU is based at the University of Victoria in Canada and grew out of a series of two and three-week seminars which were requested by UNICEF Headquarters in 1994 to promote ECD in developing countries. The first international seminar took place in 1995 at the University of Victoria in Canada and was followed up by Regional Seminars in South East Asia/Pacific (1997) and in Africa (1997, 1998).

major policy-related projects in Africa. The first study, 'Policy Studies Project', was a continental survey with three country case studies: Ghana, Namibia and Mauritius. The second was a 'Policy Planning Project' which engaged three Francophone countries: Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, and was aimed at supporting national policy planning activities for ECD (2002-2003) (Vargas-Baron, 2003, in Pence, 2004). The latter project developed a framework or blueprint for ECD policy formulation, which African governments could broadly use to develop their own country ECD policies (Box 2.4). It has, however, been argued that although the two ADEA-WGECD policy-related projects provide a useful broader context for consideration of more focused work or studies on ECD, they do not seem to exhaust the list of other issues that ECD policy planning, development and implementation will usually demand (Pence, 2004, pp.10, 12). This is understandable, especially in a region or context where ECD has not enjoyed emphasis over the years.

According to Pence (2004), two key themes seem to run through many of the important lessons that were identified in the study. The first theme is the need for a multisectoral/multiorganisational and multicountry approach to ECD policy planning and implementation. In other words, this approach puts emphasis on the "importance of working intersectorally and multiorganisationally within country ... and working towards achieving enhanced synergy and cost-effectiveness by involving several countries in the process at the same time" (p.13).

The second theme was "to proceed with flexibility and sensitivity regarding where each country is at in terms of its readiness for policy planning and implementation activities" (p.13). This suggests that individual African countries have to make an

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The seminars brought together ECD leaders from each region as part of network-building and

assessment of the specific needs and gaps with regard to the situation facing children and families, familiarity with the structural concepts being promoted, including an understanding of the integrated approach and its implications, among other things (see Evans *et al,* 2000).

Box 2.4 ADEA-WGECD guidelines on ECD policy formulation

A. Formulation of an ECD Policy:
- hold an initial national conference ...with suitably high level representation (#2)
- ensure consultation with all ECD stakeholders at every stage of policy development (#4)
- establish a task force to produce the policy document with meticulous recording (#5)

B. Content of an ECD policy:
- spell out with absolute clarity the roles and responsibilities of key players, particularly government departments (#2)
- create a co-ordinating body such as an inter-Ministerial committee (#3)
- members of the co-ordinating committee should be at a high enough level to make decisions without reporting back (#4)
- a lead Ministry or an organisation answerable to government is necessary for the policy to be represented in parliament (#5)
- the funding of the policy is the most crucial issue and must be addressed explicitly in the policy, in particular the necessary contributions from government departments (#6)

C. Implementation issues:
- monitoring and evaluation of the policy and its implementation should be formalised (#2)
- apart from government funding, other sources of funds should be explored (#4)
- decentralised funding to local governments and/or NGOs as the main implementers of policy should take high priority (#5)
- government sectors are likely to retreat to the sectoral approach to ECD, and safeguards must be developed (#6)

Source: Vargas-Baron (2004, in Pence, 2004, p.12)

Although there is reference to the need for countries in Africa to plan and implement ECD on the basis of the prevailing national contextual factors or conditions, given that the drive for ECD in Africa has its origin in international concerns related to EFA, and consequently the influence of prominent international organisations (Young, 2002; Pence, 2004; Penn 2004), the extent to which such programmes are contextually appropriate needs to be questioned. While the crucial role played by

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knowledge-sharing process (Pence 2004, p. 14).

international organisations in these early stages of ECD development in Africa should be applauded, there seems to be the danger of transferring ECD principles which may not effectively address the needs of societies in the African context. As we shall see in the next section, the adoption of an integrated approach to ECD in some African countries seems to be a reflection of such transfer of principles from developed countries, which raises serious questions about how such programmes are implemented.

2.3 ECD policy issues in Malawi

This section examines early childhood development (ECD) policy and implementation in Malawi in order to contextualise early literacy development practices at pre-school level. Furthermore, the discussion relates the ECD Policy in Malawi to the two theoretical frameworks discussed earlier on in the chapter.

2.3.1 ECD policy planning and implementation in Malawi

The first national policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Malawi was approved by Cabinet in February 2003 and officially launched in March 2004. The ECD policy planning process in Malawi seems to have benefited from the guidelines provided by the ADEA-WGECD in 2003 (Box 2.4). There is an indication that a number of stakeholders from government, NGOs and academic institutions were engaged in the planning and development of the policy and its accompanying documents (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, b, c, d, e). The approach to policy implementation appears also to follow the same pattern, in that a wide range of stakeholders are involved to meet the various demands of the ECD policy. However, the extent to which the various implementation partners/stakeholders are or will be committed to their specific aspects of the implementation process seems to be one of

the challenges facing co-ordinating Ministry of Gender and Community Services. (MoGCS) (Chalamanda, 2004)

2.3.2 *Framework of the national policy on ECD in Malawi*

The Malawi National Policy on ECD seems to have been developed with the recognition of both national and international concerns on the situation of children. Nationally the policy has situated itself within the framework of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), which is claimed to be an overarching statement of strategy for poverty reduction for the Government of Malawi (GoM, 2002, p.1). In its rationale for development, the national ECD policy aligns itself to the Government of Malawi's agenda of poverty reduction:

> In order to integrate the Government's agenda of poverty reduction into all sectors of life, it has become necessary to develop a policy for the care, support, survival, growth and development for the Malawian child. Investing in early childhood helps to reduce inequalities rooted in poverty and social discrimination in society by enabling all children to have a fair and sound start in life. The future of the nation shall be built on a sound and solid foundation (MoGCS, 2003a, p.3)

Furthermore, the ECD policy has also drawn nationally from the Republic of Malawi's constitutional and legal framework for childcare, such as *The Children and Young Persons Act*; *The Affiliation Act*; *The Maintenance of Married Women Act;* and *The Wills and Inheritance Act* (MoGCS, 2003a, p.8).

In terms of the global context, the Malawi national policy on ECD claims to have been developed with the recognition of various international conventions and other legal human rights' instruments to which Malawi is a signatory. Some of the conventions include: the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

(CEDAW), the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (EFA), and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) charter (MoGCS, 2003a). Thus by aligning itself in the global context there appear to be inevitable implications for planning and implementation of the national policy, especially in terms of external influence.

2.3.2.1 ECD policy statement, objectives and guidelines

Promotion of child survival, growth and development is at the core of the national ECD policy statement for Malawi, and these three aspects are linked to the child's future participation in national development:

> The National Policy on ECD aims at promoting the provision of high quality ECD services to the Malawian child to ensure his/her survival, growth and development that would lead to his/her active participation in national development. This will be achieved by empowering the household, the community, institutions and organisations to effectively provide the required basic and essential Early Childhood Development services that will uphold human dignity ((MoGCS, 2003a, p.10)

The link between ECD and children's future participation in national development seems to raise the issue of motivations for ECD provision which were discussed in the previous sections, more specifically that ECD is linked to economic gains in that it eventually reduces poverty. One of the bases for supporting ECD by some international organisations such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is that there are economic returns for investing in ECD. In other words, it is claimed that apart from the fact that ECD services can significantly contribute to children's development, support families and women's equality, they can also help reduce poverty[10], and this in itself is attractive

[10] There are arguments from economic circles that every US$1 invested in child care brings US$2 in social and economic benefits (Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, 2003, p.4) (Also see Hyde and Kabiru, 2003). However, one can only assume that this is in the context where quality childcare in

for developing countries. Similarly, the Malawi ECD national policy claims that investment in ECD provides savings in government education budgets due to lower repetition and drop out rates in primary school (p.6). The extent to which these economic claims are valid is yet to be established through rigorous research evidence (Penn, 2004).

Apart from issues of access, the policy statement also implies the issue of quality of ECD provision: "provision of high quality ECD", "...to effectively provide..." (p.10). This is crucial at this stage in Malawi because sometimes governments tend to put emphasis on access at the expense of quality, especially in contexts where service provision is very low. It can be argued that in Malawi, much as current discourse in ECD seems to put emphasis on access (MoEST, 2001, GoM, 2002), it is at the same time sensible to emphasise quality of provision, even in the early stages of the ECD Policy implementation, especially after learning hard lessons from the 'wholesale' introduction of Free Primary Education in Malawi in 1994, which was implemented without adequate checks and balances on quality (Kadzamira *et al*, 2004; Rose, 2003b).

The national ECD policy is guided by a number of principles some of which emanate from the international conventions to which Malawi is a signatory (see Box 2.5).

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terms of provision of both appropriate human and material resources is made – and seems likely to be in developed countries.

Box 2.5 Malawi ECD national policy guiding principles

The Guiding principles for this policy are as follows:

1. ECD shall be provided without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, tribe, health status economic status, and religious or political affiliation.
2. The family is the primary institution for supporting holistic growth and development of children
3. Children's Rights must be respected at all times in order to uphold human dignity enabling optimal child development and participation.
4. Every child has the right to develop his/her full potential. The first few years of a child's life last forever. Society has a corresponding obligation and duty to ensure that no single moment is lost since opportunity lost in early childhood is hard to compensate in late life.
5. Early childhood care for survival, growth and development is the basis of human life
6. Community-based management of ECD services is the most effective for sustainable child development.

Source: MoGCS, 2003a, p.10

2.3.2.2 Holistic approach to ECD national policy and implications

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) Programme in Malawi implies diversity of foci and stakeholders involved. Such diversification of ECD is also reflected in the national policy objectives (Box 2.6). In other words, the national policy goes beyond sectoral concerns (section 2.1.2). This approach means that related national policies are put into perspective within the national ECD Policy. For instance, the following policies are considered as directly or indirectly relating to childhood care, protection and development: *National Gender Policy*, *National Youth Policy*, *Malawi Decentralisation Policy*, *National Orphan Care Policy* (Currently know as *National Policy on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children, National Education Policy*, *National Sports Policy*, *National Health Policy*, *National Policy on People with Disability* (Chalamanda *et al*, 2001, n.p)

In a context where poverty levels are high, hence worsening the situation of the child, coupled with very little access to ECD services for children, the rural areas being even more disadvantaged, the choice of the integrated ECD model may look attractive for a

country like Malawi. This is especially applicable when effective ECD is linked to developmental benefits. Furthermore, the complexities involved in poverty reduction (GoM, 2002) appear to call for such multisectoral approaches to national programmes such as ECD.

Box 2.6 Policy objectives

The National Policy on ECD seeks to provide guidelines and support, and to enhance co-ordination and investment in Early Childhood Development programmes in Malawi

1. Promote the provision of quality antenatal care
2. Promote the best start in life for all children
3. Enhance the provision of psychosocial care for holistic development of the child
4. Expand quality early learning and stimulation services in Malawi
5. Strengthen ECD partnership and networking
6. Facilitate the provision of acceptable standards of care, early learning and development that are in line with the guiding principles of ECD Policy
7. `Address the negative socio-economic factors that affect early childhood care and development
8. Facilitate the provision of adequate resources to be made available for ECD services at all levels
9. Promote the protection of children from any forms of abuse and discrimination
10. Strengthen the protection and safeguarding of children in difficult circumstances
11. Reduce malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and improve food security at household and community levels
12. Promote access to safe drinking and adequate sanitation to the households and communities

Source: Adapted from MoGCS, 2003a, pp.10-11

Although the integrated approach to ECD has had success in some countries, particularly the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark (Kamerman, 2000, 2003; Haddad, 2002), the choice of the integrated ECD model for Malawi raises other important issues that need to be taken into account if the programme is to succeed. One of the well recorded challenges in the literature is that of co-ordination among ministries in government and with other institutions outside government (Pence, 2004; Haddad, 2002; Chalamanda, 2004). In the case of Malawi, the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services has the overall responsibility for regulating, monitoring, and supervision of ECD activities. This means that it has to

:o-ordinate efforts on child-related issues among the various stakeholders in order to :nsure the success of the IECD Programme.

The national policy document makes clear the specific roles and responsibilities for the various government sectors and other stakeholders[11] dealing with childhood matters. This acts as the framework for operationalising the national policy. This arrangement seems complex though. The extent to which each sector will cooperate in fulfilling its responsibilities towards the policy is debatable. Perhaps the major challenge is to balance individual sectors or stakeholders' concerns ("usual business" so to say) with appreciation of the joint 'project' on ECD as co-ordinated by MoGCS, especially if there are no proper funding arrangements or allocations for that cause.

Thus the stakeholders could be tempted to follow sectoral rather than integrated ECD. Of course it can still be argued that the existence of the national policy will put checks and balances on sectoral rather than integrated practices but sometimes the realities on the ground may force certain implementation complexities to occur, especially considering the fact that each (sector) has a host of challenges to deal with as well. This does not suggest pessimism, but rather that this is a useful challenge for Malawi to learn from and therefore make adjustments as necessary to benefit the Malawian child. It is important to note that when the national ECD was developed there seemed to be a general realisation of the complexities of implementing the integrated ECD and this may be a key to dealing with future complexities:

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[11] Stakeholders involved include Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP); Ministry of Education, and other educational institutions such as University of Malawi, Malawi Institute of Education, Teachers' Colleges, Medical Schools, Religions Institutions; Ministry of Persons With Disabilities and Rehabilitation Institutions; Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD), Ministry of Local Government and District Administration (MoLGDA); Faith Based Organisations (FBOs); Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) and other NGOs; Cooperating Partners; Human Rights Institutions; Communities; Household and Families (MoGCS, National Policy on ECD, 2003a, pp.15-18).

an ECD which is effective, convenient, simple and realistic to the huge social-economic challenges facing the nation.

Research has shown that one of the challenges the rural communities in Malawi are facing is the problem of illiteracy, and many children are dropping out of school without achieving basic levels of literacy and numeracy (Williams, 1998; Chilora, 2001; NSO, 2003; MESA, 2004; Johnson *et al* 2000; Rose, 2003b). This suggests that preparation for schooling of children in the rural areas may be one of the areas that need special attention if Malawi is to be realistic about improving the social status of the rural masses, which are in most cases disadvantaged in terms of education opportunities. Of course, it is often argued that children need more than education, (the development of literacy skills in the case of this study), and therefore that the other aspects need to be factored in. This is a sensible position which may not be impossible but poses formidable challenges, and is therefore one which in some contexts may be unrealistic given the fact that there are often huge resource implications for the promotion of such multi-dimensional development of children as has been argued earlier on.

Bearing in mind that pupils drop out early from primary school, and that they do so without acquiring basic literacy skills, the learning opportunities provided by ECD services are therefore crucial and can make a huge a difference in facilitating development of literacy skills in early primary school (Bloch, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Paulu, 1992; Tompkins, 2003). Given that the IECD-CBCC's focus is not limited to education only, the provision of early literacy opportunities is given divided attention. This may also be worsened by other challenges such as lack of proper infrastructure, lack of community capacity and skills, and general lack of

financial and material resources (see Mpinganjira and M. Chimombo, 2004; Chalamanda *et al*, 2001).

2.3.3 *Orientation of ECD policy and practice in Malawi: developmentally appropriate or contextually appropriate?*

This section attempts to draw together the policy issues discussed in the previous sections and relate them to the two theoretical frameworks discussed so far, namely Child Development (Developmentally Appropriate) and Sociocultural (Contextually Appropriate) approaches. This is important because the various policy claims and messages have implications for practice, which would in turn draw from either of the theories as far as care and early stimulation in ECD centres are concerned.

Following the formulation of the National ECD Policy, the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services in conjunction with UNICEF developed a number of useful documents to help implement the policy[12] (Table 2.1). These documents seem very important as they provide more specific administrative and professional guidelines to various key stakeholders in the implementation of the ECD National Policy. It appears reasonable therefore to make reference to such key documents in order to understand the practices that are being promoted in the actual implementation process.

[12] According to Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, the documents were still in draft form at the time of the study, although they are currently being used.

Table 2.1 Key Documents on Integrated Early Childhood Development for Malawi

	Document	Summary of Contents
1.	Programme Document for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) for Malawi (April 2003)	Main reference document detailing the rationale for IECD for Malawi. It thus helps clarify and expand on what is contained in the National ECD Policy. Also included is the Action Plan and Budget for the IECD Programme (2003-2007).
2.	Operational Guidelines for Integrated Early Childhood development (April 2003)	Guidelines for co-ordination and implementation of IECD in Malawi. In other words, it translates the National Policy into what should happen in practice in terms of co-ordination and management of any ECD Centre. Complements the ECD Syllabus (5 below) and the Training Manual (3 below).
3.	Training Manual for Early Childhood Development (April 2002)	Document for training caregivers. An actual two-week Programme for Training is included with various topics for each day. Topics include: Structure of the ECD Syllabus/Curriculum, Learning areas; Teaching and learning activities/methods, classroom management, Conventions on the Rights of the Child, Resources, Evaluation and Assessment, among others.
4.	Parents' and Caregiver's Guide for Households and Communities (April 2003)	Guide mainly to help ECD providers to give civic education to parents and caregivers so they understand the various child developmental practices: "provides developmentally appropriate care areas and activities, which will help parents and caregivers to interact and play with their children, thus promoting good early childhood development (ECD)" (p.7).
5.	Early Childhood Development Syllabus Levels 1 and 2 (April 2003)	Actual Syllabus for ECD in Malawi. The Syllabus is divided into eight Learning Areas to be covered in three terms. The learning areas include: Social and Interpersonal Relationships, Learning Readiness, Language, Mathematics, Health Education, Creative Expression, Spiritual and Moral Education, Environmental Education.
6.	Community Based Child Care (CBCC) Project: A Training Manual, 1989[13]	Developed in order to ensure effective co-ordination and integration of childhood services across various ministries and stakeholders. It is considered a "unified training instrument" primarily for use by extension workers in the training of village committees and volunteer child care mothers in the Community Based Childcare CBCC) Project (p.1).

Source: MoGCS & UNICEF, 2002, 2003a, b, c, d, e.

2.3.3.1 ECD policy and the contextually appropriate framework

Generally from the outset, and specifically based on the various programme documents, IECD in Malawi seems to have considered the social context in its ECD Policy and accompanying documents. Useful links have been made to specific socio-

[13] Although this manual was developed prior to the development of the IECD Policy for Malawi, it seems to have directly fed into the development of most of the national ECD Policy documents (1-5 in Table 2.1). Other useful earlier documents include *Training Modules on Improving Family and Community Child Care Practices* (6 modules); *ECD Programme for the 1990s.* Through the then Ministry of Community Services (Currently

economic and emerging issues and how they affect early childhood development in Malawi, such as health (the HIV/AIDS epidemic, water and sanitation); nutrition and food security; education (including issues on FPE); gender; child rights and protection, among others. The integration of policies in these specific areas as related to childhood development within the ECD National Policy also seems to be a clear indication of contextual appreciation of the childhood issues that matter in Malawi. It can therefore be argued that from the national level discourse point of view, the ECD Policy can be considered to be somewhat 'contextually appropriate' as far as Malawi is concerned.

However, it may be necessary to go beyond this rhetoric and address some of the important key questions that Woodhead (2000) asks (see Box 2.3). For instance, can the rhetoric at national level be always assumed to be within the perspectives of the stakeholders directly affected by the ECD programmes that have been developed? In other words, how for example, do communities perceive ECD programmes introduced in their environment even if they do not necessarily understand the technical rhetoric that often goes with it? It is reasonable to ask whether the ECD models chosen at national level are appropriate for the rural masses that have their own challenges in their communities, more specifically poverty concerns, which often top the list (Durston & Nashire, 2001; Rose, 2003a, b).

In the study by Mpinganjira and M. Chimombo (2004) in which they explored problems affecting access to quality basic education by most vulnerable children, especially girls and the disabled, in nine rural ECD centres, the researchers concluded that most of the community members involved in the study (including chiefs)

MoGCS), UNICEF particularly made tremendous efforts to facilitate the development of these documents both

appreciated the role of ECD to prepare children socially, spiritually, morally and cognitively. However, it was also clear that the dominant perception of the existence of the ECD centres in the communities was that they were meant to prepare children for formal schooling (p.8). This is in agreement with what this study has found as has been discussed in Chapters 4 to 6.

2.3.3.2 ECD policy and the developmentally appropriate framework

The various policy documents for the two types of IECD services for Malawi seem to a large extent to draw from child development theory although to some extent there is reference to the sociocultural approach. In its introduction, the ECD National Policy itself begins by making strong reference to research in Developmental Psychology as the basis for Malawi to effectively address early childhood development issues:

> Developmental psychology research has shown that it is during the early years of life that the development of intelligence, affectivity and social relations occur very rapidly. In addition, any irregularity in a child's development at this stage will substantially reduce future potential. Therefore proper attention to a child's development, in the early years, can help to increase the child's survival, balanced growth and development. (MoGCS, 2003a, p.3)

While such an introduction should not be overly emphasised for the sake of making an academic argument, the statement does suggest the important influence of child development theory on the ECD National Policy. From the outset there is an implicit intention to focus policy practice on developmental stages of the children's growth as propagated by the advocates of the developmentally appropriate approach to ECD (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997).

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technically and financially.

Pronounced elements of the developmentally appropriate approach are implied in most of the policy guidelines/documents outlined in Table 2.1. *Operational Guidelines for Integrated Early Childhood Development* (MoGCS, & UNICEF, 2003d), in particular, seems to strengthen this theoretical underpinning in its outline of key principles in the delivery of integrated ECD services, although in a few cases there is clear and useful reference to the context of child development (see points 5 and 9 in Box 2.7).

Box 2.7 Key principles in the delivery of ECD services as adopted by IECD programme in Malawi

1. **Development is holistic:** it consists of interdependent dimensions. This means that all variables such as health, nutrition, social, emotional and spiritual well-being are interwoven in a child's life and develop simultaneously.
2. **Development begins prenatally and learning begins at birth:** During the prenatal period, important developments take place that affect the brain, physical body and the chemistry of the child. These have an impact on the child's ability to learn, to thrive, to grow and to be healthy.
3. **The first eight years of a child's life form the foundation for all later development:** Early attention to the child's needs is critical. Developmental psychologists have observed that in the early years a child develops all the basic brain functions and psychological structures upon which later growth and learning are dependent. Attention to young children from conception onwards can therefore prevent later difficulties.
4. **Children's needs differ across the early childhood years:** A child's developmental needs will vary over the years of life in relation to his or her maturation process.
5. **Development is determined by a range of factors**: Development varies depending on the child's nutritional and health status, genetic inheritance and social/cultural context. There is a general pattern or sequence for development that is true for most children. However, the rate, the character and the quality of development will vary from one child to another.
6. **Children's development is cumulative in nature and not necessarily progressive:** the early years are critical in terms of long-term development. The earlier attention is given to the child's developmental progress, the more likely it is that problems can be prevented.
7. **Children are active participants in their own development and learning:** Learning involves the child's construction of knowledge, not an adult's imposition on the child.
8. **Development and learning occur as a result of the child interacting with people and objects in his/her environment:** Children need opportunities to interact with peers and adults in a safe environment that provides the child with security and acceptance.
9. **Children live within a context:** their needs are most effectively addressed in relation to the family, community and culture.

Source: MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003d, pp.7-8

Points 5 and 9 are of particular interest to the current study because they are linked to opportunities for early literacy development drawn from the context or communities in which ECD centres operate in the rural areas. It is interesting again to look at how the implementation of the ECD guidelines strikes a balance between the two

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The reference to both frameworks, however, is a good sign, and a move in the right direction in terms of possibilities of addressing children's 'holistic' needs in the process.

2.3.4 Issues and implications of ECD national policy choices for Malawi

The fact that the planning, development and (hopefully) implementation of the ECD National Policy and Programme for Malawi seems to have benefited from contributions from a wide spectrum of stakeholders, is in sharp contrast to the development of some previous policies which did not enjoy wide consultation, such as Free Primary Education (FPE) policy (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003), Vernacular Language Policy (Kamwendo, 2000), among others. This is a source of strength and hope for early childhood development and its services. The choice of an integrated or 'holistic' approach to ECD however has its own implications for implementation or practice. I will look at two broad challenges which seem to emerge from the discussion so far, although the possibility of other challenges should be acknowledged as well.

2.3.4.1 Co-ordination challenges

IECD, being such a complex arrangement, poses co-ordination challenges to the implementation of the national ECD policy. The realities of co-ordinating child care programmes under the various stakeholders both inside and outside government cannot easily be surmounted by the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services. There is therefore sense in the prediction that one of the challenges integrated policies are likely to meet within governments is the tendency to retreat to sectoral approaches to early childhood development (see Pence, 2004). Consequently the Monitoring Strategy suggested in the national ECD Policy

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MoGCS, 2003a) needs to be consistently updated to reflect the realities on the ground and hence ensure effective running of the IECD Programme.

2.3.4.2 Implementation-resource challenges

The real test for the NIECD Programme in Malawi hinges on its actual implementation at local level. Much as theoretically the programme has drawn lessons from multiple perspectives on dealing with ECD (MoGCS, 2003a; MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, d), there still remain the challenges associated with practice at ECD and community levels. The development of a number of useful guidelines for stakeholders at all levels is a critical implementation stage for the co-ordinating Ministry (MoGCS). The daunting task is therefore to ensure that what has been outlined is practically achieved, and this is not always easy, especially bearing in mind the problems of capacity at ECD centres in terms of both quality human and material resources (Mpinganjira & M.Chimombo, 2004; Chalamanda *et al*, 2001) (see Chapter 5).

For instance, although policy documents and guidelines seem promising in terms of addressing the real needs of children from the developmentally appropriate and contextually appropriate frameworks, a number of issues are still at stake. One issue is the implementation of the syllabus at ECD centre level, especially in terms of the extent to which it will be holistically implemented: that emphasis is **not** on education 'at the expense' of the other developmental aspects as has been argued by the advocates of the integrated ECD approach (see Evans *et al*, 2000; Haddad, 2002; Pence, 2004; MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003a, d). Therefore the issue of quality of implementers at ECD level (caregivers) and the quality of basic resources at their disposal, hence the determination to follow the 'holistic' approach, are a long-term

critical agenda as far as practice at the individual ECD centres is concerned (also see Chapter 5).

Research has shown that the success of the integrated approach to ECD is often linked to government's willingness to provide substantial and sustained financial and quality resources, and the provision of professional development (Moss, 2003; Kamerman, 2003). It can be argued that this may pose a threat to the implementation of the 'holistic' ECD programme in Malawi, bearing in mind the huge problems of financing education-related endeavours that characterise the government system. Although there is a strong will to support IECD by other stakeholders, especially international organisations, it is at the same time important to realise that their assistance is always only available up to some point, and that government has to take deliberate steps to substantially invest in the new programme for childhood development for purposes of providing quality learning experiences for children in ECD centres in Malawi.

2.4 Early literacy development in pre-school settings

In order to understand the development of early literacy skills in particular pre-schooling contexts, it is crucial to be cautious about the kind of theoretical underpinnings on which such practices have been built. Miller (2000a) argues that it is essential for ECD practitioners to recognise and acknowledge the socio-cultural setting within which children play and learn, including the development of early literacy skills (pp.8-10). Similarly, Whitehead (1997) contends that it is important that in our acceptance of any research in human relationships and child rearing we must be cautious of the fact that this is a complex field and that "there are other ways of welcoming babies into the world, nurturing them and supporting their learning of the

particular languages and communicative traditions of their groups and societies" (p.76). In suggesting a framework of analysis of language teaching and learning contexts, M. Chimombo (2003) emphasises the role and interaction of four major socio-cultural aspects or components of context, namely psychology, sociology, ideology and technology. The main argument is that there is a prominent role played by social context in any endeavour to understand human behaviours, including those related to language and literacy in ECD.

In their exploration of the trends in literacy in early childhood over the years, and more especially the relationships between language, literacy and cultural context, Hall *et al* (2003, p.7) conclude that:

> literacy cannot be divorced from language as a whole, nor from its wider cultural context. Literacy is given meaning by the cultural discourses and practices in which it is embedded and young children are from birth witnesses to and participants in the practices.

Similarly Ortiz and Ordonez-Jasis (2005, pp.112-113) state:

> ...to understand the process of literacy development through social interaction, we suggest considering the sociocultural context of the community where families live and the goals parents wish to achieve in sharing literacy activities with their children (...educational, recreational, political or economic).

The recognition that there is diversity in early literacy development due to diversity in social contexts is central to the discussion of early literacy development.

2.4.1 Definition of literacy

Defining literacy is not an easy task (Viruru, 2003; Guerra, 1998), and definitions of literacy can vary from the simple or basic to more complex ones (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). Guerra (1998, cited in Viruru, 2003, p.14) suggests four broad

categories of commonly used meanings of literacy: *literacy as entity, literacy as self, literacy as institution* and *literacy as practice*. According to Guerra, *literacy as an entity* is an umbrella term which suggests that it is an object that exists 'outside social and individual constraints'. The implication of this view is that written texts have an authority about them that is inviolable: the idea that meaning in texts is static (that the reader cannot create alternative meanings apart from the intended meaning of the writer). In terms of *literacy as self*, Guerra argues that literacy is viewed as something that an individual possesses and therefore it is personally constructed. He further explains that individuals are held personally responsible for the kind of literacies they do or do not possess. *Literacy as institution* views literacy as an artifact or currency, in that the more one possesses it the more successful one becomes. Guerra's final category, *literacy as practice*, "recognises that there are multiple forms of literacy, and that people blend these multiple literacies as they both create and engage with the world around them" (Viruru, 2003, p.14).

Over the years, especially with research studies in the 1970s and 1980s interested in the link between early literacy and schooling (Heath, 1983, & Taylor, 1983, both cited in Hall *et al*, 2003), there was a reevaluation of the definition of literacy as something that moved beyond the conventional ability to read and write:

> There was increasing recognition of the role that young children played in making sense of literacy; that even the very youngest were strategic literacy learners who paid attention to the print world, participated in it in their own ways, and developed theories about how it worked. A new field of study appeared – emergent literacy. This change involved a redefinition of literacy, such that literacy began to be viewed as a much broader set of print-related behaviours than those conventionally experienced in education. (Hall *et al*, 2003, p.6)

It was this kind of broad thinking that brought about a new field of study in early years education in general, and literacy development in particular, which came to be

known as *emergent literacy.*[14] Hall *et al* (2003) therefore introduced another type or concept of literacy within early childhood development, which they call 'Early childhood literacy'. The authors make a number of claims about this supposedly 'new' concept:

> It is an all-embracing concept for a rich range of authorial and responsive practices using a variety of media and modalities, carried out by people during their early childhood. (p.9)
>
> It is a concept that allows early childhood to be seen as a state in which people use literacy as it is appropriate, meaningful and useful to them, rather than a stage on a path to some future literate state. It is not about emergence or becoming literate, it is about being literate; and it allows the literacy practices and products of early childhood to be acknowledged as valid in their own right, rather than perceived as inadequate manifestations of adult literacy. (p.10)
>
> It is a concept that allows early literacy to move way beyond the limitations and restrictions of schooling and extend into all domains of the lives of people in early childhood. (p.10)
>
> It is a concept that has evolved out of contestation, innovation and reconceptualisation and one that has become and continues to be susceptible to the scrutiny of a wide range of theoretical and methodological positions. It is not a concept that has finished evolving, nor will it ever do so. As a position it recognises that it is a social construct and as such will never achieve fixity. (p.10)

The broad conceptualisation of the meaning of literacy raises a number of issues. The term 'literacy' can no longer be viewed in a narrow sense or rather restricted to reading and writing only as various individuals, societies or disciplines will often have various notions regarding literacy. In the field of educational psychology for example, there is currently discussion on *emotional literacy*[15], which does not

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[14] This term was first introduced by a New Zealand researcher, Marie Clay, to describe the behaviours seen in young children when they use books and writing materials to imitate reading and writing activities, even though the children cannot actually read and write in the conventional sense (http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li100.htm, Accessed October 2004).

necessarily deal with reading and writing. Similarly there is also the notion of *critical literacy* which in general could mean a literacy about literacies, "that literacy involves malleable social practices, relations and events that can be harnessed in the service of particular pedagogical projects and agendas for cultural action" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, cited in Viruru, 2003, p.14).

Furthermore, the broad conceptualisation of literacy has implications for researching practice in various contexts in that researchers need to be more open-minded about the implicit and explicit dimensions of meaning and practices that go beyond reading and writing. For instance, attempts to understand provision of early literacy development opportunities in rural pre-schools has to be understood in the context of the kinds of meanings that the society attaches to the learning of literacy skills. In other words, such skills may not be called "literacy" *per se* but may implicitly contribute to the development of early literacy in children within the rural setting in Malawi for instance.

In an oral society like Malawi, it is likely that oral activities within the community may facilitate literacy development in children even in the home. In fact, Finnegan (1988) questions the assumption that is often made, not only in the North but even in the South as well, that people without a tradition of literacy are therefore without the 'typically literate capacity':

> [W]e may find that the established and respected tradition is that of literacy, but oral literature is still a living art and there is constant interplay between oral and written forms. When we survey these many different possibilities, it helps to bring home how very limited is the world's experience of printed

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[15] In her book entitled *Developing the emotionally literate school*, Weare (2004) defines emotional literacy as "the ability to understand ourselves and other people, and in particular to be aware of, understand, and use information about the emotional states of ourselves and others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others" (p.2).

> literature and mass literacy – the situations we tend to take for granted as the natural form to which all others must tend....Non-literate communities have, for instance, what have been described as lyrics, panegyric poetry, love songs, prose narratives, or drama. (Finnegan, 1988, p.62)

Finnegan partly discusses the conceptions of orality and literacy in the context of Literature as a field, but the issues she raises still apply to the general issues pertaining to reading and writing skills on one hand and listening and speaking on the other. What is substantial in this argument is that she draws our attention to another form of literacy, *oral literacy* which oral cultures possess parallel to conventional literacy.

Powell (1999 cited in Viruru, 2003, p.14) provides more specific conventional ways of defining literacy: "... the ability to decode print into speech ... the ability to derive meaning from written text and ... the ability to read and write at a specified proficiency level". Such a view of literacy, it has been argued, has its own problems in that it reinforces the idea that literacy is an educational resource which can be quantified to meet certain economic criteria, for instance, levels of literacy skills can be matched with market needs (literacy can be translated into 'time and money', which is part of the economy) (Viruru, 2003, p.14).

Ortiz and Ordonez-Jasis (2005) and Brody (2005) summarise this study's own working definitions or views of literacy:

> [A]t a basic level, literacy is generally associated with the ability to read and write [...the ability to decode and comprehend written language...].... But literacy can be viewed in a broader sense, that is, as the ability to think and reason within a particular society... (Ortiz and Ordonez-Jasis, 2005, pp.111-112)

> To be "literate" means more than to be able to decipher letters into words. Words are woven into phrases and sentences, proverbs, parables, poems, extended essays, books. To be "literate" is to be able to access and interact

with the complex layers of experience and meaning ... intended. (Brody, 2005, p.3)

2.4.1.1 Relationship between language and literacy

The literature clearly distinguishes language from literacy. On one hand, language is a means of communication using spoken and/or written words/symbols. In other words, language incorporates all the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Literacy, on the other hand, mainly refers to reading and writing skills (see Pflaum, 1986; Barrat-Pugh & Rohl, 2000). It is important to note, however, that the development of reading and writing is intimately linked to the development of listening and speaking skills, and mutually reinforcing. Goodwin and Perkins (2002) argue that "the knowledge that the child has accumulated in learning to talk will provide him with powerful support when learning to read" (p.2). Wilkins (1965, cited in Goodwin and Perkins, 2002) provided a model which introduces two dimensions of language that help explain the relationships between the two categories of the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Wilkins, these two dimensions are clear: *oracy* and *literacy*; and the categories are *production* and *reception* (Table. 2.2).

Table 2.2 Dimensions of Language

	PRODUCTION	RECEPTION
ORACY	Speaking	Listening
LITERACY	Writing	Reading

Source: Goodwin & Perkins, 2002, p.1

Goodwin and Perkins therefore argue that when we categorise language in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the relationship or dependence between

oracy and *literacy* is not so much more obvious than when the dimensions of "production" and "reception" are used. Research studies in emergent literacy generally emphasise a dual focus on oral and written skills because "the development of children's writing, from drawing to convention forms, is intertwined with the development of oral literacy skills" (Sulzby, 1996, cited in Kehoe *et al,* 2004, p.1).

The link between oracy and literacy is particularly important in the discussion of provision of early literacy development activities as it raises issues about the wide range of possibilities of literacy-related practices that are oral in nature but directly or indirectly powerful in particular social contexts. This appears particularly to be crucial when researching African settings, where there is strong oral tradition (Finnegan, 1988, 1992). By looking at literacy development within the context of all the four language skills, it is possible to appreciate what particular social and cultural contexts are able to provide for children as far as the development of literacy skills is concerned. As Whitehead (1997) concludes:

> Our studies of language and the role it plays in individual development and in education should convince us of at least one thing: language is all pervasive and bound up with much of what we think, feel and do as individuals and as members of particular social groups and communities. If it is difficult to untangle language from everything we experience as people, it is almost impossible to separate out the tight mesh of the four language modes of listening, talking, writing and reading. I would also argue that if we attempt to separate these forms of 'languaging' we do irreparable harm. At the best, a trivialization of language activities occurs when we begin to cast around for lists of things to do in daily listening and writing lessons.... At the worst, we facilitate the imposition of inappropriate checklists of achievements at certain ages in listening, reading, talking and writing 'skills'. (p.159)

2.4.2 Centrality of early literacy development

The importance of literacy cannot be overemphasised. Apart from determining personal growth, quality of life, self-image and the ability to function in the world, at

national or societal level, it has been argued that literacy is central to the smooth functioning and economic prosperity of a society as it produces a well educated, flexible and highly skilled workforce (McGaw *et al*, 1989 cited in Browne, 1999, p.iv). In other words, literacy is associated with function within one's social context. Thus literacy "involves the ability of individuals to use written information to fulfil their goals, and the consequent ability to use written information to function effectively in complex modern societies" (PISA, 2003, p.19).

There is considerable research evidence that the first five years of children's lives are very productive as far as language is concerned (Hall *et al* 2003). Therefore the early years of education are critical to the success of a child's drive for literacy. In fact there is research evidence that the foundations of literacy are laid in the first two years of school:

> Students who fail to make progress in literacy during the first two years of school rarely catch up with their peers and are at risk of becoming low achievers who are alienated from school and drop out at the earliest opportunity. (Kennedy *et al*, 1986, in Browne 1999, p.v)

Apparently this calls for careful and deliberate planning for children's learning opportunities even before they join formal schooling. Furthermore, this suggests that there should be deliberately planned continuity between what children learn in pre-school and the first two years of primary school (Johns & Lenski, 2001).

Although it is important to recognise that there are arguments that children can learn to read naturally as they interact with their context socially, culturally, religiously, economically, and linguistically (Goodman, 1990, and Hannon, 2000, in M. Chimombo, 2005, p.216), researchers into early literacy generally agree that children can be successfully taught how to read and write. In this vein, Turner (1995) argues

that although over the years trends in the teaching of language have revolved around the Whole Language Movement[16] of the 1980s, there is a comeback to the teaching of the individual language skills, for instance, in reading (also see Lerner 2000; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004). Turner (1995) further argues that children must actually be systematically taught how to read as they are unlikely to develop such skill spontaneously:

> Children do not, in the main, learn to read by accident, by inspiration, contagion or osmosis, or by being encouraged in attitudes that others deem socially desirable. They learn by being taught. Reading is not a natural activity, but a set of gradually acquired component skills initially learned independently, but later integrated and automated.... There is no single straight path to competence in reading but there are many teaching routes which are costly in terms of child failure. (Turner, 1995, p.80)

In addition, it is generally accepted that children's early language and literacy experiences take place in the home and later in pre-school groups (Johns & Lenski, 2001; Campbell, 2000). Millard (2003) explains that it is in the home that children first encounter a range of literacy experiences and resources that enable meanings to be created, transmitted and interpreted (p.23). Similarly it has been argued that students' learning is influenced by the interplay of their individual, family and school characteristics. PISA (2003) notes that family characteristics such as parental occupational status, home possessions and parents' educational attainment, are major sources of disparity in children's educational outcomes. Thus:

> Families differ widely in how they shape their children's behaviour and attitudes towards schools and in their ability to provide learning

[16] A widespread argument for the whole language movement has been that acquiring literacy skills is analogous to the acquisition or development of oral language (Turner, 1995, p.89), and therefore does not necessarily need systematic teaching interactions. Turner argues that this thinking is currently being challenged by research that clearly shows the importance of systematically teaching literacy skills.

> opportunities for their children. Such differences influence children's readiness to learn even before they come to school. (PISA, 2003, p.164)

Pflaum (1986) suggests that children of literate parents are able to find sufficient information about literacy to begin the process of learning at home. However, it is important to point out that even in book cultures, families will always differ quantitatively and qualitatively in their use of print, hence the likely variations in the opportunity for development of children's early literacy skills. While the previous arguments seem to reflect what happens in pre-primary education in literate societies, it is important to also consider the implications of such assertions for "non-literate" societies. Based on Pflaum's description about provision of literacy opportunities by literate parents, it can be assumed that non-literate parents will provide few opportunities for early literacy development as the parents will not be able to identify useful literacy resources for their children.

While this point may make sense in contexts with a book culture, it raises questions on the extent to which parents and other individuals close to children in non-literate societies can be seen to be contributing substantially (or otherwise) towards the children's early literacy development. However, as Finnegan (1988) says, in such situations there may equally be possibilities and potential for provision of literacy-related activities to children regardless of the lack of 'literacy' skills by those surrounding the children. In her discussion of literacy and non-literacy cultures, Finnegan (1988) argues that there are avenues for traditionally oral societies to "express and deepen intellectual and artistic insight" of its members, which in some ways is linked to literacy development:

> If, then we think of literature as a condition for the flowering of intellectual and perceptive thought, it is hard to see the great divide between those societies which happen to use *writing* [original emphasis] for literary expression and those which do not.... It is no longer possible, therefore, to accept the old picture of the 'primitive' (or the non-literate) as unselfconscious and unaware, incapable of contemplating the world with intellectual detachment, a picture conveyed to us through our (perhaps unconscious) association of these attributes with lack of literacy and hence, we imagine, of literature.... The impact of [oral literature], we must assume, will influence their [non-literates'] outlook on life and their perception of the social, natural and human world around them. (Finnegan, 1988, p.67)

It is clear from Finnegan's argument that discussion on early literacy development opportunities, whether in the home or pre-school environments, should not just narrowly be perceived in terms of availability of written resources or literate individuals around children, but go beyond the conventional perceptions of literacy. This does not in any way downplay the importance of the provision of a print-rich environment to facilitate children's early literacy development (Loughlin & Martin, 1987; Munn, 1995; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995; Johns & Lenski, 2001).

In any case it is generally accepted that children will bring knowledge or experiences with them into the pre-school context, which Miller (2000a, p.7) calls "hidden curriculum of the home", that will facilitate their learning and development of literacy skills in particular. Furthermore, Miller (2000b) citing Gregory (1993) also points out that while accepting the link between home and early years settings in facilitating children's early learning, there is also need to be aware of possibilities of discontinuities in early learning due to negative experiences children might have had in their homes (p.23). In other words, home-pre-school interplay should not be assumed to always have positive impact on the children's development of early literacy skills. Early childhood educators should therefore develop the child's knowledge by reasonably drawing from children's home or community experiences

depending on the social context. This suggests that schools and homes should collaborate by basing their relationships on partnership and communication in order to provide children with supportive and successful educational learning (Swick, 2004; Bredekamp, 1987).

2.4.3 Issues in early literacy development and the pre-school learning environment

Most of the principles for creating a conducive environment for early literacy development originate from the "developmentally appropriate" perspective which has dominated practice in North America and Europe. As has already been pointed out elsewhere in this chapter it is essential that in considering the suggested principles there be recognition of the fact that they were originally developed in contexts other than those in the South (Penn, 2004; Woodhead, 1988, 1999, 2000). At the same time however, this does not necessarily mean some of the principles cannot be applied in ECD in the South; with careful adaptation it is possible to utilise some of them in the African context.

Generally it is claimed that pre-schools must create a conducive ground to prepare children for future learning, particularly to help the children to take off easily when they start formal schooling at primary school level. Adamopoulo (2002) echoes this rationale:

> [G]iven normal circumstances, early childhood education renders the child's transition from pre-school to primary school education less sharp, less intimidating and hence more comfortable. In other words, one would not expect in a child exposed to pre-school education a sudden experience of an alien pedagogical or learning environment once he/she enters primary school. The child's 'educational shock' is significantly lessened. (Adamopoulo, 2002, p.12)

The issue of building children's potential at this early stage is crucial not only for learning language but also for learning other subjects in school. It is therefore claimed that there is need to fully maximise on this initial potential in order to socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally prepare them for more formal aspects of primary education (Bloch, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Paulu, 1992; Tompkins, 2003).

It has been argued that an appropriate language and literacy curriculum in early childhood settings is one in which children's language and literacy potential is valued by teachers in a similar manner as the children's first utterances are cherished by the family in the home. This means that teachers must create a functional learning environment to facilitate children's development of literacy skills. According to Loughlin and Suina (1982), teachers should "distinguish between the child's learning environment and the teacher's and realise that environments must be viewed from the child's eye view in order to be assessed appropriately" (in Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995, p.157). In their study on researching pedagogy in English pre-school classrooms, Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) found that there is a great deal of corroborative evidence that children actively construct their understandings within a social and physical environment:

> Young children require direct and immediate experiences that will enable them to derive meaning from these experiences based on their previous ones. The learning environment must, therefore, provide very young children with opportunities to be active and to take the initiative to learn. The primary role of the adult is to provide these opportunities and experiences through setting the physical *and intellectual* [original emphasis] environment and through consistent planning and rigorous assessment so that appropriate opportunities may be given. (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004, pp.726-727)

A number of issues have to be considered in order to create a conducive environment for literacy development in children within the pre-school setting. Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1995) outline some of the issues, including immersing children in functional print, providing adequate resources and materials, creating a responsive community, building a social community, and creating a climate for play.

2.4.3.1 Immersing children in functional print (print rich environment)

According to Loughlin and Martin (in Bredekamp, 1987), a key role of the functional literacy environment is to surround children by symbols and print, making the literacy environment as constant and pervasive as the oral language. Apart from surrounding children with print, adults should also be available to ensure that the print is not just there for ornamental purposes, but used for real purposes. In such a print-rich environment, print will serve a variety of purposes as the children use it. For instance, as a source of information such as the alphabet; as source of pleasure or recreation, for communication with others, in the school, as well as for creating a strong tie between home and school (e.g. written language materials from home to school and vice versa).

The 'print-rich' environment argument is unarguably feasible in those contexts where there are quality and 'appropriate' printed resources for the children to explore. There is also an underlying assumption that both the children and the supporting adults have some vested interest in print within such a context. This may not necessarily be the case for contexts which are not print-oriented and where relevant resources for children are scarce (Matare, 1997; Finnegan, 1988), although there could still be other possibilities either in print or by using a combination of oral and print sources.

2.4.3.2 Providing adequate resources and materials

It is argued that if children are to discuss a variety of literacy events within and outside the classroom they need to be provided with, as well as have access to, appropriate and varied learning resources (Loughlin & Martin, in Bredekamp, 1987; Pflaum, 1986; Johns and Lenski, 2001). It is also argued that such variety of resources provides children with the opportunity to reflect on different social contexts.

2.4.3.3 Creating a responsive community

It is recommended that the ECD classroom must be organised for functional purposes so that the teacher and the children can work together responsibly to develop a democratic community. In other words, the classroom, including the materials, should be organised in such a way that the children are developed into independent community members who do not need constant assistance from their teachers in order for them to function (Wortman & Matlin, 1989, in Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995). For example, the children may be allowed to manage certain aspects of the classrooms such as the classroom library, 'post office', etc. In other words:

> Children must feel trust and comfort at school in order to take risks with language. An effective emotional environment is established through the quality of negotiation that occurs in setting rules and behaviour expectations and the amount of validation that children feel for the language(s), knowledge, and abilities they bring to school. Children's basic needs for safety and security, both physically and emotionally, are absolutely necessary for academic growth. (Wortman & Matlin, 1989, in Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995, p.159)

2.4.3.4 Building a social community

Since language and literacy development occur in a social context, it has been suggested that children should be encouraged to talk as they read and write, as there is

a direct link between oral interactions and literacy development. It has further been argued that any attempt to "pull literacy out of the network of peers is to deny children the opportunity to experience the tension between individual expression and social communication that is in the living tension of language use" (Dyson, 1987, p.246, in Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995, pp.159-160).

2.4.3.5 Creating a climate for play

A lot of research studies have demonstrated the direct relationship between children's literacy development and play – that children learn through play (Wood & Attfield, 2005; Saracho, 2004; Roskos & Newman, 1998). Accordingly, play is considered to be essential for every child as "it gives children opportunities to experiment with uses of writing, to invent freely and to practice more approximate literacy behaviours in nonevaluative settings" (Wasserman, 1992, in Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995, p.160). All this has implications for roles which pre-school teachers can play both inside and outside the classroom, as Saracho (2004) argues:

> Emergent literacy in a literacy-rich play environment warrants teachers to allow children endless opportunities to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Most of these opportunities can be offered in a literate environment during the children's spontaneous play.... Teachers need to learn to design literacy programmes that develop the children's literacy learning in the context of play, provide opportunities for quality interactions, and cultivate spontaneous and flexible literacy behaviours in young children. Within the play context, the children's expectation of success can stimulate them to explore the written language on their own and lead them into mastering the prerequisites for formal reading instruction. (p.205)

Strong claims can be made about the universality of play for children in any context. Therefore the creation of a play-environment for literacy development is essential even for the rural pre-school set up in Malawi (see Day, 2004). However, while Saracho (2004) (and other researchers above) seems to emphasise play in a 'literacy-

rich' environment, it can be argued that the principle of play in facilitating literacy development would still work when the environment 'is not print-rich' in terms of pre-school resources. Where there are limited resources, teachers can still draw from, for example, their own tradition of oral resources to help the children develop literacy skills (see Chauma *et al*, 1997; Phiri, 2004). Thus it is useful to begin to consider alternative sources, apart from written materials, to stimulate and develop children's literacy skills as they play (see Finnegan, 1988).

2.4.4 Key components in the development of early literacy skills

In literature on early learning, especially associated with the developmental approach, it is generally agreed that five key components underpin the development of early literacy in children: phonic awareness, alphabetic principle, print awareness, writing development, and oral language skills (Green, 2004). Details of what each of the five components involves are provided in Table 2.3. Furthermore, more specific strategies or techniques for promoting the development of early literacy skills that can be developed from each of the five key compontents (see Lagoni *et al*, 1989), are presented in Appendix 9.

It must however be pointed out that the five components were developed in the context of the developmentally appropriate framework for child development, which assumes that there are readily available resources for the children. In a rural pre-school context in Malawi, some of the principles and strategies in their purest form may not be possible. However, some of the ideas can be adapted by caregivers depending on the extent to which they are creative, confident or have been trained to do so.

Table 2.3 Five key components in early literacy development

	Key component	Description
1.	*Phonic awareness*	▪ An understanding that speech is composed of units, such as spoken words, syllables, and sounds. ▪ As children become more familiar with letter names, shapes, and sounds , they develop the ability to take spoken words apart sound by sound (called "segmentation") and put together sounds to make words (called "blending").
2.	*Alphabetic principle*	▪ Refers to a child's knowledge of letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. ▪ Knowledge of the alphabet at school entry has been found to be one of the best predictors of eventual reading achievement.
3.	*Print awareness*	▪ Involves a child's understanding that print carries the meaning of the story; that printed words correspond to spoken words; that print moves from left to right and from top to bottom on a page (in the English language). ▪ It is recommended that enhancing children's exposure to and concepts about print should be one of the central goals of an early childhood educator
4.	*Writing development*	▪ It is generally accepted that before children begin the formal process of writing, they experiment with activities such as scribbling, producing letter-like forms, and using invented spelling to attempt to write words. ▪ These precursory activities help children to think about the relationships between letters, words and sounds.
5.	*Oral language skills*	▪ Refers to a child's vocabulary and his or her understanding of the uses and conventions of spoken language. ▪ Research has shown that children who have larger vocabularies and a greater understanding of spoken language at a young age tend to do better on measures of reading ability later in life.

Source: Adapted from Green (2004); Campbell (2000)

Thus the five components are still crucial even in resource-constrained environments in which the need to develop early literacy skills is even greater for purposes of facilitating children's future learning (Day 2004). Perhaps what is crucial in the Malawian pre-school contexts is not whether the caregivers strictly and consciously adhere to these five components, but rather how they provide related experiences to the children, whether directly or indirectly.

2.5 Challenges to early literacy development in Malawi

There are strong suggestions from research that the development of literacy in Malawi's education system, more specifically pre-school and primary school levels has been difficult over the years due to a number of factors. For instance, in 1991,

Kabwila argued that most of the pre-school curricula in Malawi were not fully organised to provide a conducive educational environment which could properly prepare children for more formal aspects of primary school and later life. She further observed that children started primary school in a state of 'unreadiness' resulting in their being unable to cope in the first five years of school. She further argued that the manifestation of such unreadiness was directly related to language and literacy:

> These children manifest their unpreparedness in numerous learning problems such as lack of expressive language, problem of firm grasp of pen, ... hand and eye co-ordination when reading, skipping words, reversing words and a number of other problems. (Kabwila, 1991, p.11)

A study commissioned by UNICEF in the year 2000 found that children in Malawi were not provided with a stimulating environment for the development of literacy skills either at school or at home. The study further observed that in terms of play activities available for children, "almost 75% were physical activities, about 35% games involving children's creativity, such as making toys, painting, drawing, or singing, but less than 2% reading" (UNICEF, 2000, p.121, in M. Chimombo & Söderbergh, 2005, p.215).

Related research findings in 2001 by Improving Education Quality–Malawi (IEQ/Malawi)[17] showed that primary school children had a lot of problems in reading Chichewa (a local language). The study found that the majority of the boys (84%) and girls (94%) entered grade 2 before they could read in Chichewa. Furthermore, 69% of the boys and 87% of the girls completed grade 2 before acquiring adequate literacy skills to help them cope with reading in the subsequent class. According to the study,

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[17] This was a longitudinal study which IEQ/Malawi began in February 1999 in a bid to investigate the quality of education children receive at primary classroom level. Part of the investigation focused on comparing literacy development skill levels of standard 2 primary school first language speakers of Chichewa and Chiyao local Malawian languages.

the consequence of children's inadequate mastery levels in literacy was that most of them were forced to repeat or drop out early from school (Chilora, 2001).

A baseline study by the Malawi Education Support Activity (MESA) (2004) assessed the mastery levels of Standards 3 and 6 primary school pupils in English and Mathematics in four administrative districts across Malawi: Mzimba, Kasungu, Machinga and Phalombe. The study involved 15% of the schools in each target district, i.e. 40 schools from Mzimba, 47 from Kasungu, 26 from Machinga and 13 from Phalombe districts. The study administered curriculum-based assessment items in English and Mathematics for both Standards 3 and 6. In English, mastery levels in reading comprehension and writing were assessed. The results were described in levels of mastery as follows: Non-mastery (0-30%); Partial Mastery (31–79%); Full Mastery (80-100%).

The findings of the study indicated that for both standards, the majority of the pupils were at non-mastery levels in terms of reading, comprehension and writing skills. In Standard 3, about 98% of the boys and 99% of the girls were at non-mastery levels in terms of literacy. In other words, the majority of the pupils could not read a given passage taken from their class textbook. Worse still, the study reported that the few who were able to read could not comprehend what they had just read. Overall, 99% of the pupils in Standard 3 could not comprehend what they read. In terms of writing, the study found that over 60% of both boys and girls could not write any word of their choice, among the English words most commonly used.

Similarly in Standard 6 English, only about 40% of the pupils could read a passage of their class textbook with full mastery. However 80% of these students (i.e. in full

nastery in terms of reading) could not comprehend what they read. As in Standard 3, over 60% of the pupils could not read words taken from their class textbook.

The research findings suggest that pedagogical literacy development practices at primary school level are problematic. This conclusion is in agreement with Johnson, Hayter and Broadfoot's (2000) findings in their comparative study assessing literacy and numeracy at primary school level in Malawi and Sri Lanka. The researchers reported that generally primary school teachers in Malawi had problems in handling literacy development at school level. They observed that there was very little teaching of reading in Malawian primary schools and that teachers did not take an active role in teaching reading:

> Where reading activity was observed, teachers read to the whole class from textbooks. Listening to individual children read from fiction and non-fiction reading occurred in a small percentage of the lessons observed, although on most of the occasions observed, teachers were engaged in another activity, usually, marking exercise books, while children were called to the front to read. The rest of the class was asked to follow the text in their books. Only in a very few of the lessons observed did the teachers take an active role in reading. They tended to read "with" children and helped them when they encountered difficult words. Even here though, the teacher was more concerned with correcting reading errors, rather than helping the child enjoy the book by drawing attention to characters, pictures, print and so on. (Johnson, Hayter & Broadfoot, 2000, p.17)

As has been pointed out in Chapter 1, poor literacy levels in Malawi's primary schools could partly be a reflection of children's poor language and literacy background preparation before engaging with formal schooling. The Government of Malawi's plan to increase access to children's pre-schooling opportunities in order to facilitate their learning could be a major opportunity to address some of the literacy-related challenges. In this vein, the Government of Malawi intends to:

> ...develop and implement a more coherent strategy on basic education issues such as pre-school provision, adult education and literacy and school health

> and nutrition....promote the development of pre-school facilities **so that an increasing number of children have access to pre-school facilities** [*Emphasis added*] (MoEST 2001, p.14).

However, it should be pointed out that the expansion of pre-schooling should take into account the teaching and learning environment in lower primary schools if it is to be meaningful. The reality in most primary schools in Malawi is that the learning environment is poor due to general lack of quality teaching and learning resources, infrastructure and well trained teachers. In such a situation therefore, questions arise on the impact of attendance at quality pre-schools on children's development when they go into primary school.

A few research studies on ECD have to an extent provided useful insights into some of the realities of the ECD context in Malawi although their focus has not been on learning experiences in the pre-school environment. In their study, Mpinganjira and M. Chimombo (2004), focused on the feasibility of setting up Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres for purposes of increasing access to quality basic education to rural children, with special emphasis on girls and the most vulnerable children (p.6). The study, among its findings, recorded lack of capacity level at community level in terms of infrastructure and training to promote the development of the child.

Another study by Day (2004) has focused on establishing a community-driven ECD centre that would enhance quality stimulation and development of children through exploration of culturally and developmentally appropriate concepts.

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cultural values. In the study, Phiri (2004) designed sample learning units for use in pre-schools using some of the stories. However, the study restricted itself to documentation of folk stories and did not examine actual pre-school practice, especially in terms of how caregivers were in practice using such stories to facilitate children's development of early literacy skills.

Overall, it is clear from the literature so far explored that most of the studies related to literacy development have limited themselves to primary rather than pre-primary school level. In fact there is very little research information on literacy development at pre-school level in Malawi. Furthermore, the few recent studies on ECD in Malawi have tended to focus on general issues rather than more specific issues to the pre-school context as the current study does.

2.6 Major issues and implications for early literacy development in different ECD contexts

The discussion in this chapter so far raises a number of implications for early literacy development in the context of ECD practice in different contexts. Some of the issues include drivers for pre-school provision; extended meaning of literacy; the link between language and literacy and how they influence each other; and the social context of literacy development.

Various drivers for ECD provision seem to have implications for the type and level of provision of early literacy development opportunities in the various forms of ECD (see Box 2.1). In other words, the extent to which ECD is defined (and consequently questions on why it is provided, who provides it, and how it is provided) is critical, especially in terms of the extent to which early literacy development is prioritised in

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such a context. Directly related to the above questions is the issue of whether the organisations and individuals who set up pre-schools are concerned with early literacy development; whether they think consciously about early literacy development or whether early literacy development is happening on an *ad hoc* basis.

The issue of extended meaning of literacy, as well as the link between language and literacy need attention when discussing issues of ECD practice. The broad conceptualisation of literacy means that in practice it may be sensible to be more flexible to consider other 'literacies' that may be linked to or may facilitate the development of reading and writing skills in some social settings, rather than just stick to the conventional conceptions of reading and writing. Furthermore, there are more possibilities when literacy development is conceived in the context of the four language skills, as more connections to literacy related activities are made clear.

Again, this brings us to the question of whether the pre-school context should be assumed to be the only place where children learn or develop early literacy skills. If we take into consideration the extended meaning of literacy, as well as the strong influence of orality as argued above, we can then begin to see the potential that communities have in preparing children for the development of early literacy skills even before going into the pre-school setting. This suggests that communities play an important role in building up potential for literacy development among the children right in the home. It can be argued that pre-school settings could be considered to be just formalising the whole process of early literacy development for the children.

In the light of the issues outlined above and therefore in any attempt to understand the provision of early literacy development opportunities in the rural pre-school setting in Malawi, the social context in which such provision takes place should be seriously

considered. It can be argued that even in situations where the 'developmentally appropriate' approach seems to have been unsuitably applied, there is room to think about the role of the social context in specifically supporting early literacy development.

2.7 Chapter summary

First, early childhood development (ECD) in the global context, in which ECD is seen as a public good and a right for the child, was explored. Two theoretical frameworks to ECD were discussed: developmentally appropriate and contextually appropriate. These guided our understanding of issues in the chapter and subsequent chapters of the thesis. For instance, ECD Policy in Malawi was discussed in relation to the two theoretical frameworks and it was observed that while Malawi's ECD policy has on the surface taken into account the sociocultural context, it tends to draw heavily from the developmentally appropriate approach. The extent to which practice reflects the two approaches was therefore questioned in the discussion. In the last part of the chapter, the focus was on specific issues regarding the development of early literacy in pre-school settings in terms of the central role literacy plays at both the individual and societal levels. This was followed by a discussion on key principles in early literacy development, bearing in mind that some of the principles may not be feasible in certain ECD contexts. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the major issues raised and the implications for early literacy development in different ECD contexts. The methodology used in this study is the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the overall approach to the design and the specific methods that were used to arrive at the findings of the study. The discussion revolves around the design, overall approach and rationale, population of interest (setting), initial selection decisions (sampling), negotiation for access, data collection and management, data analysis, role of researcher, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Study design

The current study utilised a case study design. Stake (1995) defines a case as a "bounded system" (p.xi). Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that abstractly "we can define a case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context ... [:] the case is in fact your unit of analysis" (p.25).

The assumption in choosing the case study design was that it would help to understand the complex issues surrounding provision of early learning experiences in rural pre-schools ('bounded system'), as Stake (1995, p.2) has argued that "a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case". Such an assumption suggests that the case study is seen as being more responsive to complex than simple research questions. Yin (1984) argues that generally researchers prefer to use the case study strategy "when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p.13). He further argues that:

> As a research endeavour, the case study contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organisational, social and political phenomena.... In all ... situations, the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study allows an investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, organisational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations and the maturation of industries. (Yin, 1984, p.14)

Some corners of the research community have, however, expressed concern about the use of the case study as a strategy. One of the major arguments against case study research is that it is considered to be a poor basis for scientific generalisation and therefore tends to be inadequate for testing hypotheses (Black, 1993; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, it has been argued that case studies lack rigour, and that this has usually resulted in "equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings" (Yin, 1984, p.21). Although there have been counterarguments to the use of the case study strategy, generally it is accepted that good case studies are very difficult to do, as it all depends on the individual researcher's or group of researchers' ability to do case studies (Black, 1993, p.63; Yin, 1984; Stake, 1995). Some specific counterarguments have also been made. For instance, Stake (1995) has argued that in case studies, particularisation rather than generalisation is the central concern of researchers:

> The real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (Stake, 1995, p.8)

Similarly it has generally been reiterated that the case study does "provide an opportunity to identify and suggest possible relationships, and provide evidence to support further study. The richness of information collected by skilled researchers can

be of immense value, whether it be the behaviour of an individual child at home or in the classroom" (Black, 1993, pp.62-63).

Four pre-schools were involved in this case study and they generated information specific to them. Therefore it was possible to generalise within the cases. It has been argued that the advantage of having more than one case is that evidence from each single case is valuable and contributes to the overall validity of the study – the researcher has rich information from the single cases which may sometimes be used to make tentative generalisations within the context of the cases involved (Yin, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake 1995).

3.1.1 Overall approach and rationale

The selection of the overall approach to the study was guided by pragmatism, which advocates plurality of methods (multiple methods philosophy) in trying to understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). In the context of this study, focus was on understanding the provision of opportunities for early literacy development. Muijs (2004) argues that quantitative and qualitative research paradigms are not incompatible, as some researchers have argued, and that both "can be usefully combined in mixed methods designs, which often produce a lot of useful information" (p.10). Similarly, White (2002) considers the qualitative versus quantitative oppositions as a false dichotomy, and argues that "these distinctions need to be broken down because of the complementarity between the different approaches" (p.511).

Thus, overall, this case study utilised a mixed methods approach in which both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The approach was favoured because it provides for a broader understanding of issues under study as well as for triangulation of data (see White 2002; Kanbur, 2001; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2003).

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) have argued that there is "need to gain insights into what goes on in education from as many perspectives as possible, and hence we need to construe research in broad rather than narrow terms" (p.13). According to Flick (2002, p.269) the researcher can thus "obtain knowledge about the issue of the study which is broader than a single approach would have provided." Similarly, Creswell (2003) concludes that "the researcher bases the inquiry on the assumptions that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem" (p.21).

However, the mixed methods approach has its own limitations (Creswell, 2003). For instance, it is argued that the design is time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to carry out single-handedly. Furthermore, the researcher needs expertise to effectively apply multiple methods and approaches, and to mix them appropriately. As has been discussed later in the chapter, some of these issues emerged at different stages in this study (see sections 3.5 to 3.7). Despite these disadvantages, still there were more advantages than disadvantages in using the design in the context of this study, especially taking into account the fact that very little is known about early literacy experiences in rural pre-schools in Malawi, and hence the research topic required more exploration in order to provide a more detailed view of the issues (Creswell, 1998).

Within the mixed methods design, the study took a more qualitative than quantitative stance. As observed by Merriam (1988, p.2), "qualitative ... study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena." She further stipulates that in qualitative research one is interested in process, meaning and understanding. Similar sentiments are expressed by Mason (1996, p.4), who argues

that since qualitative research aims to produce "rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data, methods which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced have to be used." Rossman and Rallis (2003) sum up when they argue that "qualitative researchers' respect for context draws them to look at social worlds holistically, as interpretative, complex systems rather than as discrete variables that can be measured and manipulated statistically. They describe and interpret rather than measure and predict" (p.7). The issues of provision of early literacy experiences in rural pre-schools are complex, hence the need for them to be examined from a holistic point of view by using more qualitative methods (see Chapters 5 and 6).

However, the nature of some of the research questions in this study called for use of quantitative approach in order to make reasonable interpretations of some of the issues central to the study. In his attempt to answer the question of when a researcher should use quantitative methods, Muijs (2004) argues that "if we take a pragmatic approach to research methods, first of all we need to find out what kinds of questions are best answered using quantitative methods" (p.7). He further argues that quantitative methods are particularly suited to a situation or research questions which require the researcher to come up with a quantitative answer as well when s/he wants "to find out about the state of something, [when] we often want to explain phenomena" (Muijs, 2004, p.7). Therefore the quantitative methods used in the study thus provided statistical characteristics of the data, which in turn was very useful for looking at the links with issues from qualitative data within a particular pre-school, as presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

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3.2 Population of interest

The setting of this study was rural pre-schools in Zomba district, Southern Malawi. Specifically, four rural pre-schools formed the study's case. Within each pre-school the study was interested in the activities children were engaged in both inside and outside the classroom, and this obviously meant that caregivers and children were part and parcel of the population of interest. Other key actors within the pre-schools, such as the proprietors and administrators, were also considered as part of the population of interest, since they play an important role in influencing the direction and activities of the pre-schools (see Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Of particular interest were the communities around each pre-school, since they have an important role to play in bringing children to their fullest potential, and therefore needed to be part of our population of interest. Research and practice have shown that community involvement in school has a huge impact on children's learning at school (Epstein, 1995; Bauch, 1994; Davies, 1991; Ortiz and Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). For instance, school–community links influence children to develop positive attitudes towards school, as well as contributing to personal growth and academic success (see Bray, 2003).

3.3 Initial selection decisions (sampling)

Initial selection decisions in this study were made at two levels, namely selection of the four pre-schools (including caregivers, proprietors and administrators), and selection of parents and guardians for the questionnaire at community level.

.3.1 *Selection of pre-schools*

The four pre-schools were identified mainly by using a purposive sampling technique, which entails the selection of a sample "from which one can learn the most to gain understanding and insight" (Merriam, 1988, p.48). Three of the four pre-schools are under Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) whose major preoccupation is to initiate development at community level with special emphasis on addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS, such as the care of orphans (see Chapter 4).

In selecting the four pre-schools therefore, emphasis was not on characteristics of the children and the schools but rather the opportunities the chosen schools would provide for exploring the issues in this study. Stake (1995) argues that in choosing a case, "selection by sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority. Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (p.6). One of the major aspects that were considered in selecting the four pre-schools was distance of each pre-school from the centre of Zomba town. Pre-schools within the radius of 8 to 15 km from the town were chosen mainly for feasibility purposes, bearing in mind the need for frequent visits to the pre-schools. Apart from distance considerations, it was also ensured that among the four pre-schools, one was not established through a Community Based Organisation, in order to bring in a richer understanding of the provision of opportunities for early literacy development (Stake, 1995; Foster, 1996). Thus, much as it might be possible to isolate other possible variables or traits for sampling, it was generally felt that the four pre-schools were reasonably typical of pre-schools in the rural areas of Zomba.

3.3.2 Selection of parents and guardians

Using pre-school records of children attending and those who previously attended each of the four pre-schools, parents were randomly sampled for the individual interviews. However, in some cases it was difficult to trace parents and guardians who had previously sent their children to the pre-schools due to lack of proper records. In such cases therefore, convenience sampling was used, which involves taking a group or individuals that are available and willing to participate in a study (Black, 1993, Muijs, 2004). Wellington (1996) argues that in situations where the use of probability sampling may not be practical, a researcher may sometimes combine "judgement and probability sampling" (p.23). Thus in this case, in selecting the parents and guardians, other sampling alternatives had to be considered, especially when it was discovered that pure probability sampling was not feasible. The selection was therefore based on those that were found in their homes, as long as they were willing to be interviewed. Although this arrangement might have had an effect on the nature of the data that were collected, especially in terms of some of the responses that required the parents to explain issues based on their actual experiences with the pre-schools, there were generally remarkable similarities in the responses (see Chapter 5).

Muijs (2004) argues that though convenience sampling has obvious advantages in terms of cost and convenience, it "suffers from serious problems of bias, as the sites ... [researchers] have easy access to may not be representative of the population" (pp.40-41). However, in order to minimise possible selection bias, an effort was made to interview parents from at least two or three of the surrounding villages within a particular community, instead of parents from only one cluster of houses. Bearing in mind the difficulties of systematising the selection process in a typical village setting, it was felt that the 30 parents involved in each community were generally typical of

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most of the parent population in terms of their socio-economic status, though statistically they might not have been representative in terms of size.

3.4 Access negotiations

In order to gain access into the four rural pre-schools the researcher had to negotiate with gatekeepers at four different levels, namely, Ministry Headquarters, District, Pre-school, and Community. At all these levels, the gatekeepers were contacted in person as this strategy provided opportunities for them to ask questions about the study before committing themselves and their institutions. Of course, such personal contact also meant that the researcher had to travel to the capital city (about 290km) to the ministry headquarters. However, bearing in mind the complications of government departments and possible slow processing of such requests, delivering the request personally carried more weight than it would have done by post.

The MoGCS has overall control over child welfare and community services at national level. Therefore, a letter was written and hand delivered to the Ministry for permission to conduct the study in the pre-schools (Appendix 5a). Explaining what the study was about, as well as its importance, was a useful tool for negotiating access, not only at the MoGCS headquarters but also at the lower levels of the system. On this point, Foster (1996) argues that in the process of negotiating access, usually "researchers try to influence the conceptions gatekeepers have of their research [by adopting] a number of strategies. Sometimes they simply explain fully the purposes and nature of the research, and the methods to be employed, in the hope that gate keepers will be sufficiently interested and willing to allow the research to go ahead" (p.27). Similarly, Walford (1996, p.35) suggests that researchers should think of the process of negotiation for access as a "selling" process whereby they "sell" their

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research to the gatekeepers. Initially MoGCS gave oral permission to go ahead with the study but later provided formal written permission (Appendix 5d). Even with the oral permission the researcher was still able to proceed with data collection.

The second level of access was at district level, Zomba District Social Welfare Office (DSWO). The DSWO has the overall charge of social services, including early childhood development activities, at district level. The researcher hand delivered a letter requesting permission to conduct the study in the rural pre-schools to the responsible officers at the DSWO (Appendix 5b).

Pre-school was the third level for negotiating access. The researcher met directors and proprietors and asked them for permission to carry out the study in their pre-schools. The researcher also officially gave them a letter requesting permission (Appendix 5c). Once permission was granted, the researcher observed that it was not necessary to negotiate access with the caregivers as it seemed automatic for them to open access. In fact it was the directors and proprietors themselves who in turn negotiated with the caregivers about access – explaining the objectives of the study and the need to allow me to carry it out within the pre-schools. However, realising that the caregivers were critical players in the study, during the first contact with them, the researcher gave them details of the study that included the actual activities they were going to be engaged in. This approach made the caregivers less suspicious and hence more comfortable about working with the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher observed that throughout the process of negotiating access at the three different levels, the formal permission from MoGCS headquarters influenced access at the two lower levels of district and pre-school, in that it became an important reference point for the subsequent permissions.

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The final level of access negotiation was the communities around the pre-schools. With these the researcher used informal means to gain access by going to the Village Chiefs who are the custodians of cultural values at village level. This approach is culturally expected and often considered normal in the Malawian context. Once the Village Chief gave permission, the researcher went to talk to individual community members.

3.5 Data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to collect data in this study. The main qualitative data collection techniques used were *interviews* and *observations*, while the main quantitative techniques were *questionnaire*, and *checklist*. In the following sections each one of the techniques used during the data collection process is discussed, starting with the qualitative instruments.

3.5.1 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviewing is defined as a "way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds.... [T]hrough what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.1). In this case, the researcher preferred semi-structured interviews to other forms of interviews because, apart from having a structure, they are also flexible in terms of possibilities for probing by the interviewer. In her description of semi-structured interviews, Opie (2004) explains that they are "a more flexible version of structured interview which will allow for a depth of feeling to be ascertained by providing opportunities to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (p.118).

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.At pre-school level, semi-structured interviews were conducted with pre-school directors and caregivers. Key informants in Early Childhood Development in Malawi were also interviewed. They included officials from the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS), Ministry of Education (MoE), District Social Welfare Office, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), international organisations and non governmental organisations involved in childhood development in Malawi. The normal interview time was 40-50 minutes. Table 3.1 summarises the interviews that were conducted.

Table 3.1 Qualitative interview participants

Category	Sex		Total participants
	Male	Female	
Pre-school directors (administrators)	2	3*	5
Caregivers	2	6	8
District Social Welfare Office		2	2
Ministry of Gender, Community Services and Child Welfare	2		2
Ministry of Education	1		1
Ministry of Education - District Education Office	1		1
Association of Pre-school Play Groups in Malawi		2	2
UNESCO-Malawi	1		1
Total Interviews	**9**	**13**	**22**

* One of the pre-schools had two directors, both female (see Chapter 4).

Almost all the interviews were held at the interviewees' premises or offices. Two of the pre-school directors asked the researcher to interview them at their homes (2 km away from the pre-school) on a weekend because this was more convenient for them. Similarly, one of the key informants at the Ministry headquarters was interviewed away from his office as he was attending a workshop in Mangochi District. The interviewee spared adequate time for the interview. Although it can be argued that in the case of the pre-school directors, it would have been more meaningful to interview

them within the school environment in order to provide better opportunities for elaboration of issues being discussed, eventually these instances did not make much difference in terms of the information given.

The process of interviewing was evolving. When doing key informant interviews the researcher learned that there was need to be more flexible with the key questions as issues kept on coming up, depending on the type and position of the person that was being interviewed. Therefore some of the questions had to be adjusted in some situations while at the same time ensuring that the core issues were still addressed. Similarly, due to the fact that some of the key informants were very difficult to 'catch' for an interview as they had tight schedules at their offices, sometimes the researcher was given less time than was required to interview them. For instance an interview with one of the senior ministry officials took approximately 20 minutes only (which was almost half the time for the normal interview) because of other official engagements. In such cases, the researcher had to eventually adjust by focusing on the core questions for a particular interviewee. This worked although it was felt that there were still many issues which could have been discussed in more depth. This might have an effect on the quality of the information collected from the interview. However, the fact that the researcher later had more detailed discussions with another senior member of staff from the same department to some extent closed some of the gaps from the previous interview.

3.5.2 Observations

In his description of observation techniques, Schostak (1990) argues that observation goes beyond mere looking and seeing, because the main task of the observer is to be able to represent a social scene in a way that is recognisable to the actors involved,

and therefore regarded as a valid and true representation of their action. Generally it is claimed that observation has the advantage that it enables the researcher to find how something works factually or occurs within its context (Flick, 2002). This study used observations bearing in mind such an advantage.

The researcher observed learning experiences in the four pre-schools (both inside and outside the classroom) in order to identify instances in which caregivers created opportunities for early literacy development by children. In exploring early literacy opportunities the researcher was guided by the belief that literacy is intertwined with other experiences within the pre-school setting (Saracho, 2004; Wood & Attfield, 2005). In other words, it was generally recognised that while some of the pre-school activities would not appear to be directly and obviously associated with reading and writing, they eventually played a crucial role in the children's future development of early literacy skills (see Chapter 2). This helped to come to grips with actual literacy experiences and practices, not only in the classroom but also in the pre-school as a whole. On this point, Rossman and Rallis (2003) state that observation "takes you inside the setting; it helps you discover complexity in social settings by being there ... the challenge is to identify the big picture while noting huge amounts of detail in multiple and complex actions" (pp.19-20).

A lesson observation schedule was used to focus the observation on for instance, patterns of classroom interaction, or questioning (Appendix 3a). The need for a definition of what is to be documented in the observation is considered to be one of the major aspects of observations (Brown & Dowling; 1998; Foster, 1996). It must be pointed out however that the schedule was meant to be a loose guideline, not necessarily to structure the observations in what was assumed to be an informal

context in which early learning experiences were being provided. In other words, the complexities of the children's activities meant that the observations could not be made as structured as one would have expected in a formal school setting, although at the end of the field work it was clear that caregivers used structured approaches in the provision of learning experiences (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Brown and Dowling (1998) argue that observation schedules are not without their complications and challenges, and "the extent to which and the point at which observations are structured may vary dramatically between studies" (p.49).

The overall period for observation was four weeks. Although each pre-school was observed once a week on different days, in each week there was an opportunity to visit one of the pre-schools twice, making a total of five observations for each pre-school. Except in few circumstances the observations covered the whole pre-school day, which usually was between 8.00 and 11.30 am (see Chapter 6). Although the researcher would have loved to do more observations in each pre-school in order to capture as many experiences as possible, this was not possible due to time limitations, especially bearing in mind the fact that the researcher had multiple sets of data to collect within the same period (see section 3.1.1). However, based on the findings discussed in Chapters 4 to 6, it was clear that generally the twenty observations (Table 3.2) allowed the researcher to capture reasonably adequate and representative data on early learning experiences in the four pre-schools. Furthermore, the observation data were also complemented by data from the other research techniques used.

Observations were recorded using a video camera for close analysis of the lesson activities. The recording had advantages for data review and follow up of issues at a later stage, as there was opportunity to replay the tapes several times for continued

context in which early learning experiences were being provided. In other words, the complexities of the children's activities meant that the observations could not be made as structured as one would have expected in a formal school setting, although at the end of the field work it was clear that caregivers used structured approaches in the provision of learning experiences (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Brown and Dowling (1998) argue that observation schedules are not without their complications and challenges, and "the extent to which and the point at which observations are structured may vary dramatically between studies" (p.49).

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study (see Brown and Dowling, 1998; Foster 1996; Heath and Hindmarsh, 2003). Specifically Foster (1996) explains that with a video recording:

> it is possible to ... freeze the record of behaviour, and this permits a more careful, flexible and complex analysis. The behaviour under consideration can be seen or heard repeatedly, scrutinised and discussed, and interpretations and coding during analysis can be checked. (Foster, 1996, p.37)

However, there were indications that the use of the video camera was initially obtrusive in the research setting, as children were not used to it. Many children were very curious in the early stages and often stood around the camera, some feeling it. There was one case at one of the pre-schools where two children were clearly afraid to come near the camera. It took them almost half the morning to reasonably accept the presence of the camera. Foster (1996) has argued that increased reactivity is one of the major disadvantages of using a video camera. He explains that even if permission is granted to record events during research, "subjects are more likely to behave differently if they know their behaviour is being recorded on ... videotape, and where recording involves visible and obtrusive equipment or the deliberate positioning of subjects, reactivity is likely to be more marked" (p.40).

Although it was not easy to overcome this problem, one strategy the researcher used to minimise it was by doing frequent recordings (Foster 1996). The researcher made preliminary observations on different days in each pre-school during which parts of the lessons were casually recorded and replayed for the participants, mainly children and caregivers, to watch for themselves. Generally at the beginning, they were a bit sensitive to the video camera but with subsequent visits the camera became more and more invisible to the children. Brown and Dowling (1998) call this "habituation" of the participants to the presence of the observer or recording equipment, which

involves "introducing the recording device into the setting before actual data collection begins" (p.48). Table 3.2 summarises the observations and recordings that were made in each pre-school within the four week period.

In order to avoid influencing the activities, the researcher took the role of a non-participant observer which meant that ideally he had to "stand aloof" from the pre-school children and caregivers and "eschew group membership" (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p.186). Although this worked in most cases, in the later stages of the observations there were instances in which the children naturally wanted to interact with the researcher as he appeared to have become "one of them". In such cases it became difficult for the researcher to maintain his position. This might have influenced some of the episodes in some ways.

Table 3.2: Summary of the observations per pre-school

	Number of observations	Video lessons recorded
Pre-school A	5	5
Pre-school B	5	3
Pre-school C	5	4
Pre-school D	5	4
Total	**20**	**16**

(Not all the observations were recorded due to problems with the unavailability of the camera and the research assistant).

In the early stages of the field work the researcher realised that it was becoming more and more technically and practically complex to focus on the observation schedule while at the same time handling the video camera. Eventually, the researcher engaged another person to handle the camera while the researcher focused on taking notes during the observations. Although this person had previously been engaged in a

e end, especially during data analysis. The researcher noticed that he had a ıradigm shift from the issues that he first wanted to see from those he should have med to focus on. In other words, recording all the events the children were engaged ı both inside and outside the classroom meant that there were opportunities to arefully look at other issues apart from focussing on early literacy related activities see Chapters 5 and 6). Perhaps this was also part of the researcher's own philosophy hat he brought into this study; that every experience in the pre-school setting was lata, which seemed to fit in well with the interpretive approach to this study (see section 3.7; also see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Dunne *et al*, 2005).

The researcher followed up some of the issues that he observed through interviews with the caregivers. This was very helpful in understanding what was happening in terms of the caregiver's rationale for particular decisions in the provision of the learning experiences. In addition, the researcher interviewed some parents who escorted their children to the pre-schools in order to follow up on some of the issues that arose during the observations (see Chapter 5).

3.5.3 Questionnaire

This instrument took the form of a survey in which data was collected through face-to-face interviews with community members around each of the pre-schools involved in this study. Specifically, community participants involved were parents and guardians of children attending the pre-school as well as those whose children were not attending the pre-school. The questionnaire had both closed and open-ended items. The face-to-face interview approach was chosen bearing in mind that most of the participants in the communities could not complete the questionnaire on their own due to either low literacy or illiteracy. Fowler (2002) explains that frequently the self-

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administered data collection method places more of a burden on the reading and writing skills of the respondent than do interviewer procedures. He further argues that "if one is dealing with a population for which reading and writing skills are likely to be low and/or where the average level of interest and motivation is estimated to be low, interviewer-administered data collection strategies are likely to be preferable" (p.61). Furthermore, meeting the interviewees face to face meant that the researcher was able to clarify some of the open-ended questions, especially where the respondents seemed not to be clear. Muijs (2004) argues that apart from allowing the interviewer to reach sample size targets and quotas, face-to-face interviews can be adaptive (p.42).

A total of 120 questionnaires were completed in the four pre-school communities, with 30 parents and guardians completing the questionnaires for individual pre-school communities. Before the questionnaire was administered, it was translated into the local language, Chichewa, since all the interviews were done in Chichewa. This ensured that key statements were standardised in the local language and hence avoided possible variations in asking the questions.

3.5.3.1 Use of research assistants

Since the questionnaire required the researcher to interview as many community members as possible, he decided to involve research assistants. In all there were five research assistants (RAs). Three of the RAs were Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) graduates, while two were third year undergraduate education students from Chancellor College who had previous experience in conducting surveys and who were fluent in relevant dominant languages spoken in the target communities. However, in order to maximise the accuracy with which questions were

answered, and to minimise possibilities of influencing respondents' answers (Fowler, 2002), the researcher trained the research assistants in how to go about the interviews (basic principles of interviewing and challenges, among others). The researcher also went through the questionnaire, analysing each question and the information it was soliciting. Then the research assistants and the researcher translated the questionnaire together and this process helped to further familiarise the research assistants with the instrument. The questionnaire was then piloted, creating another opportunity for the research assistants to practice using it, as well as to identify areas they needed to take into account when administering it. A peer review followed after piloting, during which the challenges in administering the questionnaire were discussed. All this allowed for general standardisation of the questionnaire, in order to minimise loss of useful information during the actual interviewing situation.

Although the researcher had the help of the research assistants, he also administered some questionnaires in each community in order to have a picture of the issues that were emerging, instead of leaving everything to the research assistants.

3.5.4 Checklist

Apart from the individual interview questionnaire, a checklist was also used to find out the levels of both material and human resources available in the different pre-schools (Appendix 4). The checklist was completed by directors and administrators of the pre-schools but in the presence of the researcher in order to answer questions on what they did not understand. The completed list was then matched with what was actually observed during visits throughout the observation period in order to crosscheck whether there were any disparities. Due to lack of up-to-date information on the various issues included, it was difficult to complete some of the sections of the

checklist. Even reliable records on previous enrolment were not readily available in all the four pre-schools.

3.6 Data management

Both qualitative and quantitative sets of data were generated in this study, and therefore an attempt was made to ensure that the data were properly organised and kept for easy access during analysis (section 3.7). Dey (1993) argues that "good analysis requires efficient management of one's data ... [As such]... data should be recorded in a format which facilitates analysis. Decisions made at this stage can have repercussions later. Whatever basis we choose for filing data, it is likely to facilitate analysis in some directions and inhibit it in others" (pp.74-76).

Qualitative interview data were kept on audio cassettes, which were later transcribed and stored on computer. Hard copies of the transcripts were also kept as back up in case of computer breakdown.

Hard copies of the completed questionnaires were organised and filed before coding. After coding the questionnaire, the data were entered into SPSS computer package for analysis. Data for each pre-school as well as one which merged data from all the four pre-schools were kept in separate SPSS folders for easy access during analysis stage. Back up copies of all the SPSS folders were kept on CD-Rom.

The study's observation data included the notes taken during lessons and visual data of some of the lessons (see section 3.5). The observation notes were typed and stored on the computer. Video tapes of the lessons were labelled and kept for viewing using a systematic viewing tool (see Appendix 3b). Furthermore, notes made during the viewing of the videos (completed video analysis tools) were typed and stored on the

computer. The researcher created separate folders for each pre-school, ready for retrieval during analysis.

Finally, the researcher kept the four hard copies of the checklist in a separate file awaiting analysis.

3.7 Data analysis

Overall, the analysis of data in this study was guided by *interpretivism*. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.8) explain that:

> Interpretivists of all types ... insist that researchers are no more "detached" from their objects of study than are their informants. Researchers, they argue, have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they too are members of a particular culture at a specific historical moment. Also they will be undeniably affected by what they hear and observe in the field, often in unnoticed ways.

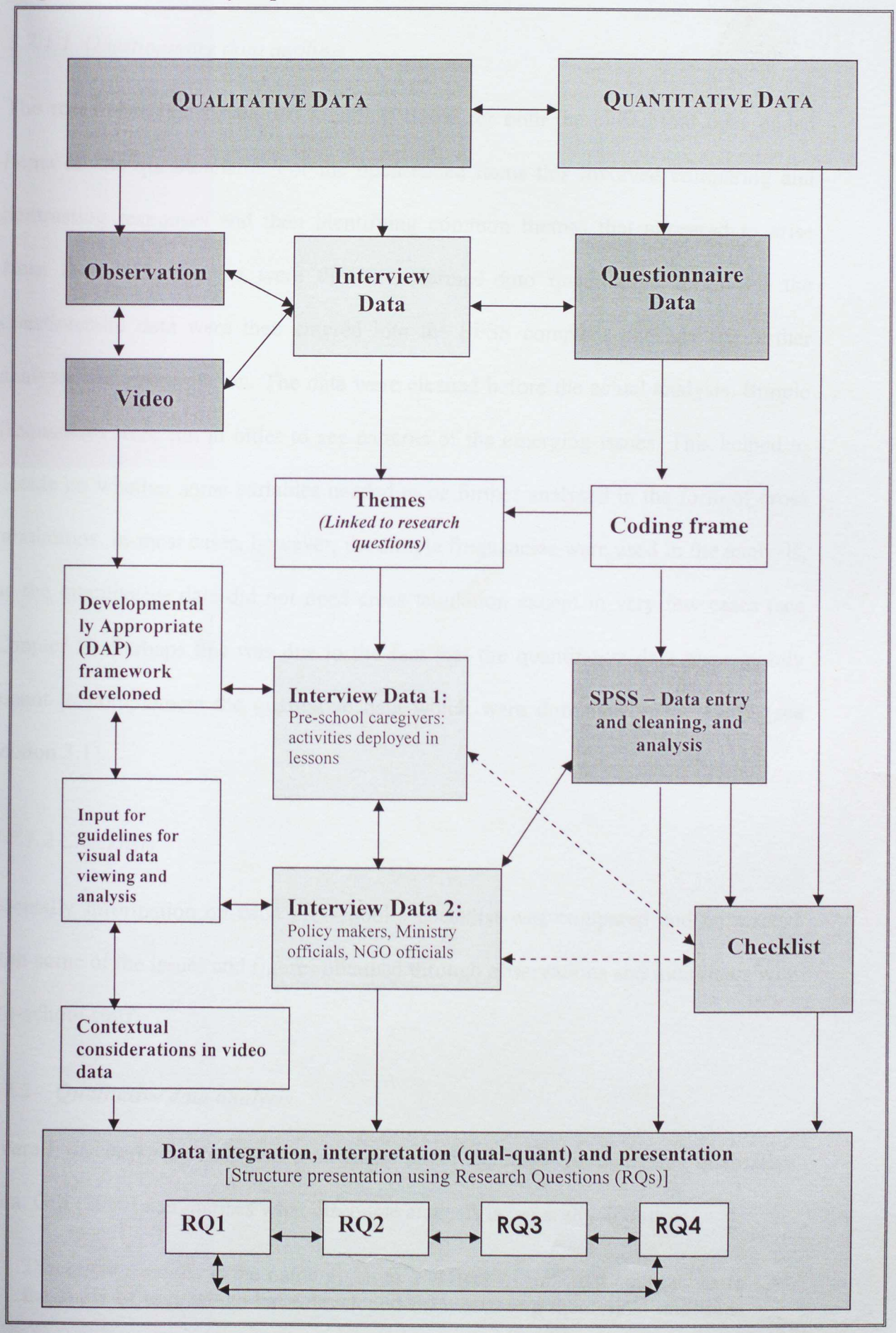
Since both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in collecting the data in this study, the analysis was done within each approach. Creswell (2003) explains that in mixed methods approaches to research, data analysis "occurs ***within*** both the quantitative (descriptive and inferential numerical analysis) approach and the qualitative (description and thematic text or image analysis) approach and often ***between*** the two approaches". (p.220). He further states that integration of qualitative and quantitative data might occur at several stages in the process of the research, namely, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, or some combination of places. Figure 3.1 is a graphic representation of the whole data analysis process which the researcher went through. Thus, while thinking about the analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data the researcher was also conscious of the ways in which data would be integrated, interpreted and finally presented (also see Rossman

& Rallis, 2003). Nevertheless, as is discussed later in the section, this proved to be a big challenge.

In developing the study's analysis the researcher used *cross-over tracks* design for mixed methods analysis (see Green *et al,* 2001), in which the researcher initiates analyses in separate qualitative and quantitative tracks, and then transforms the data in one track, crossing it over to the other track for comparison and further analysis. Ideally central to this design is comparison and contrast of issues in one set of data with another, especially with integrated research design such as the one used in the study. For instance, although in this study the qualitative approach was dominant, the researcher started with the analysis of the quantitative data in order to identify some of the general issues that were coming out of the context of the study. This helped in coding the interview data, thereby making clear the links between emerging issues from both sets of data (see Figure 3.1).

There were ideally two major tracks in the whole process of analysing the data in this study, qualitative and quantitative (qual-quant). Furthermore, each track had two sub-tracks, observation and interview data for the qualitative approach, and questionnaire and checklist data for the quantitative approach (see Figure 3.1). The research questions (RQs) were part and parcel of the analysis process in terms of providing general guidance on the major emerging issues. Although the discussion has represented the process as linear, practically it was far from that.

Figure 3.1: Data analysis process



3.7.1 Quantitative data analysis

3.7.1.1 Questionnaire data analysis

The researcher first developed a coding frame for both the closed and open-ended items on the questionnaire. For the open-ended items this involved comparing and contrasting responses and then identifying common themes that appeared to arise from them. The themes were then transformed into quantitative form. All the questionnaire data were then entered into the SPSS computer package for further analysis and interpretation. The data were cleaned before the actual analysis. Simple frequencies were run in order to see patterns of the emerging issues. This helped to decide on whether some variables needed to be further analysed in the form of cross tabulations. In most cases, however, the simple frequencies were used in the analysis, as the quantitative data did not need cross tabulation except in very few cases (see Chapter 5). Perhaps this was due to the fact that the quantitative data were mainly meant to complement the qualitative data which were dominant in the study (see section 3.1).

3.7.1.2 Checklists

Basically information on each pre-school's checklist was compared and contrasted with some of the issues and figures obtained through observations and interviews with pre-school staff.

3.7.2 Qualitative data analysis

Overall, *discourse analysis* was used as the broad technique for analysing qualitative data. Gill (2000) summarises what discourse analysis is generally about:

> *Discourse analysis* is the name given to a variety of different approaches to the study of text, which have developed from different theoretical traditions

and diverse disciplinary locations. Strictly speaking, there is no single 'discourse analysis', but many different styles of analysis that all lay claim to the name. *What all these perspectives share is a rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world, and a conviction in the central importance of discourse in constructing social life.*[Emphasis added] (Gill, 2000, p.172)

3.7.2.1 Interview data analysis

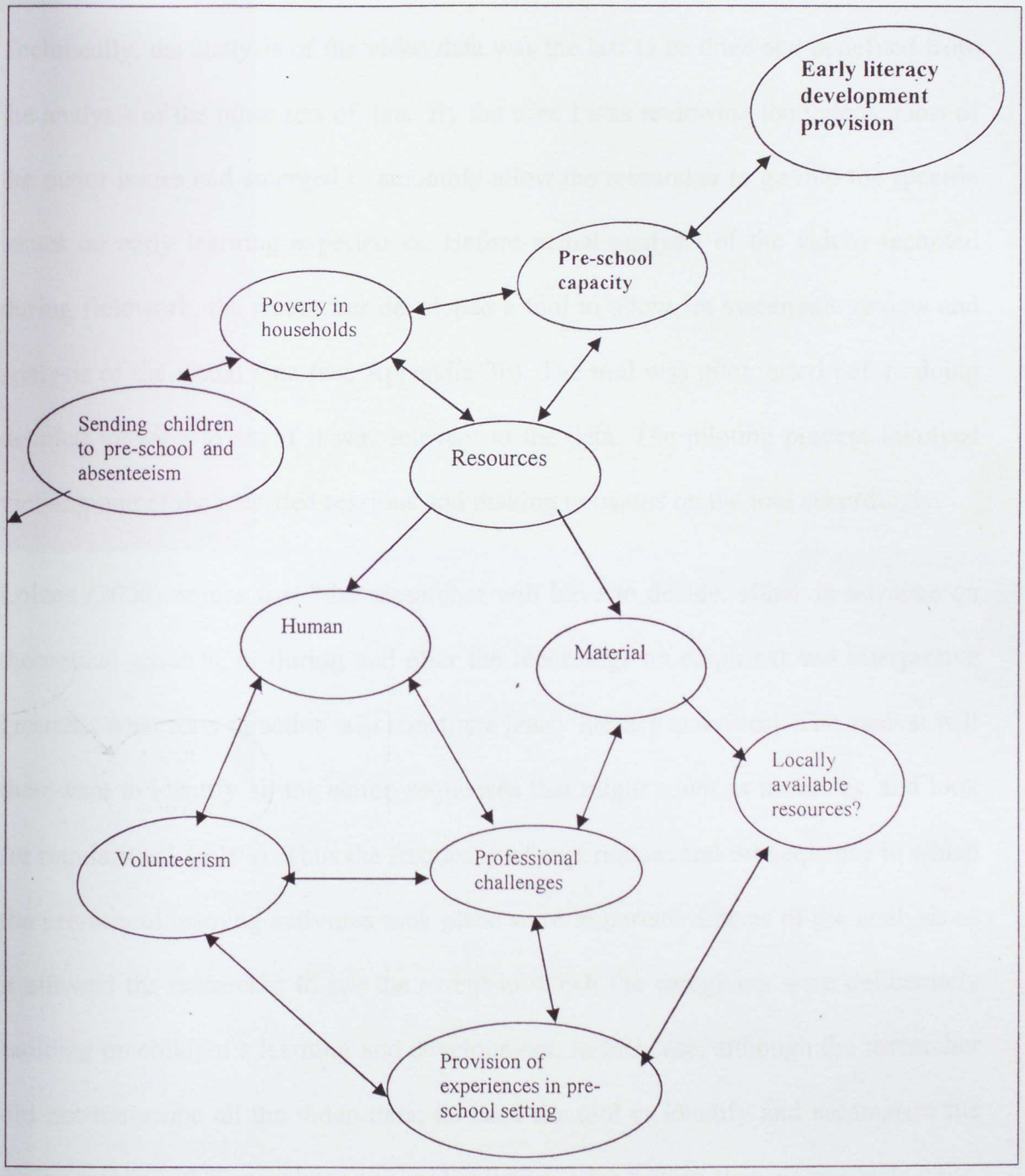
Analysis of qualitative data is often considered to be an ongoing process throughout the research process (see Dey, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Kane, 1995; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2003) and this was true for this study.

As part of the process of analysing the interview data, the researcher read over and over the transcripts. This sometimes involved re-listening to the tapes, and allowed for more familiarity with the major issues arising from the data (also see Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Further, the researcher found the processes of transcribing and typing the interviews very useful for familiarising himself with the data. The researcher therefore identified themes and categories which he then used to code the interviews. At this stage the use of concept maps as suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003) (see also Dey, 1993) proved to be very useful in showing the links among the themes and categories. Figure 3.2 is an example of the concept map used during the analysis of the interviews.

3.7.2.2 Analysis of observation data

Just as interview transcripts, the observational notes taken during visits to the pre-schools were read over and over to identify themes and categories relating to pre-school practice in early learning provision. These issues were compared and contrasted with those that arose from the interviews with pre-school staff, to see if

Figure 3.2: Sample concept map during analysis



(See also Rossman & Rallis, 2003)

there were any significant links, which was generally the case. These notes also acted as a general guideline to the next stage, video data analysis, which was part and parcel of the observation process. In this case the video data played a role which Loizos (2000) calls a more evidential, forensic role (p.103).

3.7.2.3 Analysis of visual data

Technically, the analysis of the video data was the last to be done and benefited from the analysis of the other sets of data. By the time I was reviewing the videos, most of the major issues had emerged to smoothly allow the researcher to go into the specific issues on early learning experiences. Before actual analysis of the videos recorded during fieldwork, the researcher developed a tool to allow for systematic review and analysis of the visual data (see Appendix 3b). The tool was pilot tested before doing detailed viewing to see if it was relevant to the data. The piloting process involved viewing one of the recorded sessions and making revisions on the tool accordingly.

Loizos (2000) argues that "the researcher will have to decide, either in advance on theoretical grounds, or during and after the recordings on empirical and interpretive grounds, what sorts of action will constitute [early literacy activities]. The analyst will then want to identify all the action sequences that might count as instances, and look for regularities" (p.103). Thus the frequency of experiences and the sequence in which the pre-school learning activities took place were important aspects of the analysis as it allowed the researcher to see the extent to which the caregivers were deliberately building on children's learning and development. In this case, although the researcher did not transcribe all the video data, he used the tool to identify and summarise the major activities that caregivers engaged children in for further analysis at a later stage. Since the video data were handy, it meant that when necessary, it was possible to review the specific portion, although at the same time this process was time-consuming.

As Figure 3.1 shows, the systematic viewing tool was guided by ideas from Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) especially on aspects of child growth

ıd key components in early literacy development (see Chapter 2 and Appendix 9). lowever, in the process of using the tool, contextual considerations (contextually ppropriate practice) of the issues arising out of the data were also made (Figure 3.1).

.7.3 *Challenges of data analysis*

\lthough there were obvious advantages in using mixed methods in the study, as liscussed above, the researcher experienced some clear challenges in analysis and ntegration of multiple data sets. Preparing the data for analysis was demanding as a ot of time had to be spent on the different bits of data to make the analysis easier. Furthermore, whereas the researcher was reasonably confident handling *qualitative* data, he found himself spending more time on the technicalities of sorting out *quantitative* data. Being less familiar with the use of SPSS computer package for analysing the data the researcher ended up spending a lot of time learning to use it, although this eventually enhanced his own skills in SPSS. This is in line with methodology literature which points out some of the limitations of mixed designs. For instance, Creswell (2003) argues that this model "requires great effort and expertise to adequately study a phenomenon with two separate methods. It can also be difficult to compare the results of two analyses using data of different form" (p.217).

3.8 Role of researcher

The researcher approached the study with some experiences and subjectivities about provision of opportunities for early literacy development. As a language teacher educator, and at the same time a typical rural community member in Malawi, the researcher's own feelings at the beginning of the study were that illiteracy in rural areas is perpetuated by the fact that the system of education in Malawi does not provide children with early learning support and therefore they are not properly

:opelled to stay in the school system, though paradoxically the researcher succeeded : school without having any nursery or pre-school experience. This has of course aised a lot of questions as to whether one really needs to go through pre-school or ny form of early education in order to succeed at school.

The second aspect of experiences that the researcher brought to the study was his view and questioning of the current efforts in early childhood education in rural areas, more specifically the rationale and motives for establishing Community Based Organisations (CBOs), though still aware of the problems of orphans in the communities. The researcher's first inclination was that the CBOs were aimed at attracting funding from donor organisations which would only partly be used for the espoused rationales for the quasi-NGO establishments. Thus the core aim of educating the so-called orphan for her/his sake was out of the question in the researcher's subjectivities. He thought that though there was an attempt to establish community based pre-school systems, still not much was taking place in some of the rural pre-schools because the motive seemed questionable. Furthermore, the researcher thought that due to the limited material and human resources, potential for early literacy development was not strategically targeted by pre-schools.

All this led the researcher to ask questions such as 'Are there really any useful experiences that rural pre-schools provide in order for children to develop early literacy skills (which are a key to future learning)?' If such useful experiences are provided, is there a deliberate attempt to link them to children's context? Another question was linked to the capacity of such pre-schools in the preparation of children for further learning in more formal school system by building on early literacy skills.

Going into a rural setting as a lecturer at the University of Malawi was another issue which had to be resolved in terms of the researcher's relationship with the study participants. It was likely that the participants thought about the researcher as a person of high status and this might have affected their responses to the questions. However, one of the things the researcher did was to try and reduce the distance by allowing some time for socialisation when he shared experiences on a number of common issues in the society even if such issues were not directly related to the forthcoming agenda. This, to a certain extent, eased the tension of having to think about the researcher as an agent of the "government" as was implied in one of the statements by an interviewee when asked to make suggestions on best practice at the pre-school in the community:

> *Kodi ifenso tingapeze mayankho a mabvuto athu – ndimayesa boma ndilo?*
> [Do you really think we can suggest solutions to our own problems: don't you think the government is better placed to do this?"] **(RPscDc[19])**

Some of these experiences and subjectivities might have influenced the various stages of the research process. While one would not rule out possibilities of bias as a result of the experiences and subjectivities the researcher brings to the research process (Darlington & Scott, 2002, pp.131-132), in this study the researcher made an effort to let the participants express their own views about critical issues in the study. In other words, the researcher did not let his subjectivities dominate the research process but rather the views of the participants. However, it was still important to have such subjectivities at the back of the mind as they helped the researcher understand the pre-school situation much better from the view point of the participants. Stake (1995)

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[19] The acronym stands for **R**espondent from **Pr**e-**sc**hool **D** community. Throughout the discussion the various respondents are coded similarly.

argues that in qualitative research, "Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding" (p.45).

3.9 Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of the study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that trustworthiness of research involves "credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability" (in Opie, 2004, p.71). It has further been argued that among the four indicators, credibility is considered to be "a useful indicator of goodness in case study research" (Opie, 2004, p.71). Therefore a number of features were built into this study in order to ensure its credibility.

In the first place the researcher used *triangulation* of methods in that both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to strengthen the conclusions within each of the four pre-schools. Flick (2002) explains that triangulation can mean a number of things but that the underlying rationale is for the various research methods to complement each other in interpreting and understanding an issue:

> [Triangulation] can mean several qualitative methods ... but it can also mean combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Here, the different methodological perspectives complement each other in the study of an issue and this is conceived as the complementary compensation of the weaknesses and blind spots of each single method. (Flick, 2002, p.265)

It should be pointed out that by using several methods, data were collected from many sources, such as children, caregivers, pre-school directors and administrators, officials from relevant ministries, NGOs and parents from the communities surrounding the pre-schools, in order to enhance credibility of the findings.

Piloting (pre testing) of research instruments was another feature built into the study to ensure credibility. After development, the research instruments were pre-tested in one of the villages where a pre-school exists. The pilot pre-school was not one of the

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study pre-schools but was within one of the Traditional Authorities involved in the study. Items that were repetitive or unclear were noted and revised accordingly.

Throughout the study, *critical friends* were also involved in critiquing the ideas being developed in this study. Opie (2004, p.56) explains that "the critical friend can be a colleague, family member or friend whose opinion you value". In my case, most of the critical friends were professional colleagues at Chancellor College some staff and fellow postgraduate students at the University of Sussex, where the researcher spent one year as part of the study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Since the study involved children, including those that were disadvantaged, it was critical that a strong ethical framework be followed. *Informed consent* was the first ethical issue and involved gaining consent from the participants in the study. In this case participants in the study had an equal right to be informed and to engage in any decision-making directly affecting them. Furthermore, they had the right to say "no", the right to reply and the right to have a voice in the study activities. In other words, participation in the study was voluntary. In all cases, the consent was verbal, partly because some of the participants, especially parents and guardians, either had low literacy or illiteracy, hence written consent could not be sought.

Informed consent was tricky in this study since very small children were involved who could not give it. Darlington and Scott (2002, p.26) argue that voices of children have remained inaudible in research due to the "extent to which, if any, they are capable of giving informed consent and under what circumstances and to what degree parents can give consent on their behalf". They further argue that although it is often

generally accepted through legislation that children should be represented by parents, when entering binding contracts or being involved in research, there are limits to which the parents can, on behalf of children, give consent to participate in research:

> Parental permission does not justify overriding a child's or young person's opposition to participation, so it may be appropriate for researchers to seek the views of both parents and children. (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p.27)

The argument posed by Darlington and Scott (2002) makes sense to some extent and contributes to understanding of the complexities of adhering to ethical issues in research especially where small children are involved. However, it can also be argued that there are situations where it may be extremely difficult to get children to give their informed consent to participate in a study. In such situations, the parents are a reasonable alternative.

In this study, it was feasible to obtain consent from the directors of the pre-schools and the caregivers, who are normally considered surrogate parents for the children. The proprietors in turn informed some of the parents on the research activities in the pre-schools involved. However, such an approach still raised pertinent questions in the light of the arguments by Darlington and Scott (2002) with regard to whether the "consent" from the proprietors of the pre-schools on behalf of the children and guardians was justified. The researcher's own feeling was that it was going to be practically difficult to get "consent" from the children's parents and guardians as it would have meant visiting each possible home to seek permission for their children's involvement. Another alternative of course would have been to invite the parents to come to the school and seek their permission. Although this procedure could have worked the problem would be whether, in the Malawian context, the parents would have appreciated this as good cause for calling them to meet at the pre-school. Finally,

use of a written consent letter to parents was another alternative. However, as has been discussed earlier on, bearing in mind that most of the parents and guardians in the rural areas are illiterate, using letters would not have easily worked in this case.

In light of the above scenario, what the researcher felt was more crucial, after getting consent from the pre-school directors, was to assure them of *privacy and confidentiality* in handling the data that was to be collected. In other words, whatever information was to be collected, including the videos, would be treated in strict confidence as well as for the purposes of the study only. This was also linked to issues of *anonymity* of the participants. In this case, all the participants in this study were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the interviews, observations, questionnaires, and checklists.

The researcher avoided all forms of *deception* in carrying out this study. For instance participants were given true and detailed information about the study's purposes and activities that the study was going to engage the participants in.

In order to reduce suspicions on the use of the video-recorded lesson activities and the audio-recorded interviews, the researcher indicated to the participants, especially the proprietors, that they were free to access the recordings. Of course, such a promise sometimes proved costly in resources and time. In two of the pre-schools, for instance, the directors asked for a copy of one of the videos for them, for purposes of watching it with the children. Such a request was not made for purposes of monitoring what had been recorded but rather for their own use and records. Similarly, at another pre-school, an interviewee wanted to listen to the whole interview just to appreciate what she had said. She even asked her office colleagues (though it was during working hours) to come and listen to the interview. They sat around the recorder and

listened to the whole interview. When the researcher asked them what they could make out of the interview, they just laughed and commented "It is interesting". Again in this instance it can be assumed that the intention for replaying the whole interview was not for purposes of editing what she had said during the interview but rather out of sheer interest to hear her own voice. However, she might have made the request deliberately, in order to try and protect her image and job by having her office mates cross-examine what she had reported during the interview. The latter speculation would make more sense if we assume that there were strict regulations within this pre-school over who should talk to outsiders on pre-school matters.

In all these instances, the researcher had an obligation to the participants' requests and therefore on some occasions at his own expense copied some of the videos and gave them, while in others the researcher had to spend time allowing the interviewees to listen to what had been tape-recorded. Furthermore, it can be argued that these gestures in some ways established more rapport as well as trust between the participants and the researcher.

3.11 Chapter summary

The approach and design of the study have been discussed in this chapter, with particular focus on the choices that were made, and the reasons for using the various research techniques to collect and analyse the data. The chapter has also raised some of the methodological challenges or limitations for the various stages of the processes through which the data were sorted out. In the following three chapters, namely Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the findings of the study are presented and discussed,

Chapter 4: Results (a)—The Context of the Research Sites

4.0 Chapter overview

This chapter describes in detail the four rural pre-schools in order to put in context the discussion on the major findings of the study. The description of the pre-schools focuses on location, how and why they were established, access and enrolment issues, staffing and infrastructure. The final part of the chapter provides a summary of the main similarities and differences among the four rural pre-schools. On ethical grounds the rural pre-schools have been labelled as A, B, C, D, without necessarily implying any hierarchy in any form.

4.1 The community around the four pre-schools

Before describing the four rural pre-schools, it is useful to say something about the nature of the communities in which they operate, in order to put the description in a social context. Due to the fact that there were a lot of similarities among the communities surrounding the four rural pre-schools, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the pre-school communities have been described in one section rather than separately.

The communities around the pre-schools are generally poor socio-economically. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, there are high levels of poverty in Malawi, with an estimated 65% of the population living below the national poverty line (Chapter 1). As will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 5, this has implications for any financial contributions that may be levied on pre-school children. Despite the fact

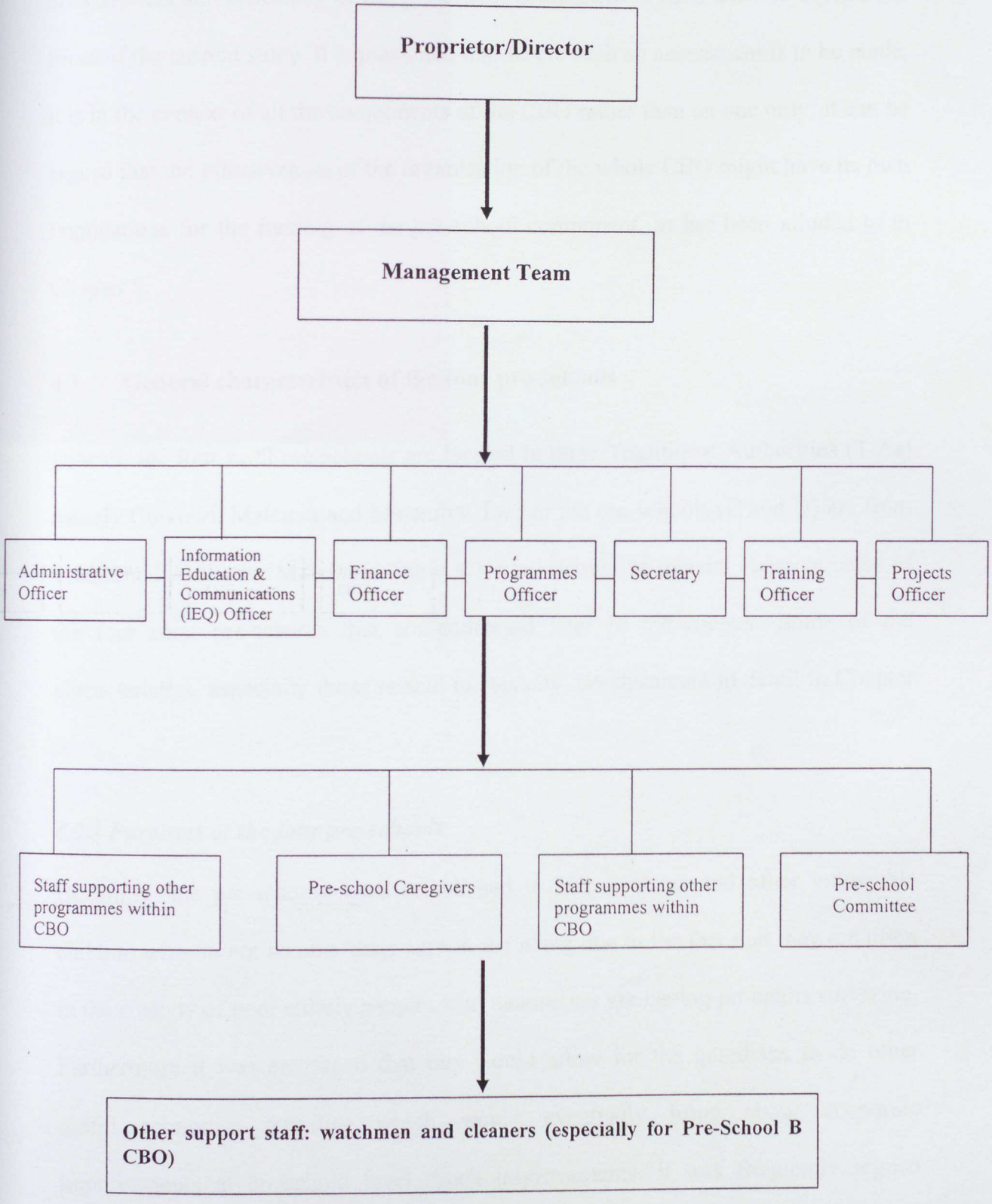
that the amount may appear small, the majority of the rural population cannot afford fees, bearing in mind that there are other household economic pressures, such as purchasing food (see Chapter 5).

During interviews with pre-school staff, the Village Chiefs were described as generally cooperative and supportive of the pre-school initiatives in their communities, so in some cases they take an active role in mobilising the communities to send children to the pre-schools. One village chief for Pre-school D community was reported to have had special interest in the affairs of the pre-school and even provided some foodstuffs for the children. As discussed in Chapter 3 and of course as we shall see in Chapter 5, in all four communities, women seemed to be more directly involved with pre-school activities than men.

4.2 Organisation structure of the four pre-schools

Since pre-schools A, B and C are located within Community Based Organisations, it is important to give a brief description of the structure of those CBOs. During interviews, administrative staff reported that each CBO has a director, with a management team which runs the affairs of the CBO. The Management team comprises different portfolios and functions for the different components of the CBO (Figure 4.1). Then there are supporting staff for various components of the CBO, such as pre-school caregivers, who are directly involved in the specific programs. In Pre-school A, the caregivers also play other roles in CBO programmes, either after pre-school sessions or on other days when children are not at the pre-school premises. It was further reported that the management team works hand in hand with a pre-school committee comprising members from the community.

Figure 4.1 Organisation structure for CBOs in Pre-schools A, B and C



The extent to which such an organisation structure directly influences the effectiveness and efficiency of the pre-school component in each CBO is beyond the focus of the current study. It is presumed that where such an assessment is to be made, it is in the context of all the components of the CBO rather than on one only. It can be argued that the effectiveness of the organisation of the whole CBO might have its own implications for the running of the pre-school component, as has been alluded to in Chapter 5.

4.3 General characteristics of the four pre-schools

Overall, the four rural pre-schools are located in three Traditional Authorities (T/As) namely Chikowi, Malemia and Mwambo. Two of the pre-schools (C and D) are from Traditional Authority Malemia. Table 4.1 summarises the general characteristics of the four rural pre-schools that are addressed later in the chapter. Some of the characteristics, especially those related to capacity, are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

4.3.1 Purposes of the four pre-schools

Generally, the pre-schools were established to help orphans and other vulnerable children who do not receive basic care in the home due to the fact that they are often in the custody of poor elderly people, who themselves are having problems surviving. Furthermore it was envisaged that this would allow for the guardians to do other useful economic activities which would eventually bring about economic improvements at household level. Such improvements, it was frequently argued during interviews with pre-school staff, would in turn improve the lives of the orphans as one of the pre-school administrators explained:

Table 4.1 Some general characteristics of the four rural pre-schools

Description	Pre-School A	Pre-School B	Pre-School C	Pre-School D
Location (T/A)	Mwambo	Chikowi	Malemia	Malemia
Catchment Area	8-10 villages	7 villages	Over 8 villages	6 villages
Estimated distance from Zomba Town Centre	8 km	13km	10km	8km
Year established	2000	2002	2001	2002
Who initiated pre-school establishment?	Community	Community	Community	Individuals external to community
Proprietors/ Director(s) – by sex	1M	1M	1M	2Fs
Management Team (for whole CBO)	10 (3M, 7F)	6 (3M, 3F)	None	None
Caregivers	3 (2M 1F)	2Fs	1F	2Fs
Support staff (for whole CBO)	4 (2M 2F)	19 (9M, 10F)	None	None
School Committee	10 (6M, 4F)	10 (3 M, 7F)	5 (2M, 3F)	10 (4M 6F)
Financial contributions by parents (non-compulsory)	MWK50 (US$0.50)	MWK20 (US$0.20)	MWK30 (US$0.30)	MWK50 (US$0.50)
Infrastructure	Permanent structure	Permanent structure	Permanent structure	Permanent structure (church building)
	Not purposefully built	Not purposefully built	Not purposefully built	Not purposefully built

M=Male; F=Female

...Cholinga cha sukuluyi...kwenikweni tinaona kuti ana ang'ono-ang'ono amene ali amasiye amabvutika kwambiri. Chifukwa ana aja akasiyidwa... ana amasiye amasiyiridwa ndi anthu achikulire kwambiri, choncho achikulire amakhala ndimabvuto kuti asamalire ana aja, akafune chakudya, apite kumunda...ndiye pofuna kupereka mpata kwa achikulire aja kuti akhoza kupita kumunda, komanso kuchita ntchito zina ndi zina tinatsegula sukuluyi kuti ana aja azipita kumenekuja azikaphunzira...Komanso tinafuna kuti tiwatsekule mutu ana aja kuti azikula bwino ndi umunthu wao. Kwenikweni athuwa akusiyanako ndi manazale sukulu chifukwa athuwa ndima Community Based Child Care Centres [CBCC], ndikumene ana amakaphunzira za umunthu wawo komanso za makulidwe awo

[...In terms of the aim of the pre-school...we observed that many orphans usually suffer a lot because they are often left with elderly people to care for them. These elderly people often have a lot of problems providing for the children. In order to create more time for the elderly people to carry out activities in the garden or do other useful activities that would make it reasonably easy to care for the children, we opened the nursery school so that the children could go there and learn. Furthermore, we also wanted to

> stimulate the children so that they can grow well as social beings. Unlike nursery schools, ours are Community Based Child Care Centres [CBCC]' where children learn to socialise and develop. **(APscB2]**

As we shall discuss later in the chapter, although Pre-school D directors did not explicitly indicate that they were targeting orphans and vulnerable children, implicitly they had similar aims to those of the other three pre-schools (see section 4.3.5).

Furthermore the four pre-schools provide access to both orphans and non-orphans. Administrators and caregivers of the pre-schools explained that this arrangement ensures that orphans do not feel secluded from the rest of the children. Furthermore, it was also reiterated that the arrangement provides opportunities to parents who are interested to have their children undergo pre-school education and development at the premises. In the following sections each of the four rural pre-schools is specifically described by focusing on some of the general features outlined in Table 4.1 in the process making some general comparison and contrast where necessary.

4.3.2 Pre-school A

This rural pre-school is based in Traditional Authority Mwambo, about 8 km to the South East of Zomba town centre. The Community Based Organisation (CBO) under which this pre-school was established started in 1998 as a volunteer youth CBO whose aim was "motivating young people to take the leading role using their skills to develop their communities by participating in the areas of HIV/AIDS, youth reproductive health, family planning, home-based care and orphan caring to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS" (Pre-school A's Write Up, 2004, p.1). It was reported that the CBO's catchment area caters for 36 villages across two Traditional Authorities of Mwambo and Chikowi. The catchment area of the pre-school, however, is 10 villages in T/A Mwambo. The pre-school/CBCC component was introduced in 2001.

The average enrolment for each year is between 30 and 40 children[20]. At the time of the study, teachers reported that 35 children were registered. During interviews with the staff and the director of the pre-school, they explained that usually they call for a community meeting involving village heads, parents and guardians to make formal requests to them to send children, including orphans, to the pre-school, as one of the interviewees explained:

> ....*choyambilira tinachitako* research that is...*1999 ndi 2000...Tinachita kafukufuku kuti tichite* identify *ma* orphans *m'midzi yathu yonse*...catchment [area]... we are working with 36 villages. *Ndiye titachita* identify *ma* orphans *tinakhala pansi ndi mafumu...tinawachita* sensitise *mafumu ndipo* we had four sensitisation meetings *ndi mafumu* on orphan caring. *Ndiye tinakhala kuona kuti kodi ndi ma* area *atiwo amene tingathe kuwathandiza ana amasiye. Ndiye tinaona kuti ndi* education... *komanso... ma* vocational skills. *Ndiye ifeyo panopa timangopanga za* education *zokha,* ECD. *Ndiye tinalengeza kwa mafumu kuti panopa tatsegula kasukulu ka ana amasiye ndiye m'midzi...m'makomo mwanumo mafumu mukatilengezere kuti makolo atitumizire ana amasiye... Komanso anthu ena oti akusunga ana kuti siamasiye akhoza kutitumizira - sukulu iyi* of course *ana ena ndi amasiye koma ena siamasiye,* it is a mixture....
> [...in the first place we conducted some form of survey between 1999 and 2000 for purposes of identifying orphans in our catchment area, which has 36 villages. After we had identified the orphans we sensitised chiefs on the problem. We conducted four sensitisation meetings with the chiefs on orphan care. Then we considered various strategies for assisting the orphans and we came up with two, namely, provision of education and development of vocational skills. Currently we are dealing with the education strategy only, ECD. Thereafter we called upon village chiefs to encourage those who were keeping children, both orphans and non-orphans, in their communities to send them to the pre-school we had just opened. So we have a mixture of orphans and non-orphans at our pre-school]. **(DPscA1)**

Except for the orphans, it was reported that parents and guardians are requested to make a non-compulsory contribution of MWK50.00 (US$0.50) per month in order for the pre-school to buy sugar and other basic foodstuffs for children to use during break time.

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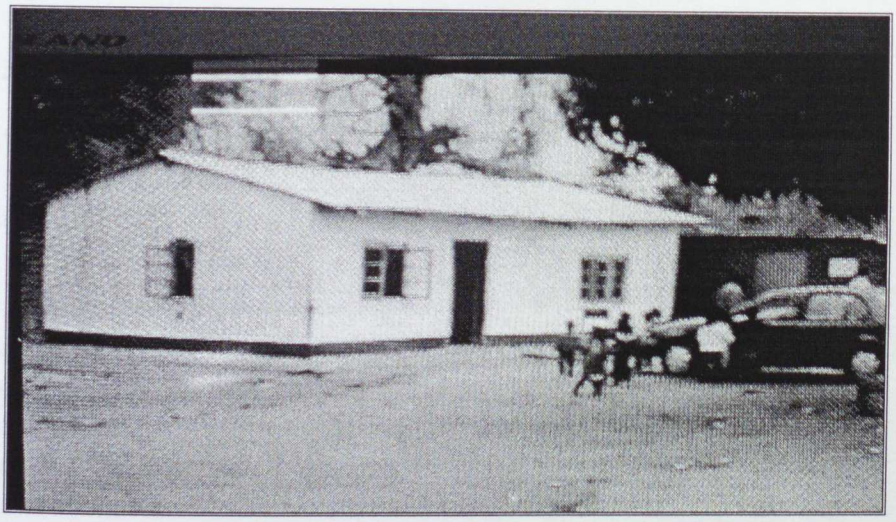
[20] Reliable records of the number of children at the pre-school were not readily available at the time of

In terms of staffing levels, the pre-school has three caregivers: two males and one female, who are directly responsible for the pre-school section of the CBO. It was reported that all three are volunteers from the community. Unlike the other three pre-schools, the three volunteers at Pre-school A are younger people[21] who reported having finished their secondary education the previous year or two. Furthermore, whereas in the other pre-schools the caregivers were all females, Pre-school A has two male caregivers. According to the arrangement at the pre-school, two of the members of staff (one male and one female) are called *"teachers"* while one member (male) is a "*care giver*". The idea is that the two 'teachers' are the ones directly involved in the 'teaching' while the 'caregiver' is seen as helping with the care of the children during the teaching process.

Figure 4.2: Pre-school A classroom block



the study. Record keeping is generally a big problem. This was also the case with the other three pre-schools involved in this study.

[21] The two male caregivers are in their early twenties. The female caregiver is in her late twenties.

In terms of infrastructure there is one permanent block (Corrugated iron roofed, brick wall, cement floor) (Figure 4.2) ideally meant to be an office for the Community Based Organisation. However, with the introduction of the pre-school component, the main office space is used as the classroom. There is a large open space around the classroom block, which could allow for building additional structures, resources permitting. The director of the pre-school reported that the land was provided by the village chief and the community in general.

4.3.3 Pre-school B

This rural pre-school was established between 2002 and 2003, and is located about 13 kilometres to the South West of Zomba town centre and about 5 kilometres from the Blantyre-Zomba main road. The pre-school is in T/A Chikowi and has a catchment area of 7 villages. Just as pre-school A, this rural pre-school is a component of a Community Based Organisation (CBO), whose catchment area is 65 villages according to a key staff member at the CBO. It was further reported that the community had actually requested the CBO to establish the pre-school in order to give their children the chance to learn and develop:

> *Ife poyamba...tinauzidwa ndi* community, *tidapemphedwa ndi* community*...chifukwa ife zinthu zathu zambiri timafunsa kaye* community. *Ikatiuza zimene ikufuna ndiye ...timayambapo. Ndiye poyamba tinapita kwa* community *kufunsa. Ndiye anatifotokozera kuti kodi bwanji titayambitsa ma sukulu a ana ang'onoang'ono zikhoza kuthandiza. Choncho tinakhala pansi ndikukambirana, komanso titakambirana kambirana, titamanga mfundo imodzi tidapita ku* District Social Welfare Office *kukawafunsa za maganizo athu. Ndikumene tidapezako luso la kayendetsedwe ka* nursery school.
> [...We were in the first place asked by the community, in fact most of our operations prioritise consultations with the community before engaging in any development activity. So we consulted the community and it suggested the establishment of a nursery school. After we had agreed on the idea, we went to the [Zomba] District Social Welfare Office to put forward our plans about establishing the nursery school and we were given some useful tips and guidelines on how to run a nursery school]. **(APscB2]**

This pre-school has the highest enrolment of all the pre-schools involved in this study. According to the caregivers interviewed at the time of the study, about 120 children were registered for 2004 and out of these an average of 70 children frequently attended the lessons. During the interviews the caregivers were further asked to explain how frequently the remaining children came to the pre-school, and one of them explained:

> ...*Eeeh...Mwina amangobwera pa* week *kamodzi ndiye kuti pathanso* three weeks *asanabwere. Ndiye kuti azangobweranso* week *inayo masiku awiri, choncho osabwera. Koma amene oti ali* active, *amabwera tsiku ndi tsiku mwina pa* week *paja kubwera ka folo, kujomba kamodzi, ndiye alipo* 70.
> [... Sometimes children just come once per week and then disappear for three weeks before they show up again. When they do so they will not consistently attend classes for the whole week; they come just twice that week then disappear again. Otherwise those that are active and consistent in attending classes – say at least four days a week, and may be absenting themselves just one day – they are 70 on average.] **[APscB2]**

The above statement suggests that even among the 70 children, not all manage to consistently come to the pre-school every day of the week, hence further suggesting that the estimated average of those attending frequently may be even lower. This raises questions about the impact of the children's irregular attendance on their development and early learning. It seems to suggests that almost half of the total who had registered at Pre-school B did not fully benefit from the pre-schooling as they should have, thereby raising questions of whether pre-schools are really meeting the needs of the children as intended, particularly the development of early literacy skills. Chapter 5 of the thesis has more discussion on these issues in terms of the challenges and reasons for the irregular attendance.

It was reported that during meetings which the school conducts in conjunction with the communities, parents and guardians are encouraged to send their children to the pre-school. Just as in Pre-school A, parents are asked to make a non compulsory

contribution of MWK20.00 (US$0.20) for purchase of foodstuffs for the children as they learn. The pre-school has two female caregivers who volunteered to teach the children.

Figure 4.3: Part of Pre-school B classroom block[22]

There is one permanent room (corrugated iron roof, brick wall, cement floor) (Figure 4.3). One corner of the room is used as storage space for building materials and equipment. There is also a large open space in front of the building, although it is close to a road that cuts through the CBO campus.

4.3.4 Pre-school C

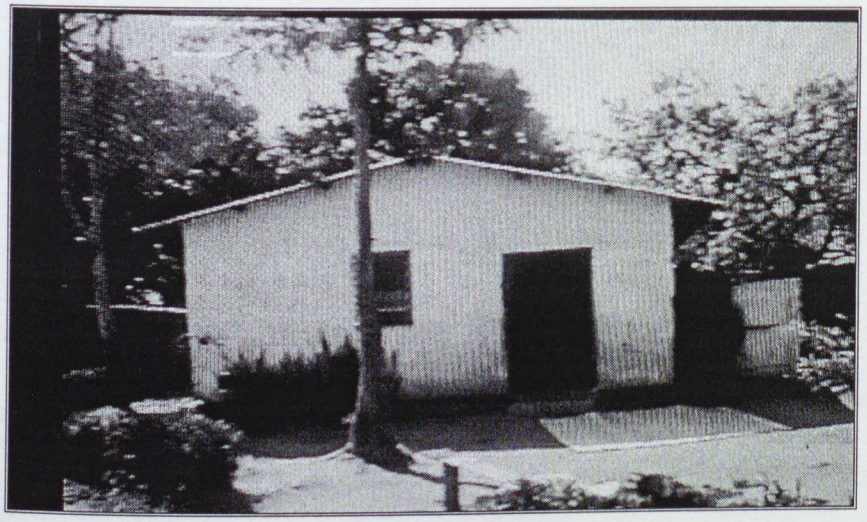
Pre-school C is a Community Based Child Care (CBCC) Support Group, which is almost 10 kilometres to the north east of Zomba town centre, in Traditional Authority

[22] The researcher has deliberately captured a section on ethical reasons because of the writing on the walls, which would easily identify the pre-school.

Malemia. The pre-school serves over 8 villages around the area. The CBCC was established in 2001. At the time of the study, it was reported that there were a total of 18 children who had registered, with an average attendance of 10 to 12 children per day. Just as in the other three pre-schools, parents and guardians are requested to make a contribution of MWK30.00 (US$0.30) per month, in order to buy basic food stuffs for the children, mainly sugar, tea leaves, and some form of simple food to be served during break times. It was reported that guardians keeping orphans were exempted from this financial contribution. The pre-school has one female volunteer (in her late 30s) who acts as the caregiver.

There is one permanent room (corrugated iron roofed, brick wall, cement floor) (Figure 4.4). There is a small office at one of the corners of the room, supposedly for the director of the pre-school. Furthermore part of the room is used as storage space for assorted items and materials not directly related to pre-schooling. The classroom block is within the compound of the director and there is enough open space around it.

Figure 4.4: Pre-school C Classroom block



4.3.5 Pre-school D

This rural pre-school was established in 2002 and is located in Traditional Authority Malemia, about 8 kilometres to the north west of Zomba town centre. The pre-school serves about 6 villages in the surrounding areas.

Unlike the other three, this rural pre-school was not birthed out of a Community Based Organisation (CBO) but is the initiative of two women whose husbands are working at a nearby institution. The two women are the current directors of the pre-school. During an interview with the two, they explained that the impetus to start the pre-school came from the fact that they could not find a suitable pre-school for their children when their husbands transferred from Blantyre to Zomba. They also explained that despite the fact that one pre-school was operating a few kilometres away from their homes, they felt it was not providing quality education and development for their children. Therefore they took the initiative to talk to one of the village chiefs, who in turn arranged for a meeting with community members during which the intention to open a pre-school was put across, and eventually endorsed. According to the directors the pre-school was meant to be non-profit making – to solely serve the community. Thus according to the directors the main objective of the pre-school was basically to provide opportunities for children within the community to socialise and learn as a means of preparing them for formal schooling in primary school.

The pre-school currently provides access to orphans and non orphans, although its main reason for establishment was not linked to caring for orphans, but rather catering for children from any socio-economic background from the community. The pre-school directors explained that orphans are exempted from a monthly contribution fee

of MWK50.00 (US$0.50), meant for the purchase of foodstuffs, since some of the children do not bring packed meals to pre-school. Furthermore, the directors reported that although parents and guardians are requested to make a contribution, the pre-school does not necessarily enforce the payment; parents and guardians are expected to make the payment in their own time when they get the money. At the time of the study, it was reported that the highest number of children that ever registered was 35 children. However a good number dropped out from the pre-school due to a number of factors, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The pre-school has two female volunteers, one in her early 40s and the other in her early 30s, who act as caregivers. Furthermore, the two directors explained that they used to be actively involved in teaching and caring for the children before the two volunteers were identified. The directors reported that they still do some teaching, but only occasionally.

Unlike the previous three pre-schools, Pre-school D uses borrowed premises, specifically a church building located in one of the villages. The church building is permanent (corrugated iron roof, brick wall, cement floor) (Figure 4.5). There is a large open space around the church building, with one large mango tree at one corner of the ground.

Figure 4.5: Pre-school D premise – Church Building

4.4 Summary of similarities and differences among the four pre-schools

Although each one of the pre-schools involved in this study is unique in its own right, there are a number of similarities among them. Of course rural Pre-school D is slightly different from the other three pre-schools in some respects. Table 4.2 is a matrix of the similarities and differences among the pre-schools:

Table 4.2: Similarities and differences among the four pre-schools (Basic information at the time of the study)

	Description	P/Sch. A	P/Sch. B	P/Sch. C	P/Sch. D
1.	Started as CBO and therefore component of CBO (i.e. CBCC)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
2.	Originally targeted orphans	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
3.	Access: integrates orphans and non-orphans	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4.	Non-profit-making	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5.	Non-compulsory financial contribution made by parents of non-orphans	Yes (MWK50)	Yes (MWK20)	Yes (MWK30)	Yes (MWK50)
6.	Volunteers as caregivers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7.	Own premises	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
8.	Borrowed premises	No	No	No	Yes
9.	Permanent structure used	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10.	Purposefully built structures	No	No	No	No
11.	Registered with Zomba District Social Welfare Office	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (but was in process)

The similarities and differences have implications for the type of provision of early learning experiences, and hence early literacy development opportunities, in each pre-school and across pre-schools. In other words, differences among the pre-schools would suggest that the levels and type of provision of learning experiences would be different, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. For instance, the use of borrowed premises such as a church building may have implications for who comes to the pre-school, organisation of learning activities, and resources for the development of early literacy, unlike a situation where the pre-school owns the premises, as in Pre-schools A, B, and C (see Chapter 5). Similarly, lack of purposefully built structures may present challenges in terms of creating a suitable and stimulating environment for early literacy development (see Chapters 2, 5, and 6).

4.5 Chapter summary

The description of the four pre-schools above shows that there are a lot of similarities and some differences among them. In the following chapters, the discussion has taken into consideration these similarities and differences in an attempt to interpret what is taking place at each pre-school. Both the similarities and differences provide a good basis for understanding the early literacy development activities that are being provided at each pre-school. Understanding the context of provision is a key feature of this thesis, as it allows us to appreciate the initiatives that are being taken at the local level. Having described the context of the four pre-schools, the following chapter presents and discusses capacity issues and community involvement in rural pre-schooling.

Chapter 5: Results (b)—Capacity Issues and the Role of the Community

5.0 Chapter overview

Capacity levels in the four pre-schools are discussed in this chapter especially as they generally relate to the provision of early learning opportunities. Bearing in mind that community involvement in the establishment and development of rural pre-schools is assumed to be central in the Malawi national ECD Policy (see Chapter 1), the discussion links this assumption to the specific roles the communities are playing in enhancing the development of the four pre-schools. Therefore, before discussing capacity levels in the four pre-schools, the communities' perceptions of pre-schooling in general are first discussed in terms of how such perceptions seemed to dictate the nature of communities' contribution towards the enhancement of the capacity of the four pre-schools. This is followed by more specific discussion of the human and material resources available at each pre-school at the time of the study, for purposes of providing further understanding of the conditions in which the specific early learning experiences to be discussed in Chapter 6 were provided. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the implications of the pre-school capacity levels and nature of community involvement in practice in the four rural pre-schools.

5.1 Community perceptions of pre-schooling

Before examining community perceptions of pre-schooling, this section describes the characteristics of the parents and guardians who were involved in the study, in terms

of sex, age, education, religion and support in meeting daily needs. This is to provide a better understanding of the community perceptions.

5.1.1 Characteristics of parents and guardians involved in the study

Almost three quarters of the parents and guardians who were involved in the study were female and only just over one quarter were male (Table 5.1). Perhaps this was due to selection decisions made on respondents, especially in cases where convenience sampling was used (see Chapter 3). However, this pattern generally agrees with the one discussed in Chapter 1, that more women than men are involved in rural pre-schooling in Malawi.

Table 5.1: Sex of respondents

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	32	26.7
Female	88	73.3

In terms of age of the respondents, the minimum was 19 while the maximum was 61. The overall mean for age was about 31 (Figure 5.1). Thus over three-quarters of the respondents were young adults in their 20s and 30s.

The parents and guardians involved were asked whether they had attended school, and over 85% indicated that they had while about 15% had not. Of those who had attended school, slightly more than half reached primary standards 5 to 8 (Table 5.2).

Figure 5.1 Age of respondents

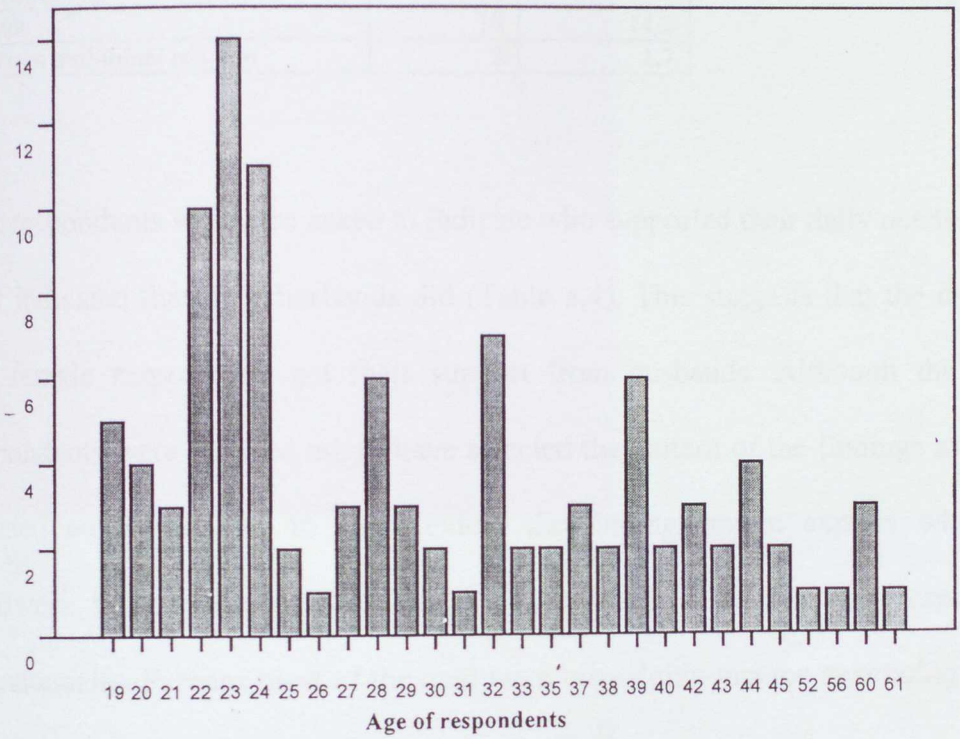


Table 5.2: Level of Education

Level of Education	Number	Percentage
None	0	0
Std 1-4	18	17.8
Std 5-8	58	57.4
Forms 1-2	13	12.9
Forms 3-4	12	11.9

In terms of religion, over fourth-fifths of the respondents were Christians, less than one-fifth were Muslims, with only two respondents indicating that they practiced African traditional religion (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Respondents' religion

Religion	Number	Percentage
Christianity	101	84.2
Islam	17	14.2
African traditional religion	2	1.7

The respondents were also asked to indicate who supported their daily needs, and over half indicated that their husbands did (Table 5.4). This suggests that the majority of the female respondents got their support from husbands. Although the way the respondents were selected might have affected the pattern of the findings as has been pointed out earlier on, to some extent the findings might explain why, during fieldwork, most of the men were not readily available in the homes to respond to the questionnaire. Perhaps most of the men were busy doing income generating activities to cater for their families' needs (see Chapter 3).

Table 5.4: Respondents' sources of support in meeting daily needs

	Number	Percentage
Myself	40	33.3
Relatives	8	6.7
Husband	67	55.8
Wife	1	0.8
Older children	2	1.7
Father	2	1.7

Having described the characteristics of the parents and guardians involved in the study, the following section will focus on the actual perceptions that the respondents had of various issues concerning pre-schooling in their communities.

5.1.2 Sending children to pre-school

When parents and guardians were asked whether they were sending their children to the pre-school within the community at the time of the study, three-fifths indicated

that they were sending their children to pre-school, while about two-fifths indicated they were not.

Table 5.5: Sending and not sending children to pre-school

	Number	Percentage
Yes	71	60.2
No	47	39.8

A comparison was made between parents and guardians who were sending their children to pre-school and those who were not in order to find out whether sending children to pre-school depended on school attendance by the respondents. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p = >0.062$). This suggests that within the sample population the sending of children to pre-school did not necessarily depend on the parent's school attendance.

Apart from education of the parents and guardians, the study also explored the influence of religion on sending children to pre-school. In-depth and follow up interviews with one of the pre-school directors showed that sometimes parents in the community were hesitant to send their children to Pre-school C for religious reasons:

> Some parents and guardians do not like to send children to this pre-school ...the community around the pre-school is Moslem-dominated and some parents fear that their children will be converted to Christianity as the Director is a Christian. In order to encourage them to send their children here we call for meetings to discuss the problems.... The strategy we use to encourage such parents is to ensure that Moslems are also involved in the running of the school... in the pre-school committee. **(DPscC1)**

When I followed up the issues during questionnaire administration with parents and guardians, especially in terms of whether they would send their children to pre-schools run by proprietors from other religious backgrounds, almost three-quarters

indicated that they would still send their children to such a pre-school, while just over one quarter indicated that they would not (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Can or cannot send children to pre-school of another religion

	Number	Percentage
Yes, can send	89	74.2
No, cannot send	31	25.8

When those that had indicated that they would send their children to the pre-schools despite the religion of the proprietors were asked why they would do so, over four-fifths argued that what was important was the education (Table 5.7). Respondents further argued that it was important to separate education from religious issues.

Table 5.7: Reasons for sending children to pre-school run by another religion

Reason	Number	Percentage
What is needed is the education	72	81.8
All schools are the same regardless of religion	12	13.6
There is only one God	4	4.5

However for those that indicated that they would not send their children to the pre-schools run by other religions, over three-quarters explained that they did not want their children to be associated with other religious influences through pre-schooling (Table 5.8). Over one–fifth indicated that they would first need some assurance that their children would not be influenced to join another religion before sending their child to the pre-school.

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Table 5.8: Reasons for NOT sending children to pre-school run by another religion

Reason	Number	Percentage
Don't want children to associate with other religions	27	77.1
Need assurance there is no religious indoctrination at pre-school	8	22.9

Therefore in general, the religious factor did not seem to feature as a major issue influencing the sending of children to the four pre-schools. During my visit to the pre-schools, it was clear that most of the activities did not particularly relate to religious issues, except for the simple prayers offered at the beginning of classes, before eating food at break and when closing the day's activities (see Chapter 6), which in most cases reflected Christianity. Although the caregiver at Pre-school C was a Muslim, according to the director of the pre-school, I did not observe any activities suggesting any form of bias towards one particular religion. In many ways there was a lot of sensitivity to religious issues in the way the pre-school activities were organised. Bearing in mind the fact that the study did not involve large numbers of parents and guardians due to time limitations and other factors (see Chapter 3), it is still vital to consider the religious factor, especially where community members of a particular religion are in the majority, as there are possibilities that religion may subtly influence the enrolment patterns in some of the rural pre-school contexts.

5.1.3 Perceptions of the importance and role of pre-schools

Apart from finding out whether parents and guardians sent children to the pre-schools, the researcher also asked those who had indicated that they sent their children to the pre-schools to explain why they did so. Four-fifths indicated that it was for purposes of helping the children to develop the potential to learn, while less than one-fifth

indicated that it was for purposes of relieving the parents of the responsibility to look after them (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9: Community's reasons for sending children to pre-school

Reason for sending	Number*	Percentage*
Develop children's potential to learn	96	80
Relieve parents of responsibility	13	10.8
For children to pass time	8	6.7
Everyone in the community is doing so	1	0.8
Persuaded by caregivers and village heads	0	0.0

** Some respondents indicated more than one reason for sending children to pre-school*

Similarly, when the community members were asked to indicate what they considered to be the main reasons for the establishment of the pre-schools within their communities, over four-fifths indicated that the pre-schools were established to provide learning opportunities for their children, while less than one-fifth saw the establishment as a means of relieving parents of their responsibilities to rear children (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10: Communities' understanding on the establishment of the pre-school

Reason for establishment	Number	Percentage*
To provide learning opportunities for children	110	91.7
Relieve parents of responsibility to rear children	11	9.2
For children to pass time	4	3.3
For children to eat food	1	0.8
Assist orphans	0	0
Business for proprietors	1	0.8

**The total is more than 100 per cent because some respondents indicated more than one reason on the questionnaire*

Based on the findings in Tables 5.9 and 5.10, it is clear that communities regarded the pre-school mainly as an instrument for providing learning opportunities for their

children above other reasons that the pre-schools were established for. To a certain extent parents and guardians' mention of relief from responsibility to rear the children agrees with part of the rationale for establishing the pre-schools, as indicated by pre-school directors in Chapter 4. Follow-up interviews with some of the parents confirmed that the pre-schools helped them to be partly relieved of responsibilities, as one of the parents who had escorted her child to one of the pre-schools explained:

> *Ubwino wa sukulu ya nazale ndiwoti umatipatsa ife makolo mpata wogwira ntchito zosiyanasiyana, kusiyana kuti mwana uja ukhale naye chifukwa umangolongolola akamapanga zosayenera. Koma ukamtumiza mwana kusukulu ifenso makolo timakhala ndi chitukuko pakhomo pathu...*
> [The advantage of a nursery school is that it gives us the opportunity to do various other things because when the child is with you at home you spend most of your time trying to correct him/her when they do bad things. However, when you send the child to pre-school, you have the time to develop your home]. **(PPscD5)**

Despite such sentiments, this did not seem to apply to some of the parents who had to walk long distances to the pre-schools, thereby losing instead of gaining time for household activities (see section 5.3).

5.1.4 Perceptions of the provision of opportunities for children's learning and development

Parents and guardians were asked to explain the extent to which they felt the pre-schools were providing adequate learning opportunities, and amost all indicated that they were doing so. Only three respondents felt that the pre-schools were not doing this. The three who indicated that the pre-schools were not doing their job well argued that mostly the children were not learning but just memorising things, there was a lack of teaching and learning resources and therefore ineffective preparation, and finally there was lack of qualified caregivers to adequately prepare the children for future learning.

To a certain extent, lack of resources and lack of qualified staff had an impact on the provision of learning experiences at pre-school level. However, the idea of memorising as not being learning on the part of children seems to be based on the respondents' misconception about how children at this level learn. It could be argued that perhaps they were confusing pre-school with primary school practice in terms of teaching and learning. However, it does also seem to unearth community expectations on how the provision of learning experiences at the four pre-schools should be done, that it should aim at preparing children for formal learning in primary school. The majority of the respondents who had indicated that the pre-schools were providing their children with opportunities for learning mentioned three major reasons, all of which were connected to children's future performance and involvement at primary school level. The first reason, which just over two-fifths of the respondents mentioned was that as a result of attending pre-school their children were 'intelligent' (Table 5.11). Respondents described this 'intelligence' in terms of the fact that the children were able to do a number of things such as introduce themselves, sing songs, name days of the week, count and write some simple words and letters of the alphabet. They also explained that their children often seemed to develop some awareness of the importance of education as a result of attending pre-school.

Table 5.11: Communities' reasons for good preparation of children in the four pre-schools

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Children speak good English	30	27.5
Children clever and intelligent	47	43.1
Children build confidence for learning in primary school	32	29.4

Directly linked to the first reason was the fact that the pre-schools prepared their children to build 'confidence' for learning at primary school level, not only in terms

of interacting with primary school teachers and fellow pupils but also in the content taught. This reason was mentioned by over one-fifth of the respondents. To be more specific, the respondents seemed to make reference to the development of socialisation skills which the children need at a later stage, in the formal primary school setting. On this point, one respondent explained:

> Children are not afraid of teachers and hence able to listen and learn from the primary school teacher. **(RPscAc)**

The sentiments on socialisation were also expressed by caregivers when they were asked about the extent to which they felt their pre-schools were providing useful help to the children in terms of learning experiences. They argued that the children gained a lot of socialisation skills in the pre-schools which helped them when they joined primary schools:

> *...chifukwa ana ena amatha kulowa m'kalasi mu* standard 1 *muja ndikuyamba kuphunzira, [koma] ngati sanadziwe kukhala ndi azinzawo amatha kutuluka panja, pomwe ndi mwana woti ali ndi zaka msinkhu mwina 7....chifukwa choti alibe mtima wokhala limodzi ndi anzake.... Ndiye ana oti amadziwa kukhala malo amodzi, kaya akapita kusukulu kuja, akakhalanso m'kalasi amadziwa kuti zimene timapanga zija ndi zimenezi.*
> [...this is because some of the children, who are even older than pre-schoolers, say 7 years, are less cooperative when they go into standard one. They may for example often leave the classroom during learning time mainly because they have not learnt to socialise with other children in the pre-school setting.] **(CPscC2)**

> *...Chifukwa choti... tikafunsa aziphunzitsi a ku* primary *ya bomayi kuti kodi mwana wakuti amapanga bwanji? Ndiye amatiuza kuti amapanga bwino komanso chachiwiri samakhala ndi mantha, chifukwa choti anazolowerana kale ndi anzawo kusukuluko ndiye kunoko samativutitsa zoliralira. Pomwe mwana woti wangochokera kunyumba kukayamba* 1, *kukakomana ndi kholo lina ngati aphunzitsi aja, kuphatikizaponso azinzake ochokera uku ndi uku, amavuta.*
> [This is because when we ask primary school teachers how the children are performing, they tell us that the children do well, and are not afraid – do not cry, since they have already been socialised in pre-school. This is in contrast with children who do not attend pre-school but just go straight into Standard 1: they find it difficult to relate to the teachers and fellow children.] **(CPscD1)**

From the face-to-face interviews with the community members, it was also evident that they strongly associated the role of the pre-schools in 'confidence' building with the fact that the children were introduced to some of the primary school content, and that this allowed the children to get more familiar with what happens in the early primary school classroom. Some of the respondents during the interviews argued:

> The lessons [children] learn at pre-school and those learnt in Standard 1 are similar and hence this puts the child in an advantaged position. **(RPscCc)**

However, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, caregivers' attempts to model pre-school practice on primary school teaching and learning seemed to have directly influenced the choices they made on what and how to provide learning experiences to the children. The extent to which caregivers made deliberate efforts to achieve a sense of balance between preparing children for primary school and overall holistic development, as the national ECD policy proposes, raises questions. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, observations and interviews with caregivers portrayed the picture that emphasis was being put on preparing children for primary schooling, perhaps at the expense of the children's other development needs (see Chapter 2), as one caregiver described her conviction on this point:

> *....mmene tikuwonera anawa amachita bwino ku* primary, *ngakhale makolo awo amasangalala: amanena kuti kawiri kawiri ana awo samabwereza* standard 1 *ija. Chifukwa ana aja amakhala ngati zambiri aphunzira ku* nursery. *Ndiye nthawi yoti akuphunzira zimenezo amakhala ngati akudziwa kale...kuti...ichi ndi chimene tinaphunzira. [Choncho] amakhala ngati kulembako sikuvuta si akhala ngati anaphunzira kale ndiye mmene amapita kunja atha kutenga nambala yabwino pokhoza mayeso....komanso kuti ana ake samabwereza kawiri kawiri* standard 1 ... *sangabwerezeyi.*
> [These children do very well at primary school. Even the parents are very happy and they comment that most of the time their children do not repeat Standard 1. It is like the children have already learnt most of the content at nursery and therefore they are already familiar with the stuff as the primary school teacher presents the material. Consequently the children do very well in examinations and cannot repeat classes.] **(CPscC2)**

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indicated that it existed while less than one-fifth indicated that it did not exist. Similarly, when the respondents were asked whether they thought such a link was necessary, over four-fifths indicated that it was, while only 4 indicated the link was not necessary (Table 5.12), mainly arguing that it was the responsibility of the proprietors and caregivers to ensure that things were working at the pre-school.

Table 5.12: Whether pre-school–community link is necessary

	Number	Percentage
Yes	115	96.6
No	4	3.4

In order to find out whether the responses on the necessity of a pre-school–community link depended on whether the respondents sent their children to pre-school, the two groups were compared using Pearson Chi-Square test. The test showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($p = >0.504$), suggesting that the perceptions on the necessity of a pre-school–community link did not depend on whether the respondents sent their children to pre-school or not.

Those who indicated that the pre-school–community link was necessary gave a number of reasons. Over two-fifths of such respondents mentioned sharing of concerns about the running of the pre-schools as the major reason (see Table 5.13). Respondents explained that this allowed the community to monitor how their children were being looked after at the pre-schools.

The second reason was to facilitate development work for the pre-schools and was mentioned by over one-fifth of the respondents. This included physical work, such as moulding of bricks, construction of shelter or classroom blocks, cultivating the pre-school garden, clearing the area around the pre-school, among others. Less than one-

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fifth regarded the opportunity to discuss children's educational progress as the main reason for the need for a pre-school–community link. Respondents explained that the link allowed parents to get feedback from caregivers on the performance and behaviour of the children so that problems identified could be dealt with at the right time.

Table 5.13: Why pre-school–community link is necessary

Reason	Number	Percent
To share concerns about running the pre-school	58	53.7
Opportunity to discuss children's education progress	16	14.8
To facilitate development work for the pre-school	34	31.5

Based on the findings in the four communities there was an appreciation of the importance of the links or partnerships with the four pre-schools in order to collectively deal with issues that concerned their affairs. In terms of sharing concerns about the running of the pre-schools, a number of specific issues were mentioned by the respondents, and Box 5.1 depicts some of them.

5.2.2 *The nature of pre-school–community links*

In order to establish the actual benefits of the pre-school–community partnerships for the four pre-schools, it was necessary to find out the nature of the existing links. Table 5.14 summarises the findings on the nature of the existing pre-school–community links based on those respondents who indicated that a pre-school–community link existed.

Box 5.1 Sharing concerns of pre-school affairs: some specific issues mentioned by parents and guardians

- So that parents and caregivers can discuss issues concerning the smooth running of the pre-school, such as making monetary contributions
- Both parents and caregivers need to cooperate in order for caregivers to better understand the problems of children through the parents
- So that when there is a problem parents and caregivers can find a solution together for the better education of their children
- When the child is rude at pre-school caregivers can communicate to parents and find ways of dealing with the child
- To inform parents of the problems faced by their children and to follow up on the progress of the children
- When the child is sick (*khunyu* – epilepsy) the caregivers can be made more aware of the nature of the child's sickness
- If the child gets sick, it will be easy to inform parents
- Parents and caregivers discuss whether it is necessary to buy uniform or not
- For parents to raise their concerns to caregivers
- To make sure that children are well cared for at pre-school and therefore make it easy for children to learn
- Parents and caregivers agree on the time to send children to pre-school so that children are not brought late for school
- To solve problems mutually raised by both parties

Source: Sample Questionnaire responses from all the four pre-school communities [Translated from Chichewa]

Table 5.14: Nature of pre-school–community links

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Making collective decisions	51	53.7
Involvement in general construction and maintenance	24	25.3
Occasional visits to pre-school by parents	2	2.1
Making financial and material contributions	18	18.9

When the respondents who had indicated that pre-school–community links existed in the four pre-school communities were asked to describe the nature of the linkages, over two-fifths explained that they were involved in making collective decisions with pre-school staff on various issues regarding the promotion of the pre-school. It should be pointed out that the collective decisions that parents and guardians claimed to be involved in were mostly associated with construction and maintenance of the pre-school structures or premises and financial and material contributions to be made

(Table 5.14). Furthermore, there were also some cases where parents and guardians complained that they were sometimes not consulted on some important issues affecting the pre-school and their children in particular. This seemed to be common where the pre-school committee was weak or did not exist.

The issue of material contribution is particularly interesting, especially in the light of the fact that there was a lack of material resources in the pre-schools, as will be discussed in Section 5.3. During the administration of the questionnaire, it was clear that the material resources the respondents claimed to have been contributing were in most cases not directly related to the actual learning experiences, but rather general resources such as firewood for cooking children's food (or preparing tea), timber for burning bricks, building materials such as thatching grass or poles, among others. These findings appear to agree with those found in research studies on community participation in primary education in Malawi and other countries where communities' participation was mainly limited to one-off mobilisation of resources for development projects (see Rose, 2003a; Durston & Nashire, 2001; Bray, 2003).

Therefore it can be argued that overall, the nature of the links between the four pre-schools and their respective communities was mainly that of material and financial contributions, rather than the actual learning experiences provided in the four pre-schools. This is confirmed by the fact that only two of the respondents (Table 5.14) indicated that they actually visited the pre-schools to see what their children were going through or even to participate in some way in the pre-school activities taking place. During visits to the pre-schools, the researcher generally observed parents and guardians bringing children to pre-school, and later picking them up after school. At Pre-school A, the researcher saw some parents who had come into the premises to do

other things rather than with a deliberate intention to observe what the children were doing in the pre-school setting.

However at Pre-school C, a special case was observed during one of the visits. The researcher saw a parent who had actually come to the pre-school with her child, who had been refusing to go back to the pre-school after some days of illness. The parent in this case took the initiative to actually sit in the classroom with the child for most of the day, in order to encourage her to learn. It also seemed clear during her stay in the pre-school that she had a lot of interaction with the caregiver and occasionally with the other children, although she provided no direct and specific learning experiences to the children. The parent's presence did not appear to affect the teaching and learning very much. There might be a number of explanations for this. One could be that the children were familiar with her, especially as she came to drop and pick up her daughter every day. Another explanation could be that the children knew whose mother it was and were less curious about her presence.

In follow-up interviews, the parent explained that her efforts paid off, as there were signs that the child was beginning to change her attitude towards attending pre-school. This was an isolated case based on limited visits to the four pre-schools, but one that provides a good model of some of the things rural communities could be encouraged to do in the promotion of their children's development.

Having looked at the nature of the pre-school–community link existing in the four pre-schools, in the following subsection the specific roles which the communities felt they played in promoting their children's development are discussed. This is for the purposes of elaborating on the extent to which the communities specifically

positioned themselves within the context of the provision of the early learning experiences in the four pre-schools.

5.2.3 Specific roles played by communities

When parents and guardians were asked to explain the specific roles they played in the care and education of their children, over two-fifths mentioned the fact that they prepared the children for pre-school every morning as their main specific role. This was followed by just over one-fifth of the respondents who mentioned motivating the children to attend pre-school as their specific role. Less than one-fifth of the respondents regarded following up on children's learning at pre-school as their main role (Table 5.15).

Table 5.15: Specific roles played by communities

Role	Number	Percentage
Preparing children for pre-school	58	51.3
Motivating children to attend pre-school	37	32.7
Involvement in pre-school development activities	10	8.8
Following up on what children have learnt at pre-school	8	7.1

On preparing children for pre-school, the respondents explained that this involved bathing the children and ensuring that they put on clean clothes, giving them breakfast and a packed meal when available, and then daily escorting them to pre-school. Similarly respondents explained that they also played a big role in motivating the children to go to pre-school. However, some also reported the difficulties they had in doing so, especially when they did not have food, in which case some parents reported that they ended up forcing the children to go. Box 5.2 provides a sample of some of the descriptions of the specific roles.

Box 5.2 Some specific roles played by parents and guardians

- ensure that their children take a bath in good time and give them breakfast
- ensure that the child has everything s/he needs to go to pre-school such as clothes, food and fees
- ensure that their children put on good clothes and give them food before they go to pre-school
- give children biscuits (sometimes) so that they can go to pre-school with a positive mind
- provide some food in their container so that they can eat at break time
- persuade their children to go to pre-school everyday
- motivate the child to go to pre-school even when s/he is not willing to do so on that particular day, such as buying sweets or food
- escort the child to pre-school even if I have something to do
- pay fees for the children every month
- contribute money to buy food for the children although children are sometimes given food at pre-school
- ask their children to show what they have learnt at pre-school
- check what children have learnt at pre-school
- come together with caregivers to discuss ways of improving the standards
- work together in brick making such that there are good classroom blocks
- maintain the pre-school block when it collapses
- bring materials that are lacking at the pre-school and encourage their children not to miss classes

Source: *Sample Questionnaire responses from all the four pre-school communities [Translated from Chichewa]*

In terms of following up on children's progress, some of the guardians reported that they encouraged their children to work hard and made sure that they always asked the children to show what they learnt at the end of each pre-school day. Apart from what they indicated during questionnaire administration, it is difficult to determine within the scope of this study the extent to which the parents and guardians really followed up on children's progress at home. However, during visits to the pre-schools, some parents (mostly women) who came to drop or pick up their children from the pre-schools also claimed that they often asked their children simple questions about what they had learnt in pre-school. Furthermore, some of the parents explained that sometimes they asked the caregivers how their children were performing in the pre-school (Box 5.2).

It appears that apart from perceiving their role as that of contributing material resources, the majority of the community members involved in this study seemed to perceive and limit their specific roles to the home rather than extending them to the

pre-school setting. In other words, the fact that less than one-fifth of the respondents saw their specific role as being connected to the educational experiences of the child in terms of follow up on what the child had done in pre-school, suggests that parents and guardians 'naturally' distance themselves from the provision of learning experiences in the pre-school setting. This has implications for the extent to which the community can contribute meaningfully to the actual provision of learning experiences, as there is likely to be the temptation of throwing the responsibility to caregivers, who, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, need a lot of support from the community.

In the next section specifically discusses the conditions of the four pre-schools with regard to capacity and link the discussion to the communities' perceived roles and therefore their overall contribution to pre-school development.

5.3 Pre-school capacity: nature and level of resources in the four pre-schools

In this section both human and material resources available in the four pre-schools are discussed. The discussion will first focus on the human resource capacity and then move on to look at the levels of material resources in the pre-schools. In the light of the community perceptions discussed in the previous sections, the discussion links pre-school capacity issues with communities' perceived roles in improving pre-school capacity in general.

5.3.1 Pre-school enrolments and attendance patterns

In terms of enrolment, Pre-school B had the largest number of registered children as well as attendance, although at the same time a larger number of children were not regularly attending for a number of reasons, as is discussed later in the section.

Generally for all the four pre-schools, the attendance appeared to be on the low side (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16: Children's enrolment in the four rural pre-schools

Pre-school	Enrolment per year				Average enrolment (for the past 2 or 4 years)	Range of daily attendance in 2004[23]
	2001	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*		
A	38	52	43	27	**40**	10-20
B	48	55	55	120	**70**	40-60
C	12	18	21	18	**18**	10-12
D	NA	NA	40	35	**38**	15-20

Source: Interviews with pre-school staff, observations and checklist

During the study, there appeared to be a number of factors to explain the low enrolments and high levels of absenteeism in the four pre-schools. In-depth interviews with pre-school administrators and caregivers indicated that lack of basic needs, especially food for children in the morning, seemed to be one of the major challenges in most of the homes, as it led to some of the children coming to pre-school without eating. Although this problem affected all the pre-schools, there were extreme cases at Pre-school B. When one of the caregivers at Pre-school B was asked about the challenges they were facing she explained:

> *....Koma mfundo yaikulu ndi mbali ya chakudya yomweyo. Chifukwa ambiri amatha ndithu kubwera osadya, kufunsa 'mwadya chani?' [amayankha], 'sitinadye kanthu.' Ndiye panthawi ya* break *ija mwina amangotha kukhala phee kumangowayang'ana anzawo akudya aja....Ndiye limeneli ndimaliwona kuti ndi vuto lalikulu kwambiri chifukwa mwana uja akabwera nanga iye samangokhala anzake uku ...akudya.*
> [...But the big issue is lack of food because most of the children come without eating anything. We do ask them and we learn about this. The

[23] The statistics in this table are based on reported figures by interviewees and on observation for the period of the study. In some cases there were inconsistencies in the figures provided by interviewees and these were crosschecked with the checklist figures where they were made available. During observations It was observed that generally in all the four pre-schools fewer children than those enrolled were attending the lessons.

situation becomes more difficult for them during break time because they just watch other children eat their packed meal and such children generally feel dejected...] **(CPscB4)**

Caregivers at the pre-school of course indicated that most of the time they tried to encourage children who brought food to share with those who did not. However, they also reported that there were sometimes challenges in that some of the children were not willing to share with anyone, and often reported the caregivers to parents and guardians if they were persuaded to share their packed meal against their will (also see Chapter 6).

In the questionnaire, parents and guardians were asked to mention the challenges they directly faced in helping their children to learn in the four pre-schools. Generally there was a similar pattern in all the four pre-school communities. Overall however, over half of those who responded to the item explained that they had major difficulties consistently finding food for children to eat in the morning as well as some to take to pre-school (Table 5.17). This problem was followed by shortage of clothes and lack of washing soap, which was mentioned by one-fifth of the respondents.

Table 5.17: Challenges faced by parents and guardians in pre-schooling

Criteria	Number	Percentage*
Hard to find food for children	53	55.8
Shortage of clothes and lack of washing soap	19	20.0
Difficult to find 'fees'	15	15.8
Escorting children to pre-school is tiresome	5	5.3
Children beaten at pre-school	3	3.2

**A few parents and guardians did not respond to this item*

The respondents further argued that as a consequence of the problems associated with food, they found it hard to send children to pre-school without eating anything,

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The respondents further argued that as a consequence of the problems associated with food, they found it hard to send children to pre-school without eating anything,

although they still persuaded the children to do so in the hope that they would find some food at the pre-school. On this point some of the parents and guardians argued:

> We lack food. ... Children resist to go to pre-school and parents end up just forcing the child to go to pre-school. The Government should subsidise fertiliser prices so that we can grow more food. **(RPscCc)**.

> If there is no breakfast our children refuse to go to pre-school. This problem is tough for me because I always have problems to find money **(RPscBc)**.

> Most of the rural people are very poor, therefore it is difficult for them to provide their children with everything they need in their daily lives. So it is hard to find soap and breakfast... **(RPscAc)**.
> *Umphawi m'makomomu ... ndiye zimakhala zovuta kuti umutumize mwana ku sukulu.*
> [There is a lot of poverty in these homes and therefore it becomes difficult to send children to pre-school.] **(RsPscDc)**

The problem of food was often connected to the shortage of clothes: most parents and guardians indicated that they were not comfortable sending their children to pre-school wearing tattered clothes which, worse still, were dirty. In-depth interviews with caregivers confirmed that indeed there were cases where children came into the pre-school without taking a bath and wearing dirty clothes, as some of the interviewees explained:

> *Komanso pena makolo mwina amatha kutumiza mwana asanasambe, kusonyeza kuti akabwera kuno ndi anzake aja amakhala kuti pena pakebe akusiyana, kuonetsa kuti uyuyu ndi uyu pena pake akusiyana, kukhala ngati akusankhika, ali paokha.*
> [Sometimes the parent may send a child to us without giving him/her a bath and that means s/he is different when among the other children. This may make the child feel isolated.] **(CPscB5)**

Similarly, the director of Pre-school C explained that the problem of clothes for the children was one of the great challenges they were facing:

> There are usually physical differences among the children, which sometimes the pre-school finds difficult to deal with: differences in what the children put on such as clothes, shoes, etc. **(CPscC1)**

Lack of good clothes affected the children concerned psychologically, in terms of how they dressed in comparison with children in "good" clothes. This has an impact on parents as well, and in such circumstances it is likely that parents prefer to keep the children at home rather than let them go through the embarrassment at pre-school, even if they know such a decision has a negative impact on the children's future.

Apart from the problems of food and clothes, enrolments also seemed to be affected by the non compulsory financial contributions that the four pre-schools required from the communities. As discussed in Chapter 6, all the four pre-schools asked parents and guardians to make a non compulsory financial contribution ranging from MWK20.00 (US$0.20) to MWK50.00 (US$0.50) per month, in order to help with the purchase of food items for the children. It was particularly interesting to note during interviews with pre-school directors and caregivers that they did not call these contributions 'fees', yet during the administration of the questionnaire it was clear that most parents and guardians perceived the contributions as 'fees'. The respondents complained that it was hard for them to source this amount in order to get their children into the pre-school, despite the fact that it was not compulsory as one of the respondents argued:

> To find money to pay nursery school fees is a big problem, although there is a provision for us to pay when we get the money. **(RPscCc)**
> Sometimes fees are too high such that parents cannot afford to pay. It must be reduced. **(RPscBc)**

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, although the amounts for fees look small, in poor agrarian communities like the ones the pre-schools are located in, it may not be easy to raise those amounts for pre-schooling purposes, bearing in mind other critical basic

needs that parents and guardians have at household level, such as securing food (Durston & Nashire, 2001). Furthermore, the fact that pre-schooling generally attracts additional indirect costs, for example, giving the child a packed meal every day, it seemed difficult for the parents and guardians to cope. The problem of fees appeared to have serious consequences at pre-school D as one of the directors explained:

> *Poyambapo anawo amabwera ambiri, anafika* nearly 40. *Amabwera ana mwamva? ....Ana ankabwera ambirimbiri ndiye kenako sinanga timanena kuti muzitipatsako tima* MWK50 *ndicholinga choti tizigula zakudya, mukudziwa kuti ifeyo sitikugwira ntchito. Ntchitoyi tikufuna kuti tithandizane kuti tianati tizisewera nato. Ifeyo palibe china chiri chonse cholowa monga mukudziwa. Choncho tinawauza kuti ifeyo muzitithandiza ndi ma* MWK50, *amene angathe, kuti tizigulira zinthu ngati tizidole, kaya tiyi...Ndiye ndikupezeka kuti i-i makolowo ataona kuti ....akusowa ma* MWK50, *tinawauzabe kuti olo akusowa ma* MWK50 *anawo zibweretsani... tiziwapatsa tiyi kunoko shuga wathu. Kunapezeka kuti makolo aja anasiya kumabweretsa ana. Kumangobwera ana ochepa ndiye tati koma mudzi umenewo ndiwotani?* I think *ndiwovuta. Eeetu ... ndiye timangowauza anthu kuti musamalipile ngakhale* MWK50....'
>
> [At first large numbers of children used to come and the numbers reached nearly 40. They used to come in large numbers and therefore we suggested to parents help us by contributing MWK50, for those who could manage, so that we could buy food for the children, bearing in mind that we are not paid. We told the parents that we just wanted to help the children and we were not looking for any financial benefits at all. So we told them that the MWK50 contributions would also help to purchase some play materials for the children. Later on it appeared the parents were failing to raise the MWK50 and we nevertheless encouraged them to continue sending the children and promised that we would still be using our own resources for tea. Unfortunately the parents stopped bringing their children to the pre-school and the numbers dwindled tremendously. We really felt bad and asked ourselves: "what type of community is this? I think this community is really very difficult"....So we decided to advise them not even to pay the MWK50.00 but just to continue sending their children to the pre-school.... **(DPscD2)**

The withdrawal of children from Pre-school D after the introduction of a non compulsory financial contribution of MWK50.00 (US$0.50) raises the question of the levels and expectations of community involvement in the promotion of rural pre-schools in general, especially in terms of the extent to which community involvement in pre-schooling should be limited to areas other than financial contributions. This is

especially in the context where in general, the income level of the communities is low and homes may therefore not be able to prioritise financial contributions towards pre-schooling above other household needs, as discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 5 (also see Durston & Nashire, 2001; Rose, 2003a, b).

One of the proprietors from pre-school D seemed to suggest that the unwillingness of parents and guardians to contribute MWK50 was more of an attitude rather than poverty problem. She argued that there was a tendency for parents to want everything to be free of charge and therefore they withdrew their children from the pre-school to another pre-school that had just been started within the community by a prominent politician who promised to give the children free pre-schooling services, including food:

> *Chifukwa makamaka anthu zimene amafuna ndizoti anawo asalipire kena kali konse, azingophunzira ulele. Komanso amafuna ana aja muziwapatsa chakudya chanu ... chakudya cha ulere,* then *maphunziro aulere. Apopo ndiye atha kumabwera.... Chifukwa amene atithawira... nkhani yake ndi ya chakudya. Chifukwa choti...a* minister*...aja...kaya ndi a* MP *anawauza kuti aziwapatsa zinthu za ulere monga zakumwazo, tiyi, waulere...*
> [What parents want is that they should not pay anything; their children should just learn free of charge, yet they expect you to give the children your own food ... free food and then free education. I am sure if we can do that they will be more than ready to send their children to the pre-school. In fact food is the main reason why some of the children have left us and joined that new pre-school. I understand the minister, or perhaps the MP, told the community that they would be giving the children free food and tea....] **[DPscD2]**

While to some extent such a claim may be true, especially with the introduction of FPE, which to most people meant free in absolute terms (Kadzamira *et al* 2004), it is important to consider the fact that the root of the matter could be household poverty, which eventually determines decisions on what to prioritise between survival in the home and cost of education (Durston & Nashire, 2001).

The other challenges mentioned in Table 5.15, namely, the problem of escorting children to pre-school, and children being beaten at pre-school, had some impact on the levels of pre-school enrolment as well. Parents and guardians explained that daily escorting children to pre-school was often hard for them because they had other engagements in or outside the home. So sometimes children would not have someone to escort them to the pre-schools, leading to low attendance. On this point some respondents explained:

> Most parents are busy with work in the field and therefore find it difficult to consistently send their children to pre-school in good time. **(RPscAc)**
> To escort children to pre-school from Monday to Friday becomes a bit tiresome for parents and guardians. **(RPscBc)**
> Escorting the child to and from nursery school every day is sometimes difficult for parents. **(RPscCc)**

In some cases, complaints reflected the fact that they walked long distances to the pre-school. At one of the four pre-schools it was claimed that parents had to walk three to four kilometres to get children there. Although the distance appears to be relatively short, it can be a big challenge in the rural areas, where there are no means of transport, as well as the fact that even if the means were available, most of the parents and guardians could not afford to pay for it daily.

Thus, apart from the likelihood of affecting children's attendance in the pre-schools, the distance negatively affected the parents and guardians, considering the fact that part of the rationale for establishing these rural pre-schools was to give them ample time to concentrate on their activities, most of which, it was assumed, would be economically beneficial to their households (see Chapter 4). It can be argued that since those parents and guardians who send their children to the pre-school have to spend part of such time escorting children to and from pre-school, they are likely to be distracted for their work, hence defeating part of the rationale for establishing rural

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pre-schools. Perhaps parents and guardians who are closer to the pre-schools are likely to enjoy the benefits of rural pre-schooling more than those who are further from the pre-schools.

The last challenge that parents and guardians indicated was that their children were sometimes beaten by fellow children and the caregiver. Although the study did not involve huge numbers of parents and guardians, this challenge was an isolated case, being mentioned by only three of the respondents in one of the four pre-schools (Table 5.17). The few parents who mentioned this problem claimed that their children were being smacked by fellow children and sometimes by the caregiver, for no reason at all, and that this led to children refusing to attend pre-school the following day. When this was followed up with the caregiver at the pre-school concerned, she argued that this was exaggerated because the children were not necessarily smacked but sometimes strongly reprimanded especially when they became rude and uncooperative, and in the process some of the children were perhaps affected and reported to their parents. The caregiver further explained that if a child was extraordinarily badly behaved and rude, they usually reported the case to the parents and explained the reasons for the strong correction the child was given:

> *Akakhala kuti makolo aja akutinena kuti sitikuphunzitsa ana aja; kuti tikumawakalipira, timawauza chifukwa chimene tikumawakalipilira. Mwina kapena akumenyana, kutukwana kapenanso sakufuna kumva zomwe tikuphunzitsa, ndiye timakhala ngati tikuwakalipira..... Kumangokhala ngati kuwaopseza kuti mwina athe kumvera zomwe tikulankhula kuti azitiopa. Tikatero ana aja amatha kusiya kutukwana.*
> [When parents accuse us of not teaching the children but just shouting at them, we normally tell them the main reason we shouted at the children. You know, sometimes we act like that when the children are misbehaving, such as beating each other, scolding others or when they do not want to listen to what we are teaching them. This is just a way of scaring the

children so that they respect us when we correct them. When we do that the children stop misbehaving] **(Caregiver at one of the pre-schools[24])**

Although this was an isolated case, it raises some important issues about caregivers' capacity in handling children in the pre-school setting. As we shall discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter 6, caregivers in the four pre-schools generally admitted that they felt handicapped in terms of basic skills for handling children due to lack of training (see section 5.3.2). However, another issue is the extent to which the caregiver's action was more of a sign of lack of capacity in handling children than part of the normal expectation from an adult who should be seen to be correctly disciplining children in order to help them develop into sensible beings. If we take the latter position, it can then be argued that to some extent it was a good attempt to address other aspects of the children's development than education. As discussed in Chapter 6, there were a number of similar cases where caregivers made useful attempts to develop the children holistically, despite the many opportunities they lost at the same time.

5.3.2 Staffing: recruitment, qualifications and training

The study was interested in finding out the capacity of staff in the four pre-schools. Therefore in this section issues of staffing capacity in terms of recruitment, qualifications and training are discussed..

5.3.2.1 Staff size and recruitment procedures

From the checklists and discussions with pre-school proprietors and caregivers, the findings generally indicated that the number of caregivers and relevant support staff was inadequate in all the four pre-schools. While Pre-schools A, B and D had at least

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[24] On ethical grounds it was decided not to use the labels to avoid identifying the caregiver and the pre-

two caregivers who assisted each other, Pre-school C had only one caregiver. Table 5.18 summarises the specific number of caregivers and the caregiver:child ratios at each of the four pre-schools.

Table 5.18: Caregiver: child ratios in the four rural pre-schools

Pre-school	Staff composition		Total	Caregiver:child ratio[25] [based on enrolment figures 2001-2004]
	Female	Male		
A	1	2	3	1:13
B	2	0	2	1:35
C	1	0	1	1:18
D	2	0	2	1:19

Overall there were more female than male caregivers in the four pre-schools. These findings are in general agreement with the discussion in Chapter 1 of the thesis. The involvement of more women than men raises issues of how ECD is generally perceived by society, and such perceptions therefore largely determine the levels of particiapation between men and women. Furthermore, it is also critical to consider the implications of all this in terms of the holistic development of the male and female children, who naturally may also need care from male caregivers.

When compared with the enrolment figures in Table 5.16, generally the caregiver:child ratio seemed to be large, with Pre-school B representing an extreme case of a very large caregiver:child ratio of 1:35 (Table 5.18). Therefore, despite the fact that generally the enrolment figures were low in the pre-schools involved in this study, the findings suggest that individual caregivers had relatively many children to engage with. This is critical, especially if we take into consideration the challenges

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school.

[25] The ratios are calculated on the average enrolment for the past two or four years (2001-2004) of the pre-schools' establishment as presented in Table 5.16.

associated with this stage of child development in which children generally demand more attention from adults than at later stages of development. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, all this presented challenges in the provision of early learning experiences in some of the pre-schools, as caregivers had to cope with the relatively large numbers in addition to the other challenges such as lack of resources.

In terms of recruitment, interviews with pre-school staff, policy makers and community members indicated that caregivers were generally volunteers from the community. Pre-school directors reported that the volunteers were mainly identified by the communities through a pre-school committee, although certain considerations were often made before engaging them at the pre-school level. For instance, at Pre-school A, the director explained that although they did not necessarily focus on academic qualifications as the major criterion, they ensured that volunteers were really interested in children and with "good qualities":

> ... as of now we don't have paid up staff, we are all volunteers...*komano kuti timayang'ana ngati iyeyo ali ndi chidwi choti okhozadi kugwira ntchito ya* voluntary....*Timayang'ananso kuti sasuta fodya, samamwa mowa ... Ku* Management Team *kokha, timachita* consider *ma* qualifications like we have the Executive Director, Programme Officer, the IEC[26] and Youth Officer *komanso* we have the Finance Officer. *Ndiye anthu amenewowo timatha kuyang'ana kuti kodi ali ndi zoyenera zoti zitha kuwakwaniritsa pantchito imeneyi....*
> [...as of now we don't have paid up staff, we are all volunteers. We normally consider whether a person is interested in doing voluntary work....We also check that they do not smoke or drink beer.... It is only when we are recruiting for the Management Team that we consider educational qualifications, like we have the Executive Director, Programme Officer, the IEC and Youth Officer and Finance Officer. For such people we really consider whether they have relevant qualifications for the post they are applying for.] **(DPscA1)**

[26] Information Education and Communication (IEC)

A similar situation existed at Pre-school B, as one of the key management staff explained that when selecting volunteers they considered the talents that the possible candidates had rather than qualifications. Just as at Pre-school A, she further reported that academic qualifications were emphasised when employing management staff for the CBO as a whole:

> *Choyamba ife...timayang'anira luso limene munthu uja amene tikufuna timulembe ali nalo. Koma sitimasankha kuti kodi munthuyu ali bwanji; kuti ali ndi matenda anji mthupi mwake, timangolemba. Chachikulu chimene timayang'ana ndi luso la ntchitolo ngati ali nalo. Tili ndi ntchito ngati za mmaofesi za ngati ma* Coordinator *ndi ma* Finance Officer*; timayang'anira luso komanso ma* certificate *antchito ...*
> [In the first place we consider the skills and talents that the candidate has. However, we do not necessarily segregate based on how the individual appears health wise, we just employ them. The most important thing we look for are the skills one has. We have other management positions such as Coordinators and Finance Officers; for these we consider both skills and education qualifications....]. **(APscB2)**

Although pre-school directors from all the four pre-schools claimed that they did not consider the level of education as a major criterion for employing caregivers, as is discussed later in the section, it is particularly interesting to observe that, except for one caregiver who had a low level of education (Standard 6), caregivers had secondary level qualifications (see section 5.3.2.2). As I discuss in the following sections, this might be a reflection of a number of factors, including parents and guardians' expectations of the role that the pre-schools should be seen to be playing in the community.

When parents and guardians involved in the study were asked whether they knew the procedures and criteria for recruiting the volunteers, just over three-fifths indicated that they did not know, while almost two-fifths indicated that they knew the criteria (Table 5.19)

Table 5.19: Knowledge of procedures and guidelines for pre-school staff recruitment

	Number	Percentage
Yes, know procedures	46	38.7
No, do not know procedures	73	61.3

Of those who had indicated that they knew the criteria for recruitment, over two-fifths indicated that caregivers were chosen based on their education and ability to speak English, followed by slightly over one-fifth who felt that mainly it was volunteers from the community who were recruited as pre-school staff (Table 5.20).

Table 5.20: Criteria for staff recruitment according to community members

Criteria	Number	Percentage
Volunteers from the community	12	25.5
Educated and speak English	29	61.7
Those who love children	6	12.8

The findings suggest some mismatch between what the pre-schools see as the major criteria for staff recruitment and the communities' perceptions of who should be employed as a caregiver. Whereas pre-schools did not consider academic qualifications as a prerequisite, parents and guardians interviewed did. Furthermore, although generally there were indications that sections of the community knew some of the criteria for recruiting pre-school staff, there was confusion between the criteria for recruiting management and pre-school staff. In other words, the few members of the community who indicated that they knew the criteria generally referred to management rather than pre-school staff selection criteria, and they further appeared to assume that caregivers were equally supposed to have a good qualification. Perhaps they were confusing all this with primary school teachers' recruitment criteria that emphasise educational qualification as a prerequisite.

To some extent, this raises the issue of the communities' own perceptions about who should be a caregiver; that they should normally be educated and speak good English. Probably these perceptions from the communities have their roots in their expectations of the role pre-schools should play in the care and education of their children. To a large extent, communities tended to expect the pre-schools to prepare their children for primary schooling above all the other purposes that they were established for (section 5.1), and this seemed to influence practice at pre-school level, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. However, it is also important that this is seen against a background where the caregivers were ideally required by the Malawi national ECD policy to focus on the holistic development of the children rather than just education (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, the fact that academic qualifications did not appear to be a major factor in the recruitment of caregivers at pre-school level suggests that fairly low levels of education are acceptable for caregivers. This has implications for early learning provision especially when we consider the fact that almost all the elements of child development within the holistic approach may need some intellectual muscle on the part of caregivers if they are to effectively stimulate the children as intended in the Integrated ECD Programme in Malawi (see Chapter 2). Furthermore the expectations suggest that some level of education is required to confidently implement the intended plans. It can be argued therefore that fairly low education or no education at all for the caregivers may determine the extent to which the children are maximally stimulated to develop, not only intellectually but also holistically. Of course there is need to be cautious about this link because it can also be argued that a high level of education for caregivers does not necessarily mean that they will be more sensitive to emerging opportunities for facilitating children's holistic development in the pre-school setting.

Therefore other factors, including active and meaningful community contributions, may be vital.

5.3.2.2 Staff levels of education

According to the findings, the highest academic qualifications among the caregivers in the four pre-schools was the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) while the lowest level was Standard 6 (Table 5.21).

Table 5.21: Caregivers' levels of education and training in the four rural pre-schools

	Pre-sch A	Pre-sch B	Pre-sch C	Pre-sch D
Academic Qualifications	MSCE (1) JCE (2)	JCE (2)	Primary 6	JC
Training received	Some	Some	None	None
Nature of training	Orientation	Community Based Care Management course	None	none
Length of training	1 week	1 week	NA	NA

Source: Checklists, and interviews

Based on Table 5.21, it is clear that all the caregivers in the four pre-schools had some level of education. To some extent, such levels of education could help caregivers think about different ways of facilitating the development of the children in the rural pre-school setting. However, it can also be argued that apart from the education qualifications, since some of the caregivers were parents themselves, they might provide as many learning experiences to the children as somebody with higher qualifications.

It was only caregivers at Pre-schools A and B who reported having received some level of training or orientation. Two of the caregivers at Pre-school A explained that they received a one-week general orientation on how to handle children. The

orientation was organised by Emmanuel Tract Fellowship (ETF), one of the local Christian NGOs in Zomba. One of the two caregivers described what they had learnt during the orientation:

> *Zinthu zake zimene tinaphunzira kumeneku ndi za m'mene mwana amakulira ndi m'mene mwana amaphunzirira kuyankhula, komanso kukhala ndi anzake. Ndingonena kuti zambiri zinali zokhuza mwana kungochoka pakhomo kuti wabadwa, wakula mwina wafika* 2 years, *mmene amakulira, kuti kapena azitha kudziwa kuti awa ndi abale anga, kumawadziwa anthu. [Tinaphunzirakonso] zinthu monga ma* activities *oyimba, monga kumayimba nyimbo ndi ana, komanso kumawadziwitsa nthano....*
> [We learnt about child development in terms of how the child grows, learns to speak and socialise. I can say most of the things were about how the child develops from birth until s/he reaches two years, how s/he develops until the stage where s/he begins to recognise people around her/him. We also learnt about some activities such as singing with the children and telling them stories.] **(CPscA2)**

At Pre-school B, the two caregivers reported that they received a one week training organised by the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) and the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) in Blantyre. They explained that the training was on how to handle children in a pre-school settings, as one of the two caregivers explained:

> *Ndiye anatilongosolera mmene ana...amakhalira; kuti mukadzaona mwana akuoneka mwakuti, ndiye kuti iyeyo ali ndi vuto, ndipo ndi ntchito ya inu aphunzitsi kuti...mumchangamutse amene uja, kapena mwina ali ndi vuto lina lake. Kapena ngati akudwala anena kuti "ah pakutipakuti pakundipweteka." Kaya sakudwala ndiye udziwabe kuti ameneyu mwina akuganiza kumudzi kapena iyayi anzakewa sakusangalatsidwa kuti azisewera nawo. Anatiuza kuti zimenezozo muziziona. Ndiye tikamaphunzitsa timazionadi...*
> [They taught us how children behave; that if you see a child behaving in a strange way it means there is a problem and that it is the caregiver's responsibility to give the child the proper attention. If the child is sick usually s/he will then tell you. However, if the child is not sick at least you know that something is wrong and might therefore speculate that perhaps s/he is thinking about home or is not happy to play with the rest of the children. [The trainers] emphasised that we should pay attention to such things when teaching. And really we do notice these things as we teach....] **(CPscB4)**

This seems to agree with what MoGCS officials reported as the areas that were emphasised during training sessions that they sometimes conducted for caregivers. One of the officials, who also happened to be a trainer, explained, when asked about a five-day training she had just conducted at the time of the study[27]:

> *Pa* five days *anthu tinangowaphunzitsa ma* basics *chabe a* pre-school. *Mwina kungowapanga* introduce *ku ma* subject *amene akuyenera kukaphunzitsa...komanso mmene mwana amakulira,* physically, emotionally, mentally.... *Komanso timatha kumawaphunzitsa za* health *ya mwana ija komanso* hygiene, *kuphatikizapo mmene inabwerera* CBCC *inayamba bwanji, kodi nanga...zimene akuyenera kupanga pa* CBCC *akuyenera kupanga zinthu zitizo... ndithu.*
> [For the five days we just managed to teach them basics on pre-school only. We just introduced them to the subjects they are supposed to teach, but also how the child develops physically, emotionally, mentally. We also sometimes teach them about health and hygiene in handling children, in addition to issues on how CBCC started and what is expected to be done in a CBCC...yeah.] **(MO-4)**

Unlike in Pre-schools A and B, caregivers in Pre-schools D and C did not receive any training, although interestingly there was indication that based on the little knowledge they had about handling children in pre-school settings, directors from the two pre-schools took some initiative to orient the caregivers, despite the fact that they themselves had not received any training at all. Caregivers in the two pre-schools confirmed that their directors sometimes helped them with ideas about how to handle the children and that gave them some confidence, as it often acted as a springboard for building their own experiences with the children in the pre-school setting. However, the caregivers at the two pre-schools explained that the help was not enough at all and thus they still felt hugely lacking in competence. One of the caregivers who had some

[27] The training ran for five days in the Southern District of Phalombe in September 2004.

experience of teaching children at another pre-school before joining Pre-school D explained:

> *Tikanakonda tikanapeza chithandizo kuti tipite kumaphunziro chifukwa zinazi timangozipangira mchimbulimbuli, ngakhale kuti nthawi zina eni ake a sukuluyi amatithandiza mmene tingamachitire, komabe ndizosakwanira*
> [We would have liked there to be an opportunity for us to get trained because we are doing most of these things in ignorance. Even though the owners of the pre-school sometimes give us tips on how to handle some of the activities, this is still inadequate.] **(CPscD3)**

The case of the two Pre-schools C and D suggests that there are some possibilities for small scale transfer of professional skills within rural pre-school settings where pre-school directors have some knowledge of early childhood development. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, such transfers seemed to pay off, especially in Pre-school D where caregivers did handle children's activities with some confidence, although there was still room for improvement. Part of the explanation for the situation at Pre-school D could be that the pre-school directors were more focused and more directly involved in the actual provision of learning experiences than at Pre-school C, where the director was involved in other aspects of the CBO apart from the pre-school.

While the importance of training should not be underestimated and might have positively impacted practice in some of the pre-schools, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, it is also crucial to consider the issue of whether training should be seen as a panacea for the challenges in the provision of early learning experiences. Based on what some of the caregivers claimed to have learnt during the training, one wonders whether they did not realise some of the basic practices beforehand, especially since they were parents themselves. For example, the issue of diagnosing whether a child is not happy during classes is one of those things parents normally would do with their children at home. Tthis raises the issues of the content of training and the way it is

conducted, although at the same time the researcher is cautious of the fact that the study did not focus on training issues, and he did not attend any of the training sessions to make any solid claims. Perhaps one general point that can be raised is that, although at some point caregivers need training, they need to be made aware that they themselves are an important resource for providing early learning experiences in the pre-school setting instead of thinking that training will always make them better caregivers. Furthermore, this raises the question of whether policy makers need to consider other more realistic ways of building the capacity of caregivers, apart from formal training, bearing in mind the resource constraints discussed later in the chapter (subsection 5.3.3).

5.3.2.3 Training providers for pre-school caregivers

During the interviews with Ministry officials, it was reported that training for caregivers was generally provided by the Department of Social Welfare Services of the MoGCS in conjunction with other local and international NGOs, especially the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) (see Chapter 1), UNICEF and recently, Emmanuel Tract Fellowship (ETF). From the in-depth interviews with officials from the training providers, it seemed at times each one of the organisations conducted training individually depending on funding sources, although in some cases this seemed to result from co-ordination/consultation problems among them. Although the ECD Policy document states that APPM is the major co-ordinating body for training, it appeared that sometimes there was a lack of consultations between MoGCS and APPM when funding was available. MoGCS and APPM officials explained that training programmes for caregivers were rare and often dictated by the availability of funding from donors, of which UNICEF seemed to be the key player.

5.3.3 Infrastructure and general facilities

Apart from looking at the staff capacity in the four pre-schools the study also explored the nature of infrastructure and general facilities available in each of the four rural pre-schools. It seemed clear during visits to the pre-schools that there were huge resource constraints (Table 5.22). I shall focus on a few key general facilities to help us put the discussion into perspective.

5.3.3.1 Classroom space

In all four pre-schools, the buildings used were permanent, although not purposefully built, with Pre-school D using borrowed premises, a church building (see Chapter 4). Although the structures at Pre-schools B and C had relatively larger space inside the building, there seemed to be no attempt to purposefully divide the floor area for specific learning activities in order to facilitate children's development. This is a common arrangement in a developmentally appropriate practice environment, where emphasis is put on creating a compartmentalised environment which imitates the immediate environment of the children. Considering the fact that the national ECD programme in Malawi is to a large extent influenced by the child development approach, one would have expected to observe an adaptation of some of the useful elements of the approach.

Table 5.22: Summary of facilities available in the four rural pre-schools

Type of Facility	Pre-school			
	Pre Sch A	Pre Sch B	Pre Sch C	Pre Sch D
Children's tables	×	×	×	×
Children's chairs	×	×	×	×
Storeroom/Storage area	✔	×	✔	×
Medical kit	×	×	×	×
Chalkboard	✔	×	✔	✔
Chalk	✔	×	✔	✔
Wall Space	✔	✔	✔	✔
Notice boards	✔	×	×	×
Toys	Tyres	Bottles	Tyres	×
Safe drinking water within premises (e.g. borehole)	×	×	✔ Borehole	×
Latrines/toilets	✔ Permanent, separate Male and Female	✔ Permanent, Common	✔ Permanent, Common	✔ Temporary, separate Male and Female
Fence around the school	×	×	×	×
Playground	✔	✔	✔	✔
Children's books	×	×	Some	×
Charts	×	×	✔ (3 old ones)	✔
Crayons	×	×	×	✔ [28]
Drawing/Activity paper	×	×	×	✔
Pencils	×	×	×	✔ [29]
Ropes	✔	×	×	✔ (1)
Balls	×	×	×	✔ (1)
Non-toxic paint	×	×	×	×
Policy Documents on ECD in Malawi	×	×	×	×
Policy Documents on Orphans in Malawi	×	×	×	×
Operating guidelines for ECD in Malawi	×	×	×	×
Syllabus for ECD in Malawi	×	×	×	×
Programme document for ECD in Malawi	×	×	×	×

[28] Some of these were shown to the researcher during interviews with the directors at their home, and they reported that this was a donation from well-wishers. The directors claimed that the materials were being kept at home due to lack of storage space at the pre-school. The researcher did not however see these materials being used during his visit to the pre-schools.

[29] Ibid.

Of course it can be argued that such an arrangement works when there are a lot of resources (see Chapter 2), however, it can still be suggested that with careful adaptation, local resources could be used to create such environment. For instance, even if the classroom space in the four pre-schools is not designed for early learning, it is possible to improvise simple, temporary compartments within the relatively large space, for example, home area, and book area/corner, among others. Caregivers would then think of relevant names for the various areas, as long as this would enhance children's learning and development. Furthermore, the researcher's experience is that even in the village setting children do create such imaginary environments during play. For instance, as part of the fun, they may 'build houses' using locally available resources within their premises. It can therefore further be suggested that using such resources, it should have been possible to create appropriate learning areas which would facilitate the learning and development of the children as they would make linkages with what they normally do in their homes.

One explanation could be lack of the knowledge and skills about what a pre-school environment should look like, at least from the point of view of developmentally appropriate practice (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, it could be argued that this was because the rooms were also being used for other activities within the CBOs. For instance, at Pre-school A, the classroom space was also used as an office; while at Pre-schools B and C, the classroom space was also used for storage of some materials not connected to pre-schooling. Finally, the fact that Pre-school D was using borrowed premises, a church building, meant that it would probably not have been feasible, even less so because there were fixed cement benches which could not be manipulated into floor areas (see Chapter 4).

With all these challenges at the four pre-schools, it is crucial to question whether it is possible to still achieve maximum learning and development among the children, even without necessarily creating the floor areas as is normally expected in a developmentally appropriate practice situation. Of course, it is not easy to answer such a question, as many factors need to be taken into account. It can be suggested, however, that apart from the issue of material resources, pre-school proprietors and caregivers need some professional help to creatively and maximally use what is already available to bring out the children's potential within the pre-school setting.

5.3.3.2 Furniture

As discussed in Chapter 4, in no pre-school were there chairs or tables for the children. In Pre-schools A, B, and C the children sat on the floor while at Pre-school D, the children sat on fixed cement benches. Of course, children do not need to sit on chairs at all times, as they are generally very mobile. However, there are times when they need to sit down more comfortably and properly when developing certain literacy skills such as drawing and writing. For example, they need to learn the proper posture during writing. Thus, unavailability of tables for the children has implications for early literacy development in terms of helping with the posture as well as the base for writing development, although it will be argued in Chapter 6 that children could be given more opportunities to write on the ground where materials that facilitate writing development are not readily available.

5.3.3.3 Teaching and learning materials

Some specific issues with regard to the levels of 'teaching' and learning materials in the four pre-schools are discussed in this section. Generally in all the four pre-schools there was a big problem with materials to facilitate the children's learning

experiences. Commenting on the lack of teaching and learning materials one of the pre-school directors had the following to say:

> ... *pa ma* teaching materials *ndiye tisaname mavuto alipo*...Of course *maziphunzitsi anaphunzitsidwa kupanga* materials *komabe ndizovuta penapake....[choncho] takhala tikupempha ku* Social Welfare Office *kuti atigawire ma* teaching and learning aids. *Koma panopa sanatigawire, panopa* we are even using our own pockets *kuti tipeze ma...* materials *ophunzitsira* like*...choko, mapepala oti anawa azilembera, ma* flip chart *ndi zina zotero...*
> [Frankly speaking we have huge problems when it comes to teaching and learning materials. Of course our caregivers were taught how to develop their own materials but it is still not enough. We have been requesting the Social Welfare Office to help us with the resources but until now they have not given us any, such that we are even dipping into our pockets to buy some of the basic materials such as chalk, writing paper, flip charts and the like....] **(CPscA1)**

Similarly, another pre-school administrator described the lack of resources at the pre-school and the fact that they also get some help from other organisations interested in the activities of the CBO in general:

> ... *ma* resources *amene tili nawo ndiwosakwanira. Chifukwa choti sukulu imeneyiyi amatithandiza ndi a bungwe la* Action Aid, *nthawi zina amatha kutipatsako zinthu zoti tikagwiritse ntchito ngati kutigulira mipira komanso zidole, komanso chakudya choti ana aja azikawaphikira ndikumawapatsa pa nthawi ya* break. *Ndiye ma* resources *ena monga mabuku oti ana aja azisewеretsa komanso ngati aziphunzitsi ma* Teachers' Guide *alibe. Ndiye kuti ma* resources *ena ngosakwanira...*
> [The resources we have are inadequate. We are mainly supported by Action Aid and sometimes they donate resources such as footballs, toys and food for the children during break time. However, we do not have other resources such as children's books and Teacher's Guides[30]. So some of the resources are insufficient...] **(APscB2)**

In both pre-schools it appeared that there was some tendency to look outside for teaching and learning resources. In this case, the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) as well as international organisations dealing with child related and development issues were generally seen as points of contact to secure teaching and

Thus according to both pre-school directors and caregivers, the availability of play materials was not only seen to promote the provision of varied activities or experiences for children but also to raise their interest in learning. Furthermore, the directors admitted that as a consequence of lack of play materials, the approach or mode of provision of experiences at pre-school level was affected, persuading caregivers to use rigid means to help children learn (see Chapter 6).

When key officials in the department of Social Welfare were asked to explain how they dealt with the problem of resources, they generally acknowledged the problems as well as the negative impact on the provision of learning experiences. However, one of the officials explained that during training caregivers were encouraged to use locally available resources in order to deal with the problem of lack of resources:

> *Nditha kunena kuti padakali panopa ku mbali ya ma* facilities *ndimasukulu ochepa amene ali ndi ma* facilities *....Koma timachita* encourage *kwambiri* using locally available resources. *Timatha kumawaphunzitsa pa ma* training *paja zimene angathe kuzipeza kumudzi kuja ndikupanga zina ndi zina zimene zingathe kuthandiza ana aja, kupangira kuti sizonse zimene anthu angathe kukagula ku sitolo, koma tizigwiritse ntchito zinthu zopezeka... kumudzi kuja.*
> [All I can say is that only very few pre-schools have some facilities. However we do encourage the caregivers to use locally available resources most of the time. We teach them during training sessions how to make local materials to facilitate children's development. This is because factory materials are expensive to buy in the rural areas...] **(MO-3)**.

To some extent, the above claim is true for pre-schools where the caregivers had undergone training and tended to use limited local resources to facilitate children's learning, which was especially evident at Pre-schools A and B. For instance, caregivers at Pre-schools A and B indicated that they made and used locally available resources to promote children's learning. A caregiver at Pre-school A described what they did practically in an attempt to use locally available resources:

Pasukulu panopo ifeyo monga anthu amene tikugwira ntchito tikuyesetsa kuti tipeze zinthu zokuti zili konkuno zoti sitingathe kugula chifukwa cha nkhani ya ndalama...Timagwiritsa ntchito zinthu zomwe tili nazo pafupi. Monga mwachitsanzo... mmalo moti tikagule chikwama choikamo zinthu, tikhoza kungodula nsungwi zomwe izo [pointing at bamboos on the school premises] *kudula mphindozo ndikusema mkatimo bowo ndikumasungamo zinthu zathu bwinobwino popanda kugula.... Monganso ku mbali ya zoseweretsa tikhoza kuwapezera tizitini...azisewerets a, eya osangolilira kuti tikagule iyayi... eyaa...*
[At this Pre-school we are trying our best to utilise locally available materials since we cannot afford to buy factory-made materials due to financial problems. We use the very things that are around us. For example, instead of buying a storage box for teaching and learning materials we can improvise by cutting down those bamboos [pointing at bamboos in the school premises] and drill a hole inside for storing some stuff...Even in terms of play materials, we can collect empty tins for the children to play with...] **(CPscA4)**

Similarly caregivers at Pre-school B argued that they were encouraged to use locally available resources instead of waiting for factory-made materials during the training they had received earlier on:

...monga ngati kumbali ya zida zophunzitsira... mwina ndinganene kuti kaya zidole kaya zoseweretsa ndiye zimenezo tinangokonza ifeyo...zongosoka, za lokolo... tinasoka zimenezo...zilipo ndithu. Kaya ndi mipira timamanga. Eyaa, ndiye kumbali ya zinthu ngati zimenezo zinazi timapanga tokha...
[In terms of play materials we just made some local ones ...we sew them. We even make our own balls using the local materials....] **(CPscB4)**

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, during visits to Pre-school A, the researcher actually saw some indication of the use of locally available materials during the class activities, such as the use of tins, bricks, and bottle tops, among others. However, as previously discussed, generally there was still limited use of locally available materials and the caregivers could have done more, especially bearing in mind the huge problems of teaching and learning materials. This suggests that the training facilitated the making and use of locally available resources in the two pre-schools, although there could have also been other factors that led to the situation, such as the

caregivers' own interest and commitment to making locally available materials in the pre-school setting. This is especially when the fact that the caregivers were working on a voluntary basis is considered.

5.3.3.4 Print materials: children's books

In terms of print materials almost none of the pre-schools had relevant children's books and printed materials (Table 5.22). It was only Pre-school C which had a few books for the children, although they were not relevant for the children, as they appeared to be a donation meant for a different context. Caregivers at Pre-school A explained that they did not have books or other relevant resources.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this has implications for early literacy development as children did not have the opportunity to engage with books at some level (see Chapter 2). This is crucial when one considers the fact that the majority of the families in the rural setting cannot afford to purchase books for their children, due to general poverty as well as being illiterate themselves (Chapter 1). It must also be pointed out that in Malawi the book culture is weak and so one would expect that the pre-school would be the only hope to get the children to develop an appreciation of print besides the oral tradition (see Chapter 2).

5.3.3.5 Draft policy and accompanying documents

None of the four pre-schools had the draft policy documents on early childhood development, including the draft syllabus (Chapters 2). Caregivers in the four pre-schools explained that they did not even know a syllabus existed and expressed the wish to see and utilise it to guide them in the provision of experiences for the children. Furthermore, the caregivers and proprietors reported that they did most

activities based on their limited experience and mainly on a trial and error basis because they did not have any guidelines:

> *Chifukwatu ndondomekoyo ndiye sindiyidziwa... Ndiye tinene chonchi, timangophunzitsa zoti ukudzidziwa; umangophunzitsa kuti... iii... bola m'mene tafikamu tipange izi... koma kuti ndondomeko yake yeni yeni sitingathe kuyidziwa...*
> [I do not know the guidelines .... What I can say is that I just teach what I am able to do; I just teach as things come. Otherwise I do not know the guidelines...] **(CPscC2)**

When the pre-school directors were asked about their knowledge of the policy guidelines and accompanying documents they indicated that they did not know much about them, as one of the directors explained:

> *...Panopa a* Social Welfare Office *samatipatsa ma* guidelines *ena aliwonse..... koma ndikukhulupira kuti maziphunzitsi amene akuphunzitsawo alinazo zoyenerera zimene zimawathandiza kuti aziyendetsa zonse bwinobwino. ... Komabe a* Social Welfare Office *amabwera kudzaona kuti zikuyenda bwanji amabwera, kuchita* visit, *kuzapereka uphungu kuti apa muchite mwakuti apa mupange mwakuti ....*
> [We are never given any guidelines by the Social Welfare Department. But I believe that our caregivers have some things which guide them in handling the children. However, officials from Social Welfare Office do come to follow up on how we are progressing and they do give us more guidance on how we can improve things...] **(DPscA1)**

Similarly, one pre-school administrator explained that she was not aware of the policy documents, although she was also quick to point out that they did get some oral guidance from the Social Welfare Office on what to do, despite not having the actual policy documents and related materials at the pre-school:

> *...ife tingati kwenikweni sitikudziwapo za ndondomekozo. Chifukwa titapita kumeneko anangotifotokozera njira zimene tingatsatire kuti tikatsegulire sukuluyo... komanso anatha kutenga aphunzitsi amene akusamalira ana amene ajawa ndikukawaphunzitsako, koma zimabukuzo aa....sanatipatse*
> [...We do not know about the policy documents because when we went there [Social Welfare Office] they just explained to us what we needed to do in order to open our pre-school...And of course later they trained our caregivers, but we do not have the actual documents.] **(APscB2)**

At Pre-school D, the director reported that they did not have the policy guidelines and accompanying documents as they had not registered yet, but were preparing to do so.

> *Aaah... izi tilibe. Ukoko timaganiza zoti tipite komano zimatikayikitsa ndi nambala ya anayi; pena ikhale yaying'ono pena ikule. Ndiye timati mwina tikhoza kupita ku* Social Welfare *koma nanga poti ana ...ndiwochepa.*
> [We do not have those documents. We are in fact planning to consult the Social Welfare Office to register our pre-school. The fluctuating numbers were worrying us and therefore delaying the process: we were waiting to have more children before registering the pre-school] **(DPscD1)**

When one senior official from the ministry headquarters was asked about the levels of monitoring or supervision of the pre-schools, especially in relation to the availability and implementation of the draft policy guidelines at pre-school level, it seemed clear that there were some challenges in operationalising the guidelines:

> Well, the operational guidelines we have developed... [but] it is the responsibility of our officers ... to look at that as their possibilities and move forward to supervise these centres to make sure the guidelines are followed properly. But there are two things. One ...eeh... our officers... I think... they are very much burdened with so many services and, they hardly get time for themselves [laughs] and sometimes it's also capacity problems... aah... ability to realise some of the things and do them properly... **(MO-2)**

The findings seem to raise a number of issues. The fact that pre-school directors and caregivers did not have the policy guidelines and the other important accompanying documents at their disposal may mean that standard provision of learning experiences, including early literacy development, may not be maximally achieved in the implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Programme in Malawi (see Chapter 2). For instance, some of the main ECD documents, such as *Operational Guidelines for Integrated Early Childhood Development* (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003d) and the *Training Manual for Early Childhood Development* (MoGCS & UNICEF, 2003c), have useful tips which can help pre-school staff facilitate children's development. Similary, the draft ECD syllabi for levels 1 and 2

clearly outline eight learning areas that pre-schools should focus on in facilitating the holistic development of the child: *Social and interpersonal relationships; Learning readiness; Language; Mathematical skills; Health education; Creative expression; Spiritual and moral education; and Environmental education.* It can be argued that unavailability and lack of awareness of such an important document means that caregivers do not purposefully and systematically exploit the various aspects of the children's development in the pre-school setting. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this resulted in some disparities in the provision of early learning in the four pre-schools.

Of course it can also be argued that apart from provision of the guidelines and policies to caregivers other considerations need to be made, such as the extent to which caregivers would make sense of such policy documents in a situation where professional development opportunities are not forthcoming. Thus even if MoGCS makes these documents readily available in the pre-schools there is still the question of whether the caregivers would be able to follow them. In such a case one possible way would be to put the guidelines together with the assumption that caregivers could use them, even without training for example.

5.3.4 Funding sources and challenges

Pre-school directors reported that there were no clear funding sources for the pre-schools and that therefore most of the time they expected the community to make some material and financial contributions towards their running costs since it was assumed that they should be owned by the communities. An interview with MoGCS officials at the time of the study indicated that there was no direct government funding to these pre-schools.

It was also reported that both local and international NGOs provided financial assistance to Community Based Organisations (CBOs) through the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO). Officials from the DSWO explained that CBOs under which the pre-schools operated were expected to take the initiative to source their own funding from various possible sources, such as local and international NGOs and individuals. It was further reported that in most cases such funding, if successfully secured, would not necessarily be only for the pre-school programme but also for other programmes within the CBO (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1). So in a way, the pre-school section would still end up not receiving direct funding for its improvement.

Some of the directors indicated that they had reasonable success in securing funding, especially for Pre-schools A and B. For instance, at the time of the study the director of Pre-school A indicated that after trying for some time he had finally secured some funding from Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) to build a separate structure for the pre-school. Since eligibility for MASAF funding is based on communities showing evidence of commitment by providing 20% of the resources for their project, either in cash or kind, this could be a sign that Pre-school community A was actively involved in the development of the pre-school as they had to prove that they had contributed part of the resources before getting the funding (see Kishindo, 2000). Similarly, at Pre-school B a key member of staff reported that the pre-school sometimes received financial and material assistance from Action Aid-Malawi, and the Southern African AIDS Trust (SAAT). Generally, all the pre-school directors explained that they found sourcing funding a daunting task.

The general expectations for the CBOs to source their own funding for the various programmes, including the pre-school, raise certain underlying assumptions about

how they should operate. There is an assumption that these CBOs will have the capacity to attract the funding from other organisations, which also have rigorous procedures for disbursing funding to support relevant programmes in rural settings. For instance, some of the directors reported that they were often required to submit proposals for funding to such organisations as UNICEF, MASAF, Action Aid, and others. This arrangement has implications for pre-schooling because securing such funding may be difficult and often takes very long as it depends on whether the pre-school directors or proprietors have the necessary skills to produce a convincing proposal for funding considerations (see Kishindo, 2000). With such unpredictable financial arrangements, it is likely that urgent challenges that specific rural pre-schools face may not receive the immediate attention they need, thereby affecting the whole practice in the pre-schools. For example, lack of funding means that the pre-schools cannot get the necessary resources for facilitating learning and development of the children, even if the caregivers have some knowledge of what they are supposed to do in facilitating the children's development.

5.4 Chapter summary

The discussion in this chapter centred on capacity levels of the four rural pre-schools and the role of the surrounding communities in enhancing the activities of the pre-schools. The findings point to the fact that there are a lot of challenges with regard to pre-school capacity in terms of human and material resources. Furthermore, the findings have shown that generally communities claimed to make considerable material contribution towards the development of pre-schools, such as moulding bricks, providing timber and firewood, thereby helping build the capacity of the pre-schools. However, as has been discussed in the previous sections, community

learning and literacy experiences as it may be difficult to decide what should constitute appropriate practice (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, it is worthwhile to consider the issue of the extent to which practice in the four pre-schools would significantly change to reflect national ECD policy in the event that the policy and accompanying documents are made available to the pre-schools, especially bearing in mind the strong community expectations of the roles of pre-schools, which have been presented in this chapter.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6) some of these tensions have been made clear through the nature of the learning provisions which caregivers provided in the four pre-schools. Specifically, the next chapter will present and discuss the early literacy experiences provided by the rural pre-schools involved in this study.

Chapter 6: Results (c)—Early Literacy Development Experiences

6.0 Chapter overview

The actual learning experiences observed during visits to the four rural pre-schools are discussed in this chapter. The chapter begins by briefly discussing the overall daily organisation of care and education activities at each of the four pre-schools in order to create the basis for discussion of the learning experiences in and outside the classroom. As the chapter develops, it provides a comparative analysis of the issues since generally there tended to be more similarities than differences in the nature of the activities that were used (see Table 6.1). Furthermore, the two theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2 form the basis for discussion of some of the learning experiences that facilitated the development of early literacy, and those that actively facilitated early literacy development in the pre-schools that employed the activities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the major issues that have been raised with regard to the provision of early literacy experiences in the four pre-schools.

It is necessary at this stage, however, to raise two important issues to be born in mind regarding the approach to the discussion in this chapter. In the first place, although it is almost certain that the problems of resources and training raised in Chapter 5 have had a huge influence on practice at pre-school level, the focus was not only on the impact of these obvious challenges but also on whether within these genuine capacity constraints some significant attempts were made by caregivers to provide useful learning experiences in general, and early literacy development experiences in

particular. Secondly, it should be pointed out that the various learning experiences identified in this chapter are discussed with the understanding that in ideal conditions most of these activities can be deliberately exploited for early literacy development even if they do not obviously relate to literacy *per se*.

6.1 Overall daily organisation of care and education experiences in the four pre-schools

This section will first briefly discuss how "teaching and learning" were generally organised in each pre-school, and then the actual learning experiences for children in the four rural pre-schools, The word "teaching" is used cautiously because the expectations of how children should be handled at this level should be different – the experiences should not be as structured as for older children in formal education such as at primary school, as young children often learn more through play (see Chapter 2). However, the observations in the pre-schools showed that the opposite was true, as is discussed later in the chapter. Four general patterns in the routine of activities in all four pre-schools were observed: *preliminary activities*, *main lesson activities before break*, *break time activities* and *main lesson activities after break*. The four patterns are followed in the discussion of the organisation of care and education experiences in this section.

6.1.1 Preliminary activities in the four rural pre-schools

In all four pre-schools lessons, started between 8.00 and 8.30 am and ended between 10.30 am and 11.30 am from Mondays to Fridays. However, in some instances it was observed that there was a lot of flexibility in the exact starting timetable for lessons and often this was dictated by the number of children available rather than the time for starting lessons. For instance, if most of the children arrived late that morning,

lessons would start as late as 9.00 am. Normally parents or guardians escorted children to pre-school, except in a few instances where it was observed that some children came to pre-school unaccompanied. Caregivers explained that in most cases such children came from homes nearby. In some cases however, it was reported that this happened because the guardians or parents were busy with other work away from home such as in the garden (see Chapter 5).

The common pattern in all four pre-schools was that when the children arrived in the morning, they gathered at one place waiting for more children to arrive. When the caregiver felt that a good number had arrived they went into the classroom for an assembly which among other things involved physical exercises such as stretching and bending their hands ("upwards, downwards, sideways, shoulder and forwards"). This was followed by singing the Malawi National Anthem and then children were asked to pray. At Pre-schools A and D these opening activities were conducted in English while at Pre-schools B and C, they were generally done in the local language, Chichewa. Caregivers and some pre-school directors explained that the assembly was conducted in this way to prepare children for primary school, where typical (assembly) activities generally take place. (See Figure 6.1.)

6.1.2 Main lesson activities (Part 1)

Soon after assembly, the main activities for the day began, most of them taking place inside the classroom, but there were times when caregivers took children outside for other activities, as we shall see later in the chapter. Generally in all four pre-schools a lot of teaching was modelled on what happens in Malawi primary schools in terms of both approach and content taught. Contrary to what I had assumed at the beginning of the study, I observed that the activities were highly structured and there was a lot of

Figure 6.1 Caregiver and children singing the Malawi National Anthem during assembly

"teaching". For instance, in terms of style, except in Pre-school B, caregivers stood in front of the children all the time, getting them to listen and follow instructions. In Pre-school B sometimes caregivers sat down to maintain eye-level with the children as they facilitated the learning. The seating arrangement generally looked formal and inflexible, not allowing children to move around. This perhaps was partly due to lack of purposefully built infrastructure and furniture for the children (see Chapter 5). For instance, at Pre-school A, children sat on a mat; at Pre-schools B and C children sat directly on the floor; while at Pre-school D children sat on fixed cement benches in a church building (Figures 6.2 a, b, c, d).

Furthermore, some of the caregivers were particular about getting the children to sit in well made rows, sometimes male and female children in separate rows (Pre-school C).

In Pre-schools A and B, caregivers seemed less bothered about getting the children to sit in a particular pattern.

Figure 6.2a Pre-school A seating arrangement

Children at Pre-school A listening to caregiver during one of the sessions

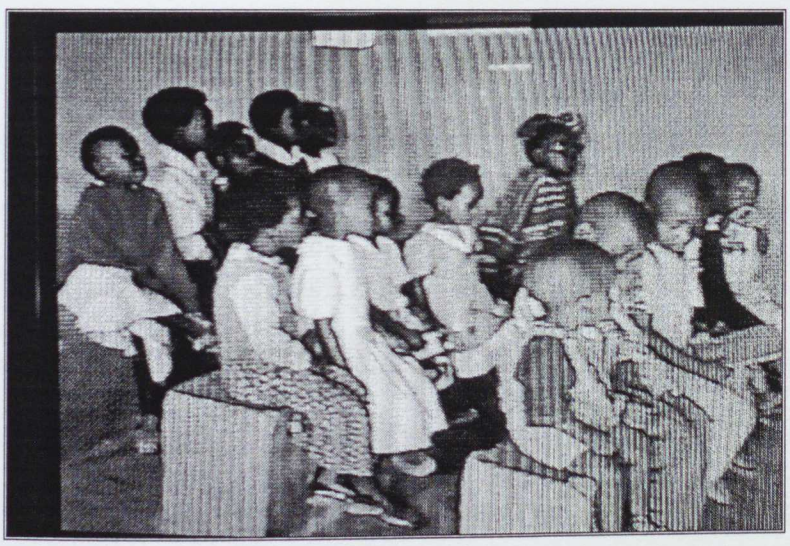
Figure 6.2b Pre-school B seating arrangement

Children at Pre-school B during one of the sessions

Figure 6.2c Pre-school C seating arrangement

Children at Pre-school C during one of the sessions as caregiver prepares to call out register

Figure 6.2d Pre-school D seating arrangement



Children at Pre-school D listening to the caregiver during one of the sessions

6.1.3 Break time activities

Between the sessions there was tea break, which ran for about 20 to 30 minutes in all the pre-schools, although at times the tea break seemed to be much longer, depending on a number of factors, such as having only one caregiver who, after teaching the children also had to prepare tea for them (Pre-school C). During break time, children ate packed meals they brought from their homes, such as cooked cassava, rice, or fruits such as bananas. At Pre-school C, the caregiver prepared tea for the children in

addition to the food they brought from home. The researcher did not observe any tea being prepared at Pre-schools A and D, although claims were made that sometimes it was provided. At Pre-school B, caregivers prepared maize porridge for the children to ensure that all children had something to eat at break time. However, during visits to the pre-schools and also through discussions with caregivers, it was evident that some children did not bring packed meals to pre-school at all, due to general poverty at household level (see Chapter 5).

6.1.4 Main lesson activities (Part 2)

The general trend in part one of the main lesson activities (section 6.1.2) continued in this second and last part of the day's activities as well. In all the four pre-schools, this last part was considered to be the most challenging as children were reported to be less cooperative in the structured activities. This was confirmed by observations. In all four pre-schools, children seemed to be restless after break and thus often presented a lot of problems to the caregivers, who still wanted to control the pace of the activities and ensure they maintained the structure of the lessons. However, in most cases, the more the caregivers tried to do this, the more "uncooperative" the children became. Most of the caregivers explained that they often noted a common pattern of behaviour among the children after they had taken their snack. They further explained that as a solution they resorted to getting the children to sing most of the time in order to contain them. As is discussed later in the chapter, although singing nursery rhymes and local songs seemed to be one of the major strategies for learning (section 6.3.5), it was perhaps interesting that some of the caregivers in this case did not see this as part of the learning process for the children. It was also observed that sometimes during such moments when the children seemed "uncooperative" and "unwilling" to "learn"

(as some caregivers described them), children were sent outside to play without a clear objective.

Furthermore, some of the caregivers reported that this pattern was very common on Mondays, when children came back after the weekend. During a follow-up interview on one such Monday, after the researcher had observed that the caregiver had been struggling to control the children during the lessons, she explained:

> ....*Ana amachita masewera kwambiri likakhala kuti ndi* Monday, *chifukwa amaiwala zoti abwera ku sukulu. Amatenga masewera a ku* weekend *ndikuwabweretsa kuno mmalo momapanga sukulu...iwo amakonda masewera aku* weekend. *Kotero ma* Mondays *amakhala obvuta nthawi zonse...*
> [.... Children are very playful on Mondays because they still have a hangover from the activities they were engaged in at home during the weekend and therefore forget that they have come to school. They bring their 'play' from the weekend and instead of focusing on learning they like to play. So, generally Mondays are always difficult....] **(CPscA3)**

To some extent, this reflects this particular caregiver's views on how children should be "taught": perhaps that the learning environment must be 'properly' structured if the children are to 'learn' better. This further suggests that the children in this context only began to 'learn' when they stepped into the pre-school setting in which the weekend "play" should not be allowed to interfere with the organised 'learning'. It can therefore be argued that the children appeared "uncooperative" because they experienced a lack of congruence between home and pre-school experiences, which the caregiver did not seem to see. To some extent there were lost opportunities to help children connect home with pre-school experiences in this particular case.

The day's activities finished with a closing prayer by the children, either in English or the local language (Chichewa).

6.1.5 Medium of instruction during pre-school activities

Generally the medium of instruction used was the local language, although there was a clear attempt to exclusively use English as a medium of instruction in some parts of the sessions. However, Pre-school D was very particular about using English as a medium of instruction almost exclusively. There were few occasions when the caregivers used the local language (Chichewa), and when they did, it was mostly for purposes of correcting a child's behaviour or mistake. Chichewa was also frequently used during break or outside activities.

When the researcher followed up on the exclusive use of English, one of the caregivers explained:

> *...Chifukwa choti ma* Primary School *a panopa sakutha kulongosoka moyenera, monga ngati....akapita mwina makalasi akuluwa...Ndiye tinapemphedwako ndi makolo kuti kodi ana athuwa sangathe kuti azidziwako ka chizungu patalipatali? Ndiye timayesetsa pang'ono-pang'ono mpaka ataphunzira chizungucho...*
> [...generally primary schools nowadays are not offering good services to the children even when they get into upper classes. Therefore we were asked by parents whether the pre-school could help the children learn some English language, and hence we try our best to help the children learn English little by little] **(CPscD3)**

Similarly one of the directors for Pre-school D argued:

> *Cholinga chathu sinanga tiana tija tikuphunzira ndiye tikupita mtsogolo moti tikakumana ndi Chizungu. Ndiye kuli bwino kuti ayambiretu pansipa kuphunzira kuti akakula...asazavutike.... Vuto limakhalapo komabe cholinga chathu nchofuna kuti tiana tiphunzire...chifukwa choti zinthu zambiri...zimakhala mChizungu. Ndiye ndibwino mwana kumphunzitsa ali wamng'ono kuti akamakula...asazavutike. Mwana akaziwa kuyankhula Chizungu akali wamng'ono sukulunso siyimavuta. Sinanga ma* lessons *ambiri amaphunzitsa mChizungu, ndiye ukakhala kuti ukudziwa Chizungu sizimakuvuta ayi*
> [...Since the children will encounter English as they go higher in their education, it is important for them to start learning and picking up the English language. Of course there are usually problems as we try to do this but still our aim is to ensure that they do not face problems as they grow up. A child who knows how to speak English as early as possible usually does

not encounter many problems in his or her future learning since most of the things are taught in English…] **(CPscD1)**

These findings seem to agree with those in Chapter 5, where communities around the pre-schools expected pre-schools to prepare their children for formal schooling. Furthermore, children's ability to speak English was seen by communities as a good sign that the pre-schools were fulfilling their role in the community. The influences of the communities' expectations on practice at pre-school level cannot therefore be underplayed in the four pre-schools and is a key issue in the discussion of the provision of early learning experiences in this chapter.

6.2 Overall learning experiences provided in the four pre-schools

In this subsection some of the general learning experiences that were observed in the four pre-schools will be presented before discussing more specific ones, which are then linked to the development of early literacy experiences. As discussed in Chapter 5, the learning experiences were identified mainly through observations and in-depth interviews with pre-school caregivers and some of the directors.

Generally the discussion on the provision of the early learning experiences in this subsection takes into consideration the stages and levels of development of the children as a context, and these broadly include physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. In that case then, early literacy development is not discussed in isolation from these aspects of child development as it is likely to cut across these levels of growth. Further, in categorising and structuring of the discussion in the later part of the chapter (section 6.3), the five key components in the development of early literacy skills have been used, and these are:, Phonic Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, Print Awareness, Writing Development and Oral Language Skills, as a

frame of reference for understanding the nature of provision of early literacy development in the four pre-schools (see Chapter 2).

6.2.1 Learning experiences and attempt at holistic development of children

Despite the fact that the focus of this study was on early literacy development-related experiences, it was also necessary to look at some of the general learning experiences that the pre-schools informally provided in facilitating the children's development. Although the list of the general experiences discussed in this section is not necessarily exhaustive, the intention is to provide a general picture of issues that were addressed despite the capacity challenges that have already been discussed in Chapter 5. Some more general issues are raised in subsection 6.3, which also discusses what was considered to be more specific learning experiences, some of which facilitated the development of early literacy experiences.

As has been discussed in Chapter 4, caregivers encouraged the children to say simple prayers before eating their meals during break time. Children also prayed at the start and end of the day's activities. This catered for the spiritual development of the children (see section 6.1.1). Similarly, it was observed that children were encouraged to develop hygiene practices such as washing their hands before and after eating their food during tea break (Figure 6.3a, b). Caregivers also encouraged the children to give each other turns when washing hands, by sometimes being in some form of a queue, although at times this was not observed, especially when the children were anxious to eat their food. Although during the visits the researcher did not observe caregivers reinforcing this by asking children why they had to wash their hands before eating, it nevertheless meant that the children were still internalising and getting used to this practice, since this was happening daily.

Figure 6.3a Caregiver helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school C

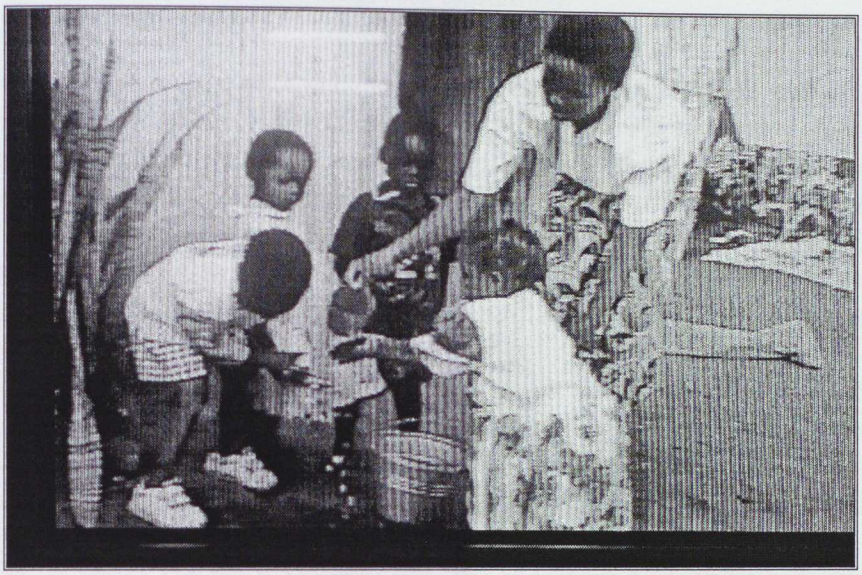


Figure 6.3b Caregivers helping children to wash their hands before taking their food during break time at Pre-school D

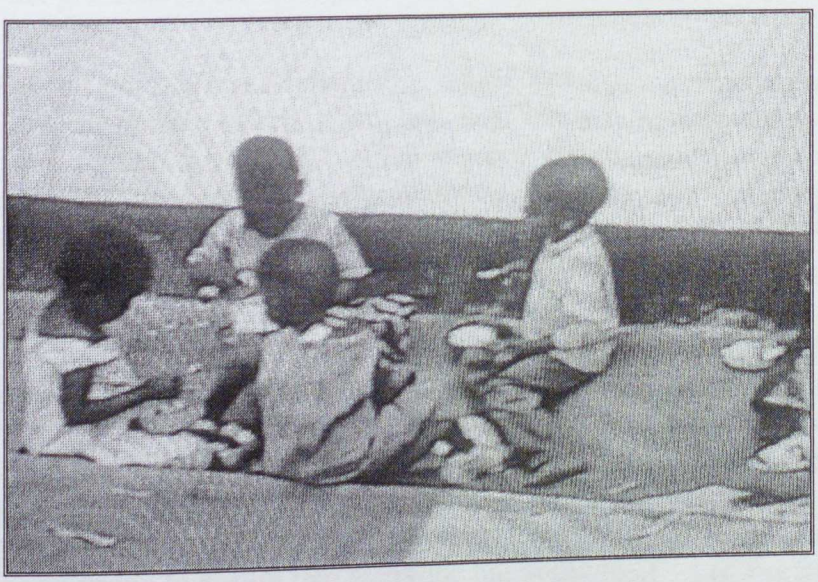
It was clear during the study that caregivers encouraged sharing among the children, especially food during break times. Children who brought packed food were encouraged to share with those who did not. This was one of the interesting and useful experiences all the four pre-schools provided to the children. Pre-school A presented an interesting model in this case. Caregivers at the pre-school explained that they had developed a strategy to promote sharing among the children. The caregivers explained

that they came up with a phrase which they taught children to remind them to share with those in need, as one of the caregivers explained:

> *...Komanso ana aja m'makomo mwina ndimokuti amalephera kuti azigula zinthu tsiku ndi tsiku.... Ifeyo kunoko ana aja tinawaphunzitsa...khalidwe kuti azikondana, pali mawu akuti "kuganizirana." Ndiye tinawapatsa ana aja mawu akuti "kuganizirana" kuti mnzanu ngati alibe ... muganizireni. Ndiye ana aja amatha...kumugawira mnzawo alibe uja. Ngati alibe kanthu...timauza makolo awo aja kuti mwana asalephere kubwera ku sukulu chifukwa choti alibe...chakudya. mwana uja ngati alibe chakudya anzake amamugawira....*
> [...Some of the homes where the children come from are very poor and do not manage to give children food every day as they come to pre-school. So what we did was to teach these children to love each other and introduced to them the phrase "consider others", meaning that if your friend is in need you should "consider" their situation. So the children actually consider their friends and share the food accordingly. We therefore also encourage parents and guardians not to fail to send the children to pre-school just because they do not have food because the children have learnt to share their food...] **(CPscA4)**

This was confirmed during visits to Pre-school A. It was observed that during break, and when children were taking out their food, the caregiver would announce the phrase to get the children to check whether those next to them had food. In most cases, children voluntarily shared their food with those in need.

Figure 6.4 Children eating together during break time at Pre-school A



During one of the break sessions outside the classroom, I described some events as follows:

Caregiver	Children
[Break Time]. Caregiver gets children to wash their hands and pray before they eat the food they have brought from home. Caregiver reminds the children to consider others who have not brought food: "*Tiyeni tiwaganizire anzathu*" ["Let us consider our friends"]	Children take turns to wash their hands and pray for food. They then get their food from the classroom and come outside to eat. Children who have food share with those who have not brought any. Food brought includes bananas, rice, cassava, bread/bread rolls/buns

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

The fact that Pre-school A had this simple but seemingly effective strategy for encouraging sharing meant that the children internalised it and therefore did not have problems, and this was clear during my visits to the pre-school. Similarly children from Pre-schools C and D did not appear to have problems with sharing, although there appeared to be no specific strategy like the one at Pre-school A. However, at Pre-school B caregivers reported that although the children generally shared their food, sometimes they had problems with some of the children (also see Chapter 5). One caregiver at the pre-school, for example, described her experiences:

> *...ukamawapanga kuti 'ali ndi chakudya ndani amugawire mnzakeyu', aliyense amakaniza chake... Eeeh...*[laughs]*...basi amaganiza kuti aliyense pobwera watenga chakudya chake... ndiye anzawo aja akamawayang'ana kuti umpange kuti umugawire nzako amakana. Tsono iwe ukatenga kumpatsa mnzakeyo...amanyinyilika...amalira. Mwinanso pena amakatha kumakanena [kwa makolo] kuti iii aphunzitsi anandilanda chakudya...eeh... pomwe iwe watema wamugawira .... mnzake...nanga wina angokhala?*
> [When you try to find out who has some food to share with another child who did nor bring food, everyone refuses to share their food....You know, they take it for granted that everyone has brought their own packed meal. Therefore, when you try to get some of the food and give it to the one who doesn't have any they are upset and may cry. Sometimes they report you to their parents and guardians claiming that you grabbed the food from them yet you were just trying to ensure that everyone has some food...] **(CPscB4)**

Pre-schools A and B therefore present an interesting contrast in terms of helping children to learn the values of sharing. Since this problem mainly appeared at Pre-school B and not the other three, it may be argued that differences in the number of children could have been one of the contributing factors. The fact that Pre-school B generally had large numbers of children and lacked a strategy to encourage sharing could have meant that it was more difficult to get the children to relate to each other. However, there could be other factors that may need to be taken into consideration, apart from numbers.

The fact that the caregiver at Pre-school C was often seen to separate girls from boys in the seating plan (section 6.1.2) suggests an indirect way of getting the children to realise their gender roles in the society, and how they should relate to each other as members of the opposite sex (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2c). Perhaps this is what is valued in the wider context of the pre-school, especially also when one considers the fact that culturally the gender gap in Malawi has been wide (GoM, 2002; Binauli & Chipeta 2000). However, it seems also important to raise the question of whether children at this level should be separated from each other based on sex, bearing in mind the fact that currently a lot of attempts are being made to reduce the gender gap (Moser *et al*, 2004; White, 2003).

Similarly, although the activities observed generally addressed all the four main aspects of child development (physical, intellectual, emotional and social development) (see Table 6.1), the extent to which this was effective in addressing the children's development raises questions. For instance, during the visits it was observed that there were clear opportunities that caregivers could have used to help children develop one or two of the four aspects, but did not seem to recognise and

take advantage of. The following lesson extract from observation notes describes a typical example of such cases. This particular session took place on a Monday morning towards the end of an assembly, after the children had just sung the Malawi National Anthem (see Section 6.1.2):

Caregiver	Children
..... [Caregiver] then announces they will pray and asks for a volunteer to do so. She then greets the children in English, "Good morning children"	Most of the children hesitate ...then one child volunteers and gives a simple prayer as the others are quiet with eyes closed. Then in a chorus children respond to caregiver's greeting, "We are very well, thank you madam" [in English]
Caregiver then asks who went to church the previous day (Sunday)..... Listens as children simultaneously say whether they went or not but still does not give turns to individual children... says "okay" [in English] to the last child to speak. [Then almost immediately moves on to the next activity] [Announces] "Seven days make a week...."	["Chaos", everyone mumbles something] - Most children simultaneously say whether they went to church or not (no turns are given). After the "chaos" one child says *"Ine sindinapite ku tchalichi chifukwa mmimba mumandipweteka"* [I did not go to church because I had stomachache].
	Children join in almost automatically, "Seven days make a week.... Sunday...Monday...Tuesday...Wednesday...Thursday...Friday... and Saturday..."...

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

It can be argued that the caregiver made a useful attempt to link classroom experience (in this case, prayer) with children's home experiences: whether they went to church the previous weekend. However, she lost an opportunity for more useful learning experiences by not giving substantial feedback or following up on the last child's reason for not having gone to church, which was stomachache. It can be argued that this was a good oppportunity to facilitate some brief discussion of the children's

experiences. For instance, the caregiver could have casually asked more probing questions on the cause, treatment received or not received, among other simple questions. This would have allowed the child concerned to talk as well as feel that her social and health concerns were being appreciated by all, more especially the caregiver. It would have made the child feel an important part of the group. Furthermore, this could have triggered more individual experiences from the other children, thereby allowing for more social, emotional and intellectual development. Similar examples from the other three pre-schools are discussed later in the chapter.

Overall, despite the shortfalls raised, it can be argued that apart from the education aspect, the four pre-schools were responding to other aspects of the children's development through some of the general learning experiences they provided. It is particularly interesting that although the pre-schools did not have the ECD syllabus for example, they appeared to respond to some of the learning areas in the syllabus especially health education, spiritual and moral education, and social and interpersonal relationships (see also Chapter 2). Perhaps part of the explanation for this situation might be attributed to the little training that some of the caregivers had received, as discussed in Chapter 5. Similarly, despite the sporadic visits to Pre-schools A and B by officers from the District Social Welfare Office (see Chapter 5), this might have had some positive influence on the caregivers' awareness of areas to put emphasis on in the provision of early learning experiences. Ideally this is a significant development for ECD policy implementation in Malawi, especially in terms of the potential that pre-schools may have to meet some of the holistic aspects of the children's development, especially in the event that the national ECD policy guidelines are made available (Chapter 5). Furthermore, this suggests the important

role training and supervision can play in enhancing caregivers' abilities to provide useful learning experiences to children.

The following section discusses whether learning experiences facilitated the development of early literacy skills in the children, bearing in mind the fact that in an ideal situation almost all the learning experiences identified in this study could be exploited for early literacy development.

6.3 Early literacy development experiences provided in the four pre-schools

Although there were some differences in the way caregivers provided specific learning experiences in each rural pre-school, overall, there were a lot of similarities in the nature of activities used. There were, however, cases where some pre-schools provided more varied specific early learning experiences than others, as is discussed later in this section. Box 6.1 summarises the various learning experiences observed during visits to the four pre-schools. It is important to point out, however, that this list is not exhaustive due to the limited period over which the researcher visited the four pre-schools (see Chapter 3). There might have been other activities outside those in Box 6.1, which caregivers might have used before or after visits. However, bearing in mind that most of the activities in the pre-schools were repeated on a daily basis, it was likely that the researcher captured most major activities in the four pre-schools.

Box 6.1: Catalogue of all activities observed in the four rural pre-schools

- ***Assembly activities:*** involved physical exercises such as stretching hands and legs, singing the Malawi National Anthem (Chichewa and English) and prayer.
- ***Singing songs and nursery rhymes/poems***: songs and rhymes for specific purposes such as counting, reading, prayer. Some general songs were used as gap-fillers.
- ***Exploratory questions:*** involved asking children simple questions about their welfare – such as what they saw on the way to pre-school, what they ate, among others.
- ***Hand exercises:*** children were involved in such simple activities as clapping hands a specified number of times; rubbing hands together to "light a fire"; "shutting" and "opening" hands.
- ***Jumping***: Caregiver directly asked children to jump a specified number of times, but sometimes this was accompanied by relevant songs and rhymes.
- ***Mini role playing/mimicking:*** involved children mimicking such things as an aeroplane taxiing and then taking off.
- ***Parts of the body***: Both directly and indirectly, children were asked to name and point at parts of their body. Sometimes this was done through relevant songs in Chichewa and/or English, depending on pre-school.
- ***Playing with clay (moulding):*** Caregiver gave children the opportunity to play with clay and mould objects such as birds and cars.
- ***Calendar:*** Children were engaged in mentioning days of the week and months of the year. Sometimes this was done through relevant songs and nursery rhymes.
- ***Self-introduction:*** Caregiver directly asked children to introduce themselves (in English): who they were, where they lived, their age, and where they learn.
- ***Vocabulary learning:*** Children were involved in learning common English words, often in association with some action such as jumping, sitting, walking, or running.
- ***Games:*** Caregiver engaged children in circle games in which children were for example running within the circle, passing on objects and dancing.
- ***Counting numbers:*** Was done through direct teaching and sometimes through relevant songs in Chichewa and English. Children counted from 1 to 10; 1 to 20 in some pre-schools.
- ***Distinguishing sound levels:*** Involved children in activities with tin, stones/water/bottle tops. The tin was hit before and after objects were placed inside and children were called upon to distinguish the levels of the sounds. Sometimes children were asked to make noise or keep quiet for some time and explain what they heard.
- ***Alphabet letters:*** Children were engaged in saying the letters of the alphabet directly and sometimes through relevant songs and rhymes (often in English).
- ***Direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences in Chichewa***: Caregiver directly taught children how to write numbers, letters and lines on the chalkboard. She physically helped some children to write.
- ***Dance and music:*** Sometimes children were engaged in singing and dancing some general traditional songs, such as for weddings.
- ***Drawing on the ground***, and ***in the air:*** Children were taken outside and instructed to draw on the ground such things as cars or anything they wanted. In class children were asked to write numbers or draw circles/squares in the air.
- ***Story telling:*** Caregiver told stories to children.
- ***Building blocks:*** Using stones and bricks, some children built "houses" and other structures they could imagine.
- ***Playing with toys (mainly tyres and empty bottles):*** Children played with tyres in the open space. At one pre-school the children played with empty bottles.
- ***Some play with books:*** At one pre-school children played with some books outside the classroom and sometimes at break time.
- ***Writing on the chalk board:*** Children [at one pre-school] were involved in writing numbers, letters, short and long lines on the chalkboard.
- ***Distinguishing drawings (on the board):*** Sometimes children were asked to distinguish drawings on the chalkboard, such as girl from boy, long from short lines.
- ***Weather Description***: children were asked to describe weather at different points such as cloudy, sunny, rainy, based on a weather chart.

Table 6.1 categorises the various activities according to the specific aspect of child development they seemed to cater for the most. It should be pointed out that some of the activities cartered for more than one aspect of child development depending on how and for what purpose they were used by caregivers.

Table 6.1: Learning experiences employed at each pre-school and child development aspects emphasised

Learning experience	Pre-schools				Aspects of child development emphasised			
	A	B	C	D	PD	ED	ID	SD*
Assembly activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Singing nursery rhymes or poems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Exploratory questions	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×
Hand exercises	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jumping	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mini role playing/Mimicking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parts of the body	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Playing with clay (moulding)	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×
Calendar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-introduction:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocabulary learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Games	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓		✓
Counting numbers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Distinguishing sound levels	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×
Alphabet letters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences in Chichewa	×	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	×
Dance and music	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓
Drawing on the ground	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓
Drawing/writing in the air	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓
Story telling	×	✓	×	×		✓	×	×
Building blocks	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×
Playing with toys (tyres and empty bottles)	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×
Some play with books	×	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	×
Writing on the chalk board	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
Distinguishing drawings on the chalkboard	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
Weather description	×	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×

*Key: *ED – Emotional Development; ID – Intellectual Development; PD – Physical Development; SD – Social Development*

Of the learning experiences in Box 6.1 and Table 6.1, some directly relate to the development of early literacy skills. To structure the discussion, the five key

components in the development of early literacy are loosely used as a general guide: Phonic Awareness (PHA), Alphabetic Principle (APP), Print Awareness (PRA), Writing Development (WRD) and Oral Language Skills (OLS) (see Chapter 2). The idea is to examine the various ways caregivers appealed to or adapted some of the ideas within the principles, even if they had no idea about the existence of the five key components. Table 6.2 attempts to categorise the various pre-school learning experiences as they relate to the five key components. Although some of the learning experiences fell into more than one key component, for purposes of this discussion the rationale was to consider only those that directly and clearly relate to each key component in a major way.

Based on Table 6.2, generally most of the early literacy development activities focused on the development of oral language skills and speculations on this pattern of practice are made in section 6.3.5. Furthermore, not all the activities in Table 6.2 were directly related to the development of early literacy skills, although practically this may have depended on how the activity was implemented by caregivers, even if on the surface it did not appear to have anything to do with early literacy development. The following sections discuss in some detail the specific activities that were directly related to the development of early literacy skills in the four pre-schools, as presented in Table 6.2, in the context of the five key components in early literacy development beginning with the Alphabetic Principle.

Table 6.2: Early literacy experiences employed at the four rural pre-schools according to the five key components in early literacy development

Early literacy Development experience	Five key components in early literacy development*					Pre-school where early literacy component applied
	PHA	APP	PRA	WRD	OLS	
Assembly activities						
Singing nursery rhymes or poems	✔	✔			✔	A, B, C, D
Exploratory questions					✔	B
Hand exercises						A, B, C, D
Jumping					✔	A, B, C, D
Mini role playing/Mimicking					✔	A, B, C, D
Parts of the body	✔				✔	A, B, C, D
Playing with clay (moulding)				✔		B
Calendar	✔	✔			✔	A, B, C, D
Self-introduction:					✔	A, B, C, D
Vocabulary learning	✔				✔	A, B, C, D
Games					✔	A, D
Counting numbers	✔					A, B, C, D
Distinguishing sound levels	✔				✔	A
Alphabet letters		✔				A, B, C, D
Direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences in Chichewa	✔				✔	C
Dance and music					✔	A, B
Drawing on the ground			✔	✔		
Drawing/writing in the air			✔	✔		A, D
Story telling		✔			✔	B
Building blocks					✔	A
Playing with toys(tyres and empty bottles)						
Some play with books			✔			C
Writing on the chalk board			✔			D
Distinguishing drawings on the chalkboard			✔		✔	D

*Key: *PHA - Phonic Awareness; APP - Alphabetic Principle; PRA - Print Awareness; WRD - Writing Development; OLS - Oral Language Skills*

6.3.1 Alphabetic principle

The alphabetic principle was one early literacy development component that was emphasised in all four pre-schools. The alphabetic principle, as has been explained elsewhere, deals with facilitating the child's knowledge of letters of the alphabet as well as their corresponding sounds (see Chapter 2). Although there was a common pattern in the way caregivers employed this principle, activities for promoting it

varied from pre-school to pre-school. In some cases this was done through songs which contained part or the whole of the alphabet. In other words, songs were used both as content of learning and as a means for learning. For instance, the following song involved letters of the alphabet:

There are 26 letters of the alphabet... [Then Alphabet song]
A, B, C, D....X, Y, Z,
[a-b-c-d-e-f-g
h-i-j-k-l-m-n
o-p-q
r-s-t
u-v-w-x-y-z]
(All four pre-schools)

All: *Pamchenga timatero posewera,*
Caregiver: *Ichi nchiani?*
Children: *a ...e...i...o...u*

All: This is how we play on the sand,
Caregiver: What is this?
Children: a ...e...i...o...u
(All four pre-schools)

Ife ndife tiana
Tiana tochepa
Timadziwa kuwerenga [1 mpaka 10][31]
... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10;

We are little children and we know how to read/count 1 to 10
(All four pre-schools)

In addition, all four pre-schools tended to use direct ways of getting the children to learn the alphabet letters, such as asking the children as a group or individually to say the alphabet letters:

Tiyeni tinene alphabet... "26 letters of the alphabet..."

Let us say the alphabet..."26 letters of the alphabet..."
(Pre-school A)

[31] The phrase *"1 mpaka 10" (1 to 10)* was added at Pre-school B's version of the nursery rhyme

It appeared that in most cases caregivers made sure that every child had the chance to say the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. For instance, one activity would sometimes run for about fifteen to twenty minutes to ensure every child had their turn, and by the time each child had a chance, the majority of the children were "lost" in other things and could not really concentrate. Some of them would, for example, be lying on the floor or talking to each other.

In Pre-schools A, B and C the knowledge of the alphabet was further facilitated by the presence of a handwritten alphabet chart stuck on the walls for children to refer to. Although the chart was not frequently referred to during alphabet–related activities, its existence and usefulness while on the wall cannot be overemphasised, as in some ways it provided the children with ongoing exposure to the alphabet.

Unlike the others, Pre-school D provided a variety of activities for learning the alphabet, some of which allowed the children to see the alphabet letters in the context of sample words and pictures. This appeared to have been facilitated by the availability of a factory made alphabetic chart[32], around which the caregivers at the pre-school developed activities. For example, children were involved in identifying alphabet letters and corresponding sounds and pictures. Most of the time the caregivers at Pre-school D called upon the whole group of children to chant the alphabet letters after her before asking individual children to do so.

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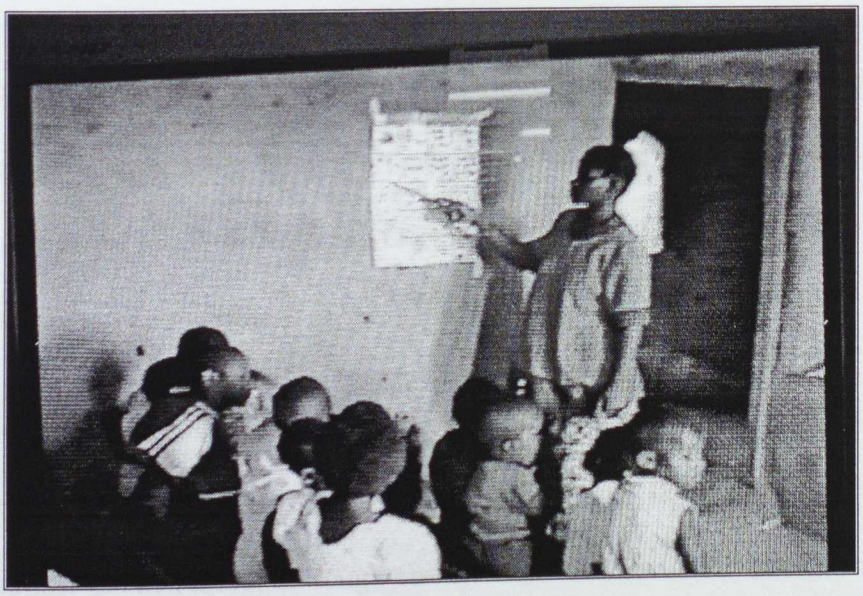
[32] Through interviews with the directors of the pre-school I learnt that this factory made alphabet chart was a donation to the pre-school by some white visitors who came around the area and got into contact with the pre-school directors, who were at that time actively teaching the children (see Chapter 5).

Caregiver	Children
Caregiver asks children to say alphabet letters from an alphabet chart on the wall. She starts: "*A stands for astronaut.....* *B for Bear....*"	Children say after the caregiver the alphabet with corresponding names and pictures: *A stands for astronaut* *B for Bear* *C for Cat* *D for Dog* *E for Everybody* .... *Z for Zebra* Children repeat after the caregiver

[Observation notes on Pre-school D]

Sometimes the caregiver asked small groups of children to draw closer to the alphabet chart to 'read' (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: Children reading an alphabetic chart at Pre-school D



In some ways therefore, the caregiver at Pre-school D provided more opportunities for the children to see the relationships between the alphabet letters, their sounds and examples of words using the letters, rather than just chanting the alphabet letters or

song without any functional context, as was the case in Pre-schools A, B and C. However, the extent to which some of the objects or pictures on the Alphabet Chart (for instance, the term *"astronaut"* etc.) were discussed with the children in order to help them to understand what they stood for raises questions. While such terms may be easy for a child to recognise and understand in a western context, children in the rural areas in Malawi may not easily understand and identify with them, unless some attempt is made by the caregiver to provide some general facts about the term. This raises important contextual issues with regard to the factory-made alphabetic chart itself; although it was a useful tool for enhancing children's knowledge of letters and their sounds, there was need for some casual discussion of some of the objects, pictures or terms, such as who astronauts are. However, this would also depend on the extent to which the caregivers are knowledgeable about some of these scientific terms, bearing in mind that they are volunteers and may not have the necessary confidence or knowledge (see Chapter 5).

Furthermore, in Pre-school D, there was some attempt to help children to distinguish between capital and lower case letters, although this was not done frequently and children were not given much opportunity to practice writing such letters to facilitate their understanding and development of early literacy skills.

From the experiences at Pre-school D, the issue of enhancing knowledge of the alphabet may be in some ways facilitated by the availability of some level of material resources to support the activities, although ability to efficiently utilise such resources for early literacy development cannot be taken for granted. Thus even though Pre-school D attempted to use the factory-made alphabet chart to provide some reasonable variety of activities, it was clear that the caregiver could have done more creative

activities with the chart, such as generating discussion with children on features on the chart.

Generally, in all four pre-schools, not much attempt was made to help children learn the letter sounds. Caregivers were not able to go beyond getting children to chant the alphabet letters and provide some more activities to facilitate the process. Caregivers could have employed other activities for purposes of enhancing children's learning of the alphabet letters such understanding the sounds that letters make, recognising the beginning, middle and final letters in words and syllables. Based on the discussion in Chapter 4, it can be argued that part of the explanation for the caregiver' inability to create alternative activities could be lack of the necessary competence and skills (Chapter 5).

6.3.2 Phonic awareness

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, Phonic Awareness is concerned with the units of speech, such as spoken words, syllables, and sounds. Generally all four pre-schools appeared to provide more opportunities to sing and therefore the possibility of indirectly developing phonic awareness. For instance, in all the four pre-schools the following nursery rhyme was common:

Uko kumwamba, zamadenga
Kuli Mulungu, zamadenga
Uko kutchire, zamadenga
Kuli zirombo, zamadenga
Apa pansi, zamadenga
Pali nyerere, zamadenga
Chorus: moyo moyo...zamadenga
(repeat) [children dance]
..."

Up in heaven there is God
There in the bush are animals
Here on the ground are ants...
(All four Pre-schools)

It can be argued that such general songs allowed children to learn about units of speech such as sounds of syllables and words. In the above song, children learn sounds and words connected to location of objects such as "*here*" and "*there*".

It was only Pre-school D which appeared to provide children with the opportunity to sing or say nursery rhymes or poems in English which were directly linked with phonic awareness. During one of the sessions when a caregiver who had been sitting with toddlers on one side of the classroom was taking her turn to "teach", she started with the first line of the poem/rhyme before the children joined in automatically:

Caregiver:	*Two little birds standing on the wall...*
Children (in a chorus):	*Two little birds standing on the wall*
	One called Peter one called Paul
	Come along Peter, come along Paul
	Come back Peter, come back Paul!!
Caregiver:	Again...
Children (in chorus):	[Repeat as above]

(Pre-school D)

When the caregiver was asked on whether the children understood the contents of the poems/rhyme, which was in English rather than the local language, she explained that to some extent they understood as the caregivers often translated the contents into the local language so that the children knew what they were singing about. However, for the whole period in which Pre-school D was visited, the researcher did not observe the caregivers doing what they claimed. Follow-up interviews indicated that this was done occasionally, especially when they introduced a new poem or song to the children. Furthermore, the researcher did not observe in any of the four pre-schools phonic awareness linked with books that focused on sounds, rhyming and alliteration. Part of the explanation could be lack of material and human resource capacity, to be professionally creative and achieve the objective even if the resources were not

readily available (see Chapter 5) (also see, Chauma *et al*, 1997). Apart from the songs, caregivers did not make a deliberate effort to promote phonic awareness in a direct manner, as is often expected (see Chapter 2). Since language is included as one of the areas in the ECD Syllabus (Chapter 2, and Appendix 9), it is assumed that phonic awareness is taught.

6.3.3 Print awareness

Print awareness ideally requires that the environment is arranged in such a way that children have the opportunity to interact with books and other print materials (see Chapter 2). During visits to the four pre-schools, there seemed to be little effort to facilitate print awareness (Table 6.2).

At Pre-school A, children were not observed interacting with books throughout the period the researcher visited the pre-school. There was no indication that there were books for the children. However, there was a variety of displays on the wall, such as photographs of staff attending board meetings, peer training,[33] handwritten alphabet chart, information on job descriptions of various members of staff of the CBO, information on child labour policy, old calendars, and HIV/AIDS-related posters.

Indirectly, therefore, displays exposed the children to print which was not directly rele vant to them, and the caregivers did not appear to utilise. Except for the alphabet chart, there was no particular point when the researcher saw caregivers utilising any of the displays on the wall to stimulate or facilitate discussion on general life issues that concerned the children, if that was feasible. It is questionable whether the dis-

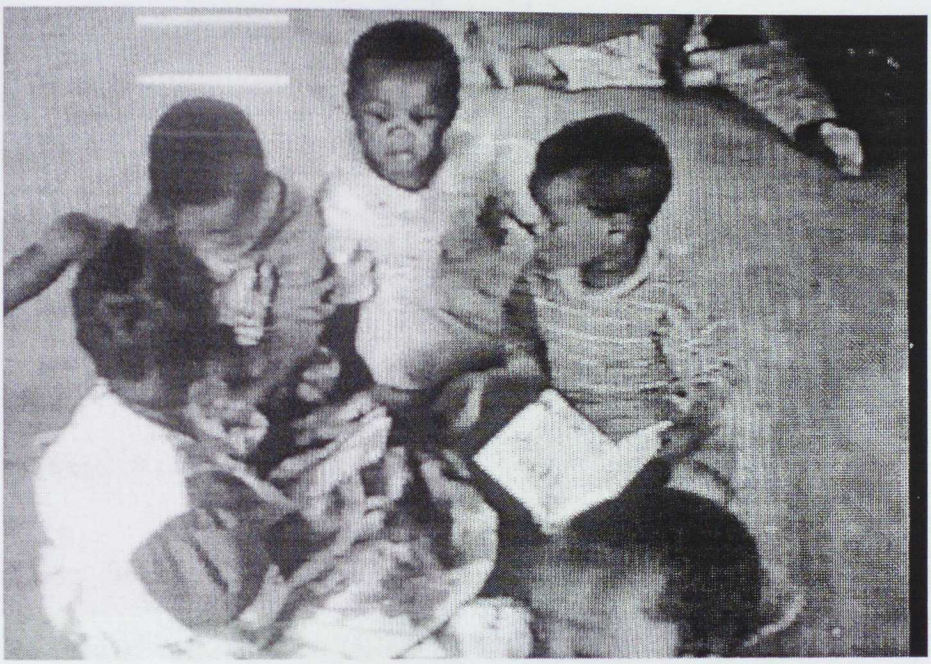
[33] The training was not on pre-school-related issues but other issues in which the CBO as a whole was engaged.

plays were put strategically on the wall to enhance children's early literacy development. Most of the displays in this particular room, being a multipurpose "classroom", often used as an office for the CBO, pertained to other aspects of the CBO than the pre-school.

At Pre-school C, however, there was a handful of books for children (4–8 books), which were kept in a small office within the classroom. The books were only brought out to occupy the children either before assembly (i.e. while waiting for other children to arrive) or during break time, while the caregiver was busy preparing tea (see section 6.1.3). This, of course, provided an opportunity for the children to get exposure to some print. However, the major problem seemed to be lack of strategy on the part of the caregiver to meaningfully help the children draw more from playing with the books. The researcher expected to see children being given some basic guidance related to use of books, such as how to handle them or recognising features (Appendix 9). During follow up interviews with the caregiver, and throughout the study, there were no indications suggesting that the caregiver had done such activities previously to promote print awareness in the children,. Furthermore, in terms of content, the few books did not seem appropriate for the children as they appeared to have been developed for Western contexts and were probably a donation.

The situation at Pre-school C raises the issue of capacity to utilise the few resources that are available to enhance the children's development. In this case despite the fact that the few books were inappropriate, there was still some possibility of enhancing children's print awareness in a more useful way, an opportunity which the caregiver did not seem to notice. This is unfortunate because the children were enthusiastic about the few books that were available (see Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6 Children playing with books during break at Pre-school C



Perhaps for most of the children this was the only opportunity to touch a book, even if it was not relevant to their situation. For instance, during observation of one particular session soon after assembly, the caregiver had expected the children to sit quietly and begin to "learn" as usual. However, to her surprise some of the children rushed for the small pile of books in a corner:

> …Soon after singing national anthem, caregiver gets the children to sit down "properly" in a single row facing her, as usual, girls separated from the boys…. Then some of the girls and one boy rush towards the corner of the room and pick up some of the books they had been looking at before entering the classroom… Caregiver looks disturbed and, while walking towards the "culprits" warns: *"mabukuwo ayi, ndiye kuti simuphunzira bwino…tiyeni bweretsani…"* ["Stop tampering with the books because you will not be concentrating on the lesson"]… She grabs the books from the children and packs them away ….Then goes on to the first activity of the day….tells the children to stand up, jump, walk, run…. ***(Observation notes on Pre-school C)***

It appears that by rushing for the books instead of waiting for the caregiver's planned activities for the day, the children were going against the norm, which the caregiver eventually discouraged by grabbing the books from the children. This was a lost

opportunity to help the children become aware of print as the caregiver could have taken advantage of their interest in the books to advance the print awareness agenda by engaging them in useful activities, such as questioning on pictures. A number of factors could have persuaded the caregiver to behave in the way she did. For instance, this might have been due to her tendency to keep the lesson as structured as possible, as she did in most sessions observed. Furthermore, the researcher's presence in the room might have also influenced the caregiver to ensure things were going on as she had planned instead of allowing unnecessary digressions.

However, bearing in mind that in most cases caregivers generally ensured highly formal and structured 'teaching and learning' environments, it is unlikely that the researcher's presence could have been the major influence. Although when handling children some form of structure may be necessary, in this particular case it reflected lack of professional capacity of the caregiver, especially in understanding that such a highly structured and formal approach is not always appropriate for children to learn and therefore develop. There was thus little print awareness in any of the four pre-schools. Furthermore, where potential existed such as at Pre-school C, it was not exploited by caregivers.

6.3.4 Writing development

As discussed in Chapter 2, writing development in early childhood development involves providing such activities as scribbling, producing letter-like forms, and using invented spelling to write words. It was further argued earlier on that these activities help children to think about the relationship between letters, words and sounds.

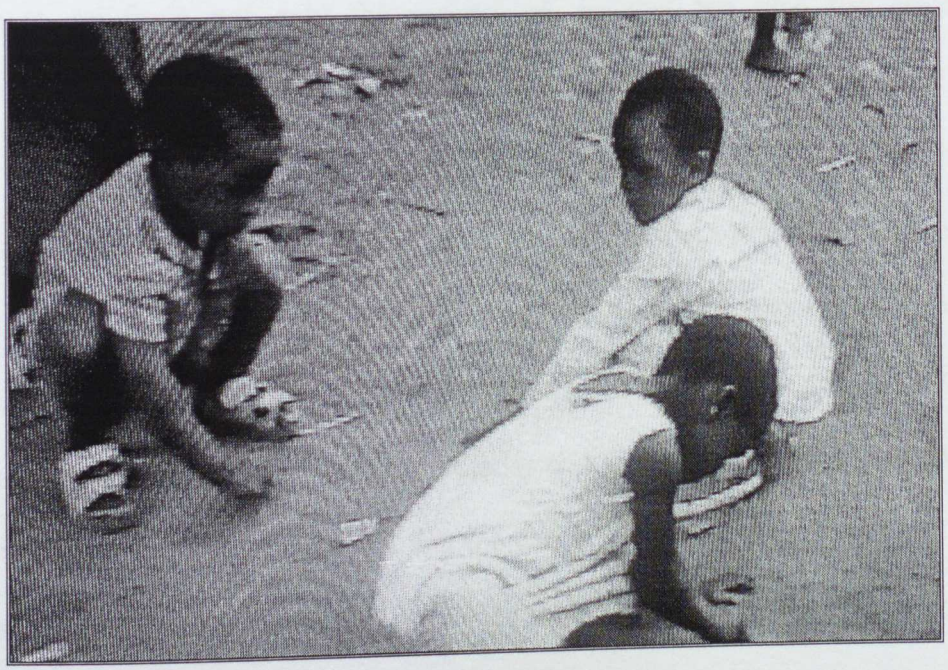
During the limited period in which the researcher visited the four pre-schools, little provision of opportunities directly related to writing development was observed.

Furthermore it seemed that only Pre-schools A and D made direct provision for the development of writing (Table 6.2). Although caregivers at Pre-school B had claimed during interviews that they sometimes involved children in playing with clay, this was not actually observed. Similarly, no writing development opportunities were observed in Pre-school C.

6.3.4.1 Drawing on the ground

As can be seen from Table 6.2, drawing on the ground was only utilised in Pre-school A. This activity took place outside the class and children were asked to draw such objects as cars or people. Drawing on the ground thus provided the children with opportunities to develop their fine motor skills, especially hand-eye coordination and hand movement which are necessary for writing (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7: Children drawing on the ground at Pre-school A



However, sometimes, the caregiver did not follow up on the children's drawings, consequently missing opportunities for facilitating their writing development. The following example took place during one of the sessions at Pre-school A when children were asked to draw cars, and demonstrates how caregivers lost an opportunity to facilitate the development of writing by the children:

> Caregiver announces: ... *Tsopano tijambule galimoto eti? Aliyense ajambule galimoto yake...* [Can we draw a car? Everyone of you draw your car....] Then he sits with two toddlers under the shade of a nearby mango tree as the rest of the children enthusiastically spread over the open space to draw cars] ...then one child (male) draws the attention of the caregiver from some distance: *"Ine ndajambula [galimoto] yanga yaikulu aphunzitsi..."* ["Teacher, I have drawn a very big car"]. While still sitting under the mango tree with the two children [no specific activity with the two children] caregiver responds casually: "Okay".... [but does not go over to see the 'big' car] [or use it to develop discourse skills.] ***(Observation notes on Pre-school A)***

In one way or the other, the fact that the caregiver did not take the initiative to follow up on the "big car" this particular child had drawn meant that he lost a golden opportunity to reinforce not only the process of drawing but also the child's enthusiasm to create and draw. Despite the fact that this was a good writing-related activity the caregiver did not utilise the opportunity to maximise children's learning by interacting with them using their drawings as a basis, bearing in mind that there is always a story behind what children draw. It could be suggested that the caregiver was also attending to the children under the shade of the mango tree and therefore could be excused for not attending to this particular child who had drawn a "big car". However, it was clear during the session that the caregiver had all the opportunity to follow up on what the child had drawn as he was not engaged in any useful activity with the children under the tree, apart from just relaxing with them.

This example again raises the issue of capacity in terms of how much specific professional skills caregivers have, which would help them act appropriately to enhance children's development in a pre-school setting. In this case one could argue that the caregiver did not genuinely see the lost opportunities due to lack of the necessary professional skills to realise and utilise learning opportunities that arise in the process of providing early literacy experiences. Furthermore, there is the issue of staff shortage (Chapter 5). Perhaps this scenario could have been alleviated if this caregiver had other caregivers around to attend to the children who needed specific attention while he was busy with other children.

6.3.4.2 Writing and drawing in the air

This activity was frequently utilised by both Pre-schools A and D during the observations (see Table 6.2). In addition, the activity took place in the classroom rather than outside and involved caregivers asking the children to write numbers or draw circles in the air. Usually it was very short, and often used alongside other activities such as counting numbers. At Pre-school D, as the children wrote/drew in the air, they chanted: *"A circle is round like a tyre"*. Similarly, while drawing a square or a circle in the air, the children sang a square/circle rhyme:

> *Draw a square/circle in the air ...in the air...[hand clap 3 times]...x 2*
> *Put your hands up in the air...in the air...[hand clap 3 times]...x 2*
> **[Pre-school D]**

Apart from helping the children with hand movement as they drew or wrote in the air, this activity helped them develop their imaginative thinking, which in some ways is connected to the writing process in general. However, caregivers seemed not to go beyond drawing circles and squares or writing one number in the air. Extending such

an activity to draw other imaginary objects would have provided more opportunities for the children to develop in this area.

6.3.4.3 Direct teaching of writing using the chalkboard

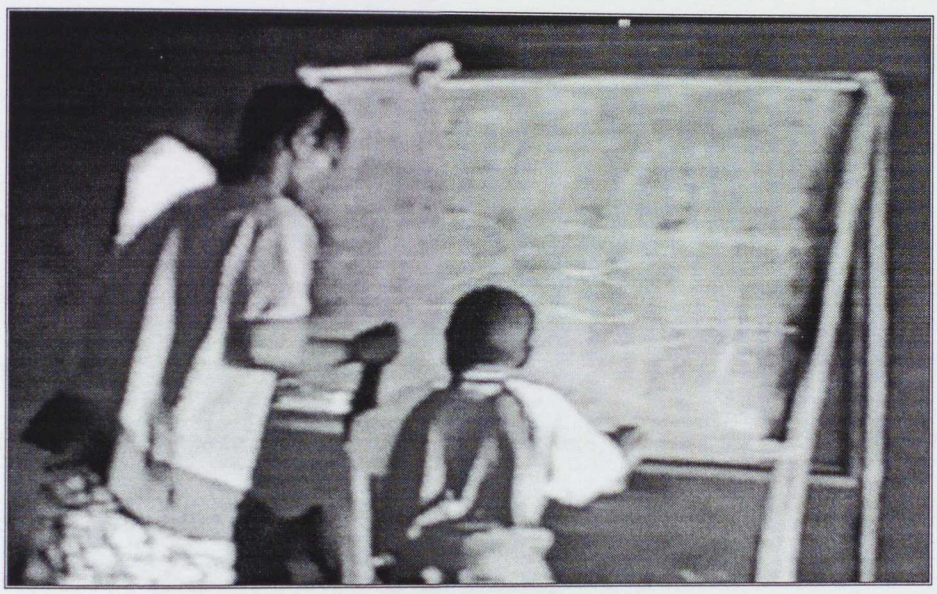
Unlike in Pre-schools A, B, and C, caregivers at Pre-school D formally and directly taught children how to write numbers and letters on the chalkboard (Table 6.2). After explaining and then demonstrating how to write a number or letter on the chalkboard, caregivers often gave individual children opportunities to write numbers or letters on the chalkboard (Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8: A child writing numbers 1-20 on the chalkboard at Pre-school D

The caregivers physically helped and trained individual children to write or draw on the chalkboard especially if they had problems or they were too young (Figure 6.9). It was observed that the majority of the children were enthusiastic to be given the opportunity to write or draw on the chalkboard. However, the temptation to get every child to have a chance to write every time meant that the activity often became

unnecessarily prolonged and hence made the rest of the children bored and restless. Therefore there was a need for learning areas and rotation of groups from one to another to ensure that the children were kept meaningfully busy.

Figure 6.9: Caregiver helping a child to write numbers on the chalkboard



Other than getting individual children to write on the chalkboard, the caregiver did not consider ways of capitalising on their enthusiasm to practice writing. Again, just as in the other situations discussed in previous sections, this was was another opportunity to meaningfully engage as many children as possible in writing development by providing alternative means. For instance, in the absence of writing materials such as pencil and paper[34] (see Chapter 5), instead of trying to get each one of the 18 children to write on the chalkboard, it would have been more effective to take the children outside and let them write down the numbers and letters on the ground. Alternatively, the group could have been split so that half was in class and the other half outside to

write on the ground. The two groups would then rotate accordingly. This would have reinforced what the caregivers had demonstrated on the chalkboard. Furthermore, it would also have given the enthusiastic children more opportunities to practice writing.

Another issue is the extent to which toddlers who were in this group were benefiting from this direct teaching of writing, bearing in mind that they were just too young to follow and could not handle a piece of chalk properly to write on the chalkboard. It should be mentioned that although there were generally few toddlers in all the pre-schools, meeting their learning needs raised a lot of challenges in the context of the older children. In all the four pre-schools, some of the early literacy activities catered for the older children rather than the toddlers. It was also evident that although some of the children coped reasonably well with the activities, the toddlers' needs in terms of early literacy development were not being prioritised. The caregivers assumed that the toddlers would be picking up things in the process.

However, it can be argued that this put the toddlers at a disadvantage in terms of early stimulation as most of the time learning experiences were focused on the older children. In most cases, the toddlers would just be picked up or left to roam around the rooms, without alternative activities designed for them. On a few occasions, however, the toddlers were involved, especially when it came to singing nursery rhymes and physical activities such as jumping and clapping hands. As discussed in Chapter 5, important questions need to be asked as to whether in a situation where the human and material capacity is low, this arrangement where toddlers are mixed with older children is really achieving the intentions for which the pre-schools were

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[34] Interestingly, the directors of the pre-school had earlier on indicated that they had been given a donation of pencils and other writing materials which they were keeping at home due to lack of storage space at the borrowed premises.

established, namely holistic development of the children, as has been assumed in the national ECD policy (Chapter 2).

6.3.4.4 Moulding clay

Moulding clay helps children to develop their fine motor skills, especially hand-eye co-ordination, and hand movements, which are important for future development of writing skills. Moulding clay as a learning experience was mentioned at Pre-school B (see Table 6.2). Although the researcher did not actually observe the caregivers using the activity, they claimed during interviews that they often asked children to bring clay to the pre-school to facilitate their learning:

> *...Komanso pena timatha kuwauza [ana] kuti katengeni dongo...tizisewerera monga ana, eya, kuti nthawi izikhala ngati ikupita ndithu ....Akamaomba dongo lija uku...achaeni akewo akusewera...*
> [Sometimes we instruct the children to bring clay to pre-school so that we can play with it ...so that we can also "kill" the time. When they mould the clay it is also part of their play...] **(CPscB2)**

Although the clay is a locally available resource, it is questionable whether children really brought it to pre-school for learning purposes. Such an activity may not be employed frequently when it depends on whether the children bring the clay to pre-school or not. This argument could be extended to the parents and guardians of the children who are likely to bear the responsibility for actually collecting the clay for their children to take to the pre-school the following morning. In such a case it would depend on whether the parents and guardians specifically regard an extra task as a priority among the activities they engage in at home, as well as whether they generally prioritise pre-schooling. As has been discussed in Chapter 5, the community is not involved in actual learning experiences in the four pre-schools, and therefore it is unlikely that some pre-school requests are being followed.

In the interviews the researcher was also particularly interested to learn the extent to which caregivers were aware of any links between moulding clay and the child's learning in general, and one of the caregivers at Pre-school B explained:

> *...kuomba dongo kumene kuja kumakhala kuti mwana uja mumpatseko kachidwi koti azitha kuzindikira kuti tikati chakuti chimaoneka mwakuti. Ndiye kuti ngati mutawauza kuti ... "tikufuna lero tiwombe mbalame". Ndiye kuti iye uja azikhala ndi chidwi choti kodi paja mbalame imaoneka bwanji? Ndikuyamba... kuomba; ndiye kuti ngati muzitchula zimenezizi, tsiku lina muzatchula china, mukaomba azadziwa kuti paja chimaoneka mwakuti? Muzaona kuti...akuchitulutsa tsopano...akuchitulutsa. Ndimbali imodzi yoti maganizo awo aziganiza kuti chakutinso ndichofunikira ...ndizidziwa mmene chimaonekera...*
> [...Playing with clay helps children to develop interest in things within the environment. When we tell them to mould something like a bird, the children are stimulated and begin to think about the features of a bird before they mould it. Therefore the more practice the children are given to mould particular objects, the more accurate they become about the objects they mould. All this is part of stimulating the children to think about the appearance of things around them....] **(CPscB3)**

Thus generally the caregivers at the pre-school knew the benefits of the moulding activity, especially with regard to intellectual development and expressive skills of the children. It also appears that through this activity children learn more about the environment to some extent, especially as they mould familiar objects around them. It can therefore be argued that moulding clay helps the caregivers to appeal to other learning areas in the ECD syllabus apart from language. For instance, creative expression, environmental education, and social and interpersonal skills. The caregivers, however, did not make any links to early literacy development, even after being asked during interviews. This emphasises the need to get caregivers to understand and appreciate the benefits of using some of these activities with the children in the pre-school setting. Having such knowledge at the back of their minds can make a big difference in the way caregivers use the activities.

6.3.4.5 Building blocks

This activity was used at Pre-school A, where children were using bricks and stones to build blocks of "houses" and cattle "kraal," among other things. The bricks and stones were not necessarily organised by the caregivers but children would just pick them up from all over the open place outside the classroom. In fact when this activity was observed, there was no particular set up by the caregivers and they generally got the children to do this as a gap-filler as they were about to go for break. Consequently, there was no supervision or follow up of any kind to facilitate the children's learning. Of course it can also be argued that sometimes children need to be left alone to do things without the teacher interfering, to allow them to develop a sense of independence, but it is doubtful whether this was by design on the part of the caregivers.

6.3.5 Oral language skills

As discussed in Chapter 2, the development of oral language skills deals with the building of the child's vocabulary as well as understanding of the use and conventions of spoken language. This last key component in early literacy development appeared to be the most favoured in the four pre-schools. Consequently the similarities in provision of early literacy experiences in the four pre-schools were largely linked to oral language development (Table 6.3).

Some speculations could be made on why most of the learning experiences provided by the four pre-schools were geared towards the development of oral language skills. One reason could be that caregivers found it far easier to deal with activities related to oral language skills than the other key components in early literacy development, given the low human and material capacity in the four pre-schools as discussed in the

Table 6.3: Major activities for oral language skills development and pre-schools which employed them

Activities	Pre-schools which employed the activities
Singing	All
Exploratory questions	B
Calendar	All
Self-introduction	All
Vocabulary learning	All
Games	A, B, D
Distinguishing sound levels	A
Story telling	B
Direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences in Chichewa	C

previous sections. The fact that caregivers seemed to miss opportunities that arose in the process of providing some of the early literacy experiences in the key components addressed in the previous sections suggests that caregivers were not confident in dealing with other strategies for the development of early literacy skills in pre-school settings.

Similarly having few teaching and learning materials at hand might have limited the caregivers' ability to use related early literacy development activities to address the other four key components discussed in the previous sections. Furthermore, the caregivers' capacity to think creatively and use locally available resources cannot be taken for granted especially considering that they were volunteers who had little or no professional knowledge and skills to handle children in pre-school settings (see Chapter 5).

It seems therefore that the employment of many experiences related to the development of oral language skills was a consequence of many factors, which directly and indirectly have implications for the nature of early literacy development opportunities provided in the four pre-schools. Whether the situation was by design or

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not, the emphasis on the oral language skills is important for children to build early literacy skills, especially when considering the linkages between language and literacy at this early stage; that language is a prerequisite for literacy development (see Chapter 2).

6.3.5.1 Singing nursery rhymes and general songs

Throughout the observation period singing was one of the activities most frequently used by caregivers in all four pre-schools. In follow-up interviews when the caregivers were asked whether they saw any linkages between singing and oral language development, they explained that as the children sang the songs they were at the same time practising their speech skills. Overall, it appeared that caregivers allowed children to sing the songs for general vocabulary development, learning alphabet letters, learning to count, and prayer (see Box 6.1). The following songs[35] from the four pre-schools demonstrate this pattern:

Manja mmwamba	Hands up
Manja pa mutu...	Hands on head
Manja mmapewa...	Hands on shoulders
Manja pa mimba...	Hands on abdomen
Manja mchiuno...	Hands on the waist
Manja mmawondo...	Hands on knees
Manja mapazi...	Hands on foot
	(Pre-school A - Vocabulary development - parts of the body)

Pamchenga timatero posewera	This is how we play on the sand
Ichi nchiani?	What is this?
a, ..e...i...o...u	a, e, i, o, u]
	(Pre-school C - on alphabet and vowels in Chichewa)

[35] Appendix 6 presents a catalogue of the songs and rhymes that were frequently sung during visits to the four pre-schools.

Ife ndife tiana, tiana tochepa *Timadziwa kuwerenga...1, 2, 3, 4...10*	We are little children We know how to read /count 1 to 10 ***(All Pre-schools – on counting)***

o Yo Ye little children We know how

Tiyamike dziko labwino	Let us thank God for the wonderful earth
Tiyamike mbalame zoyimba	Let us thank God for the birds that sing
Tiyamike Mulungu wa zinthu zonse	Let us thank God, the owner of everything
Tiyamike Mulungu wathu Amen	Let us thank our God, Amen ***(All Pre-schools on prayer)***

In some cases, however, singing was used as a gap-filler, and even as a means of controlling the children, especially if they were restless and uncooperative. It was further observed that in such cases the caregivers often gave the children the chance to decide what song(s) they would like to sing, and at times one of the children would lead the singing. This was good in some ways, as it allowed children to choose what interested them most and therefore stimulated them to draw from or refer to familiar songs from their homes in the process. For instance, at Pre-school D, when children on a particular day were temporarily spending part of the morning under a mango tree outside the classroom (church building),[36] there seemed to be less structured activities for them and therefore some of the children on their own started singing and dancing [with a lot of clapping and shaking their bodies in excitement] to the following song:

Achimwene..iii... *Achimwene abwera x2* *Amayi asiye kuphika nandolo...*	We are happy that brother has come so we will eat fish, and mum will stop cooking pigeon peas

[36] This was a Thursday and the researcher learnt from the caregiver that the Women's Guild for the church used the premises from 10.00 am. This meant that the children had to spend the remaining part of the morning outside the classroom, and on this day they were under a mango tree nearby.

iii...Tidye nsomba **(Pre-school D)**
Amayi asiye kuphika nandolo...
iii...Tidye nsomba

A similar situation was also observed at Pre-school B, where caregivers appeared to have run out of ideas after break, so they engaged the children in a lot of singing while waiting to finish the day's activities. Specifically, caregivers led children to sing and dance a number of wedding songs such as the following:

Kwa Kabuni[37] *lero kwatelera* At Kabuni, the celebrations are at the peak
Waza-waza, woye-woye
Waza-waza
Wa! Wa! Wa!
(Pre-school B)

A Kabuni tinyade x2 People of Kabuni in Zomba District, let us celebrate and enjoy ourselves]
Yo Yo Yo a Kabuni tinyade
Kwa- ani
Kabuni mboma la Zomba
(Pre-school B)

Interestingly, two of the children were responsible for beating 'drums' (tins) in the middle of the circle as the other children danced around the two drummers.

Although the singing was done as a gap-filler, to some extent it was very useful as a means of helping children link home and pre-school experiences. That may explain why at some point during the singing some children naturally took over leading the songs from the caregivers. Furthermore, the singing and dancing also provided useful opportunities for physical, emotional and social development as they interacted in the clapping and dancing, and more importantly sharing the excitement associated with the messages in the songs. This suggests that pre-schoolers can draw a lot from home experiences and bring them into the pre-school setting, provided there is more

[37] Pseudonym for the village in which Pre-school B is located.

flexibility and less structure in the way learning experiences are provided within the pre-school environment (see also Chapter 2).

6.3.5.2 Exploratory questions

Although caregivers in all the pre-schools asked children some basic questions about their affairs, this strategy was particularly used by caregivers from Pre-school B. During in-depth interviews, caregivers at Pre-school B explained that they used this activity for purposes of getting the children into the lesson as well as identifying their emotional and physical state at the beginning of the day. In addition, caregivers argued that as children responded to questions, they were at the same time developing their oral language skills. One of the caregivers explained what they often did:

> *Tikakhala kuti tayamba kuphunzitsa ,ndiye kuti chachidziwikire kuti tiwapatsa* "Good morning"*, nanga siazidziwa ka chizungu pang'ono. Mwina pamene paja tikatha* "good morning" *tiwapempheretsa, azidziwabe kuti kupempheranso...ndikwabwino....Ndiye poona kuti sanachangamukebe ndiye umayambano kufunsa zimene awona munsewu muja tsopano: "mwaona zotani zotani?" Ndiye aliyense azinena zimene wazionazo. Chabwino, akamaliza pamene paja kuona kuti sanachangamukebe maganizobe ali kunyumba: "iwe wadya chani ...iwe wadya chani...."? Ndiye kuti ukawafunsa zazakudya zija, udziwabe kuti uyu wanena kuti paja sanadye, mwina wangoti phee njala ikumuwawa. Ameneyu mwakutimwakuti, umatha kudziwa kuti paja muja timafunsamu anati mwakutimwakuti, uyu anayankha zakuti, uyu anayankha zakuti....Uyu pamene akuchangamukiramu paja ananena kuti wadya zakuti zakuti...*
> [...When we start teaching we first greet the children, "Good morning" so that they should know some English. This is followed by a prayer, to help them to realise the importance of prayer. If by this time the children are still not into the lesson, we start asking them questions with regard to what they saw on their way to school. If this does not help either, we ask further questions on what they had for breakfast that morning. All this helps us identify those children who have not eaten something and hence appreciate their passiveness or activeness during lessons. For example, if the child sits quietly we know they are hungry, especially if they had earlier on indicated that they did not have breakfast before coming to pre-school...] **(CPscB2)**

The idea of asking exploratory questions was interesting, as there were often possibilities to achieve authentic interaction between the caregivers and the children,

since the children were stimulated to talk about personal experiences. However, it was observed that in most cases caregivers only asked very simple questions which did not elicit talk from the children. During one of the sessions in which such questions were asked, the following interaction between the caregiver and the children took place:

Caregiver: *Fainess, unaona chani munjira?*	Caregiver: Fainess, what did you see on your way to pre-school?
Fainess: *Njinga*	Fainess: Bicycle
Caregiver: *Njinga...nanga Rebecca unaona chani?*	Caregiver: Bicycle...what about Rabecca, what did you see?
Rebecca: *Galimoto*	Rebecca: A car
Caregiver: *Falida, unaona chani?*	Caregiver: Falida, what did you see?
Falida: *Njinga*	Falida: Bicycle
Caregiver: *James, unaona chani?*	Caregiver: James, what did you see?
	(Pre-school B)

Such a superficial 'conversation' with the children will not have meant much to them in terms of opportunities to express themselves, thereby building on their language skills. Given the large numbers of children, the caregivers were making every effort to get every child involved in the activity every day, which was not necessary if within each week every child had at least one such opportunity. This raises the question of practicality in terms of the caregivers' claims about the use of exploratory questions for diagnostic purposes. For instance, one wonders to what extent the caregivers really managed to assess every child at the beginning of the session, and whether this really achieved the purposes for those exploratory questions.

6.3.5.3 Calendar

This activity was very common in all the four pre-schools and mainly involved getting the children to recite the seven days of the week and the twelve months of the year. Although there were some differences in activities built around the calendar, children were generally called upon to chant in chorus the seven days and then move

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Fainess:	*Njinga*	Fainess:	Bicycle
Caregiver:	*Njinga...nanga Rebecca unaona chani?*	Caregiver:	Bicycle…what about Rabecca, what did you see?
Rebecca:	*Galimoto*	Rebecca:	A car
Caregiver:	*Falida, unaona chani?*	Caregiver:	Falida, what did you see?
Falida:	*Njinga*	Falida:	Bicycle
Caregiver:	*James, unaona chani?*	Caregiver:	James, what did you see?
			(Pre-school B)

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on to the twelve months of the year. This was followed by individual children taking turns to say the calendar. In all four pre-schools, caregivers directly instructed children to say the days of the week, in most cases by simply making an announcement as in the following extract from observation notes during the beginning of one of the daily sessions at one of the pre-schools:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver tells all children to sit down [on a mat at the centre of the room] and instructs them:	Children sit on the mat and fold their arms [because they seem to know it is time to learn]
"Aliyense apinde manja nthawi yotani ino...yophunzira" [Everyone must now fold their arms/hands because it is now time to learn].	Children respond and chant in a chorus *"Seven days make a week... Sunday...Monday ... Tuesday ... Wednesday... Thursday...Friday, and SATURDAY!"*
Then standing in front of them caregiver announces: "Days of the week… How many days make a week?	
Asks individual children to take turns to chant days of the week beginning with "Sunday", e.g. *"John, stand up...how many days make a week? Start from Sunday..."*	Then individual children mention the seven days of the week. Some do it correctly while others skip some of the days and are corrected by the caregiver. Children give feedback to those who say the days, even if they do not do it perfectly: "Well done, well done…John"
Caregiver encourages children to give feedback: "Well done, well done…John"	Children chant seven days of the week in a chorus
At the end caregiver asks all children to chant seven days of the week in chorus	

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

Unlike the other pre-schools, Pre-school D, extended the calendar activities, especially those dealing with days of the week by using some context to facilitate

learning. The following extract from the middle of one of the sessions demonstrates this:

Caregiver	Children
Caregiver announces: *"Days of the week...Seven days make a week... Sunday..."*	Children mention the seven days of the week, *Seven days make a week:... Sunday...Monday ... Tuesday ... Wednesday... Thursday...Friday, and SATURDAY!"* *On Monday we go to school,* *On Tuesday we go to school* *On Wednesday we go to school* *On Thursday we go to school* *On Friday we go to school* *On Saturday and Sunday we play at home*

[Observation notes on Pre-school D]

Apart from the days of the week, this activity could have been strengthened further by engaging the children in other calendar related expansions, such as months for planting, weeding, harvesting; months when there is more sun, wind or rain. This would have provided more context, eventually allowing for more meaningful development of oral language skills.

6.3.5.4 Self-introduction

As a way of helping children to improve oral language skills, caregivers in all four pre-schools regulary used a 'self-introduction' activity in which children were asked to introduce themselves in English by mentioning their full name (first and second names), age, sex, where they lived (village), and where they learnt:

My name is John,
I am a boy, I am 3 years old
I live in Y Village
I learn at Z nursery school
[All pre-schools]

In most cases individual children just memorised the statements and chanted them when given the opportunity to introduce themselves. None of the pre-schools asked the children to introduce themselves in the local language, even if a particular child struggled to introduce themselves in English. For instance, at Pre-school A, one child had just joined the pre-school that day and was being asked to introduce himself in English as the others had done. The child could not say anything until the caregiver spent sometime drilling him to say the introduction in English:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver announces: "Time for introduction". Calls upon individual children: "*Say your introduction – what is your name... where do you live...how old are you?*". The activity continues until every child "says" his or her *self-introduction*.... After some time the caregiver is now finding it difficult to get the children to concentrate on other children as they introduce themselves...	Individual children "say" their introduction: I am X ... I live at Y village...I am Z years old". Most of the children are lying on the mat, seemingly uninterested. Three have moved away from the mat and are playing with one of the chairs in a corner as the caregiver continues to call individual children to say their introduction.... One child who seems to have just joined the pre-school school today is called upon to say his introduction but does not respond to the caregiver's questions. He does not seem to know what to say until the caregiver leads him statement by statement ...

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

Although this was happening in a context in which the caregiver was trying to help the child learn English, the main idea should have been to get the children to talk, regardless of the language, rather than getting them to struggle with English.[38] For instance, the children could be called on to introduce other children within the group to allow more talk. As discussed in Chapter 5, this seems to reflect general

[38] The subject being taught though, at this stage, was English.

community attitudes towards the role of pre-schools and English in schooling, rather than genuine desire to help children learn English.

6.3.5.5 Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning was another frequent activity in the four pre-schools. This mostly involved learning common English words and was often done in association with some action. During visits to the four pre-schools, it was observed that caregivers generally focused on basic vocabulary such as *sitting, standing, walking, jumping, running, eating, sleeping.* In addition, they often began by demonstrating one of the English words and the children followed suit until most of the basic words were covered:

> [All this accompanied by appropriate action]
> *We are sitting down*
> *We are standing*
> *We are walking*
> *We are jumping....*
> ***[All Pre-schools]***

It was interesting that, when facilitating the vocabulary associated with food and drink caregivers at Pre-school A got the children to role play eating and drinking by providing them with plates and cups. The children sat in small groups pretending to eat and drink together while chanting "We are eating...we are drinking…."

Although the children were saying the words in English, the organisation of this activity allowed for the children to link what they were doing with their home experiences about sharing food. As is discussed in subsection 6.3.5.6, sometimes caregivers used games to enhance the children's basic vocabulary in English, although they did not favour such activities in all four pre-schools.

6.3.5.6 Games

In all four pre-schools, games were used to some extent, although Pre-schools A, B and D seemed to use more games than Pre-school C. In addition, Pre-school A used more elaborate games than the other three pre-schools. During visits to Pre-school A, it was observed that in several sessions, caregivers used a lot of circle games. A typical circle game was entitled *Fisi waphwanya khola* (Hyena has broken the kraal). In the game, children were required to run in a single file within a circle ensuring that they did not step out of it. If any of the participants stepped out of the circle they were disqualified from the game as they were regarded as "hyena" that had broken the kraal. The following is an extract from the description of the game:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver takes children outside and draws a circle on the ground, and asks children to get inside. They play a circle game called *"Fisi waphwanya khola"* [Hyena has broken the kraal]. The game involves the children running within the circle. Any child who steps outside the circle is disqualified from the game *(Fisi waphwanya khola).* They do this until one person (Champion) remains in the cirle. Caregiver begins song as she runs around within the circle together with the children: *Fisiyo fisiyo – hee!* *Waphwanya khola...* (Hyena has broken the kraal)	Children play circle game. They run around within the circle while singing: *Fisiyo fisiyo – hee-Waphwanya khola* (Hyena has broken the kraal) Those who step out of the circle are disqualified from the game and stand outside the circle still singing, until only the caregiver and one child remain running around in the circle. It takes some time to see who the champion is. Then the child looking tired, steps out of the circle and is disqualified and the caregiver is the champion

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

Another circle game at Pre-school A involved children sitting in a circle with two small stones in their hands which they quickly passed on to the persons squatting next

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In all four pre-schools, games were used to some extent, although Pre-schools A, B and D seemed to use more games than Pre-school C. In addition, Pre-school A used more elaborate games than the other three pre-schools. During visits to Pre-school A, it was observed that in several sessions, caregivers used a lot of circle games. A typical circle game was entitled *Fisi waphwanya khola* (Hyena has broken the kraal). In the game, children were required to run in a single file within a circle ensuring that they did not step out of it. If any of the participants stepped out of the circle they were disqualified from the game as they were regarded as "hyena" that had broken the kraal. The following is an extract from the description of the game:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver takes children outside and draws a circle on the ground, and asks children to get inside. They play a circle game called *"Fisi waphwanya khola"* [Hyena has broken the kraal]. The game involves the children running within the circle. Any child who steps outside the circle is disqualified from the game *(Fisi waphwanya khola).* They do this until one person (Champion) remains in the cirle. Caregiver begins song as she runs around within the circle together with the children: *Fisiyo fisiyo – hee!* *Waphwanya khola...* (Hyena has broken the kraal)	Children play circle game. They run around within the circle while singing: *Fisiyo fisiyo – hee-Waphwanya khola* (Hyena has broken the kraal) Those who step out of the circle are disqualified from the game and stand outside the circle still singing, until only the caregiver and one child remain running around in the circle. It takes some time to see who the champion is. Then the child looking tired, steps out of the circle and is disqualified and the caregiver is the champion

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

Another circle game at Pre-school A involved children sitting in a circle with two small stones in their hands which they quickly passed on to the persons squatting next

to them as they sang together. The idea of this game was to ensure that the stones, or any object that may be used, are circulated around the group. This meant that every child in the circle needed to be alert in order to pass on and receive a new stone or object from the person sitting next to them. The following is the description of the event during the session:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver instructs children to hold each other's hands and form a circle and says: *"Bwalo likule..."* ["Extend the circle"] Then instructs children to collect stones and then squat to play game. Caregiver starts a song while hitting the ground with the two stones in his hands: *"Ogode...ogode..."*	Children sing while in a circle: *"Bwalo likule bwalo likule Charles"* Then children play game. They sing the song while hitting the ground with two stones in their hands before passing them onto the children next to them during the chorus: *Ogode ...ogode...* *Ena aphika nyama...* *Ena aphika thelele...* *Ena aphika nyemba, etc* *Chikati gwegwerere...* *Chili kwa iwe* (repeatedly) [Some are cooking meat, others ocra, others beans, etc]

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

Again apart from providing fun, the game was a good context for the children to interact and informally talk to each other, thereby developing their oral language skills. Similarly, the games allowed for children's development of psychomotor skills, especially co-ordination: control of fingers and hands, which are linked to the development of writing.

A common game that was used in all four pre-schools was called *"Follow the leader"*. In this game, the caregiver led the children to do certain actions, expecting

everyone to follow the instructions, such as walking, running, sitting, jumping, among others. At times the caregiver would let one child be the leader and the others would follow the instructions:

Leader: *Follow-Follow-Follow* [while walking, running, etc]
Children: *Follow the leader* [with action following the leader's actions]
Leader: *I jump-I jump-I jump*
Children: *I jump-I jump-I jump*
Leader: *Follow-Follow-Follow*
Children: *Follow the leader*
Leader: *I run-I run-I run*
Children: *I run-I run-I run .....*
(All four pre-schools)

Games thus provided a wide range of opportunities in all the four development aspects of the growing child. To some extent they linked well with early literacy development through the provision of more opportunities for oral language skills development. Games enhanced children's learning of basic vocabulary in English, much as those other activities discussed in the previous section. In other words, games provided a good stimulus and context for informal conversation among children and also with the caregivers. Furthermore, the fact that children had to follow rules for the games meant that there were gains in intellectual development which would form the basis for the development of skills in future, such as learning to follow basic rules for reading and writing. Generally in sessions where games were used by caregivers, children were enthusiastically and actively engaged as they combined learning with play (see Chapter 2). This is another occasion where the caregivers addressed the ECD syllabus learning areas (see Chapter 2).

Unfortunately, as discussed in the previous sections, some of the pre-schools involved in the study did not maximise the use of games despite the many advantages they seemed to bring about. One wonders whether this was mere oversight by the

caregivers or genuine lack of ideas about the sort of games to use, and therefore the tendency to deliberately lay that aside and concentrate on activities that appeared easy to use.

6.3.5.7 Distinguishing sound levels

This activity was used at Pre-school A only (Table 6.2). The activity involved children distinguishing sound levels produced upon beating a tin when objects such as stones, bottle tops, and water were placed in it. Children were then asked to indicate whether the sound was loud or soft before and after placing the objects in the tin:

Caregiver	**Children**
Caregiver (female) is in the open space and squats with children in a circle. She asks each child to collect a stone and place it in a tin in the middle of the circle and asks them how much noise their stone makes: "low or high sound". Asks children to squat and puts bottle tops incrementally into the tin and shakes. Asks children to describe the strength of the sound after each shake. ....Puts water into a cup. She asks children to form circle – hold each others' hands. Then asks them to distinguish the sounds when she hits the tin (empty) and the cup (filled with water). She repeats the process with empty cup and tin with water.	Each child collects stones and puts it in the tin and then shakes the tin and describes the sound – high or low Children listen and describe the level of the sound, giving reasons, e.g. "because you have put into the tin more bottle tops". Children listen and describe the sound level, giving reasons, e.g. "because you have put water into the cup."

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

The fact that children were asked to distinguish the sound levels and then give reasons meant that they were given the opportunity to express themselves and hence develop

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Asks children to squat and puts bottle tops incrementally into the tin and shakes. Asks children to describe the strength of the sound after each shake.	Children listen and describe the level of the sound, giving reasons, e.g. "because you have put into the tin more bottle tops".
....Puts water into a cup. She asks children to form circle – hold each others' hands. Then asks them to distinguish the sounds when she hits the tin (empty) and the cup (filled with water). She repeats the process with empty cup and tin with water.	Children listen and describe the sound level, giving reasons, e.g. "because you have put water into the cup."

[Observation notes on Pre-school A]

The fact that children were asked to distinguish the sound levels and then give reasons meant that they were given the opportunity to express themselves and hence develop

their oral language skills. Similarly such an activity also helped the children develop scientific knowledge and skills.

6.3.5.8 Story telling

During visits to the four pre-schools the researcher did not observe any of the caregivers telling stories to the children. However, caregivers at Pre-school B indicated that they sometimes told simple stories to the children as part of the learning process. They further reported that most of the stories were told in Chichewa and were part of oral tradition. Since it was not possible to see caregivers actually telling the children stories, and therefore appreciate the role the children played during such sessions, it is difficult to speculate on the extent to which the story-telling sessions facilitated the development of children's oral language skills. Given that in all four pre-schools activities were often repeated on a daily basis, one wonders to what extent story-telling was used within Pre-school B as there was no attempt at least once or twice during visits to use such an activity. However, as has been discussed earlier on, given the fact that the researcher was not in the pre-schools all the time (see Chapter 3) it would not be fair to jump to conclusions on the extent story telling was employed in all four pre-schools.

Nevertheless, within the limitations of the findings, this suggests that there is underutilisation of story-telling in the pre-schools, although as discussed in Chapter 3, story telling is one of the most powerful techniques for helping children to develop early literacy skills in pre-schools. As argued in Chapter 2, story-telling is part of the oral traditions in Malawi and therefore one would expect that caregivers would use it to the full within the pre-school setting. This raises further questions with regard to

the priorities of caregivers in the four pre-schools in terms of the type of learning experiences they choose to emphasise and the reasons.

6.3.5.9 Direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences in Chichewa

At Pre-school C, there was a lot of direct teaching of vowels, syllables, words and short sentences, mostly in Chichewa. These were written on a chart and children were called upon individually or as a group to "read" after the caregiver. Generally the caregiver started with the vowels, syllables, words and then short sentences containing the words and syllables previously read. The caregiver first read out each aspect and then would ask all the children to "read" after her in a chorus, before giving individual children the chance to do the same. Finally the caregiver would try and get individual children to read on their own, but from observation this proved difficult for the children. The caregiver therefore often had to drill individual children. The following is an extract from observation of one of the sessions and might help to explain what seemed to be common practice by the caregiver:

Caregiver	**Children**
….Caregiver then straightens an old flip chart stuck on the wall [it seems it has been there for a long time as some of the writing is fading]. On the flip chart are written five Chichewa vowels (a, e, i, o, u); and syllables follow. Caregiver points at each one of these aspects and asks children to read along.	In chorus children "read" after caregiver and, chant as caregiver reads out Chichewa vowels (a, e, i, o, u); and then syllables (in the order below): *ma, me, mi, mo, mu* *na, ne ni, no, nu* *ka, ke, ki, ko, ku* *ta, te, ti, to, tu* *sa, se, si, so, su* *fa, fe, fi, fo, fu* *wa, we, wi, wo, wu,* *ga, ge, gi, go, gu* Individual children "read" along until everyone is given chance to "read"….Only one girl has been able to read the above vowels without much assistance from the teacher – she seems to have been at the nursery school for some time unlike the

	others who are being assisted throughout
Caregiver goes on to read out short sentences for children to "read" along as follows: *Onani amayi* *Onani agogo* *Onani atate* Then calls for individual children to "read" as she points to the short sentences using a stick….	In chorus children "read" short sentences after caregiver: *Onani amayi* *Onani agogo* *Onani atate* At this stage most of the children are not concentrating as individual children "read" alongside the caregiver.

[Observation notes on Pre-school C]

A number of issues arise from the above activity. There is the question of the level and suitability of content children are exposed to at this pre-school (and in the other three pre-schools as well). The content is not appropriate for this group of children but rather those in primary school, although it is also important to ask ourselves who should justify such content as appropriate. In general however, this is a clear indication of an attempt by caregivers to model the provision of learning experiences on primary school content, in the mistaken view that they are thus better preparing children for primary schooling. As has been discussed in Chapter 5, the absence of the guidelines in the pre-schools, especially the syllabus, might have contributed to the caregiver's choice of content. It was clear that the children could not cope with such content. In addition, the fact that most of the children at Pre-school C were new to the pre-school meant that such sessions might have had a negative impact, especially developing negative perceptions about themselves as they struggled through the activities individually.

Overall, the discussion on the development of oral language skills indicates that caregivers used a reasonable variety of activities for the development of children's

oral language skills, although it should be pointed out that they did not use them with the same frequency and degree in the various pre-schools. For instance, Pre-schools A and D used most of the activities, but even so, it was clear that they underutilised them.

6.4 Some key issues on provision of early literacy experiences in the four pre-schools

From the discussion, it appears that in all four pre-schools, decisions for provision of learning experiences were in most cases influenced by the perceived need to prepare children for primary schooling. This determined the nature of the activities and level of content provided to children, having further implications for the nature of early literacy development experiences provided. As discussed in Chapter 5, this seems to have its origin in the way roles of the four pre-schools are perceived in their communities.

The discussion suggests that there are still a lot of questions on how early literacy development activities discussed were provided. One wonders whether caregivers in the four pre-schools really knew which activities bring out more benefits in children's learning and development, and therefore the implications for their choices for children's development in general, and for early literacy development in particular. The fact that some of the key early literacy development experiences were either ignored or underutilised, even in cases where caregivers did not need sophisticated resources, raises important questions about the degree to which children are benefiting from the pre-schools. In addition, some activities lacked depth and flexibility, so caregivers lost a lot of opportunities. As has been discussed in the previous sections, this issue could be linked to the caregivers' level of knowledge and skills in the care

oral language skills, although it should be pointed out that they did not use them with the same frequency and degree in the various pre-schools. For instance, Pre-schools A and D used most of the activities, but even so, it was clear that they underutilised them.

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and education of children in pre-school settings, which would assist them to think creatively about alternative stimulating activities for the children, even in the resource-constrained context of the four pre-schools. As has been discussed in Chapter 5, this challenge originates from the fact that caregiving is voluntary, which has its own implications for the quality of practice, especially the provision of learning experiences, and care in general.

The findings in this chapter have further shown that much stress in all four pre-schools was put on the development of oral language skills, at the expense of other useful early literacy skills. While the emphasis on the oral language skills is in some ways a strength for early literacy development, given that language development is often regarded as a prerequisite for literacy development (Chapter 2), the fact that most of the activities were not exploited for suitable activities on phonic awareness, print awareness and writing development, suggests that the provision of early literacy experiences is polarised to one major aspect only. Such provision may not help develop a balanced, stimulated child as far as early literacy development is concerned.

In all four pre-schools lack of resources to facilitate early literacy development at pre-school level is a big challenge. Despite the fact that in three of the pre-schools there is an attempt to use locally available resources to advance children's learning experiences, in general, caregivers did not use them maximally, even less so in the development of early literacy skills (also see Chapter 5). There is need to critique some of the assumptions that have been made on the roles of communities in addressing some of these challenges as is discussed in Chapter 7 (also see Chapter 5). In other words, what contribution can the communities make to advance the provision of early literacy experiences in rural pre-schools, especially given the policy

assumptions that have been made about community involvement in ECD provision in rural Malawi? (see Chapter 2).

Perhaps this is also a consequence of lack of human and material capacity at pre-school level (Chapter 5). The small numbers of caregivers mean that they find it difficult to effectively address the individual needs of the children. However, it is also possible that the problems are more than just availability of caregivers; it is also a question of the ability and skills the caregivers have in addressing not only early literacy development but also emotional, physical and social development needs of the children. This raises issues of the extent to which the pre-schools are really meeting the needs of the children holistically if less attention is being given to some developmental needs. Moreover, the fact that preparation for primary schooling is one of the major goals in the four pre-schools (see also Chapter 5) means there is a possibility that the youngest children may not be benefiting much from the pre-schools, unless considerable effort is made to provide both human and material capacity.

Although the issues of the extent to which some of the early literacy activities were contextually appropriate are discussed in detail in Chapter 7, at this stage it seems important to raise some issues which are already clear. From the discussion, some of the activities that caregivers employed in all the pre-schools applied to the children's local context, especially the songs and some of the nursery rhymes. However, if caregivers in the four pre-schools try to meet the expectations of the community by aligning their practice towards such common expectations as preparation for primary schooling, to what extent are the resultant learning experiences contextually appropriate? This is a major issue which is pursued in Chapter 7.

6.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the learning experiences provided by the four rural pre-schools. The chapter began by describing the overall daily organisation of care and education activities in the four pre-schools and it was observed that there were a lot of similarities in the organisation. The findings have indicated that apart from the activities that specifically facilitated early literacy development, caregivers also provided useful general learning experiences to facilitate the development of the whole child. In other words, despite limitations discussed in the chapter, caregivers attempted not only to respond to the intellectual needs but also to other aspects of the children's development especially as related to health, spiritual, moral, social and interpersonal relationships. The bulk of the chapter focused on whether specific learning experiences facilitated the development of early literacy skills. Overall, the provision of early learning experiences was influenced by the need to prepare children for primary schooling, which determined the nature of the activities for early literacy development. The chapter has further shown that in all four rural pre-schools emphasis was on the development of oral language skills at the expense of other useful early literacy skills. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the major issues raised with regard to the provision of early literacy experiences in the four pre-schools, lack of human and material capacity being highlighted as one of the biggest challenges for the pre-schools. The discussion in the following chapter pulls together the main issues raised by the study, and suggests the way forward.

Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusion and Implications

7.0 Chapter overview

The study set out to examine early literacy development opportunities provided in four rural pre-schools. This chapter, therefore, discusses the key issues that the study has raised and need further investigation in the continuing process of developing the field of pre-schooling, and ECD in general, in the rural areas of Malawi. As pointed out in Chapter 1, while this study has made a lot of reference to ECD National policy and implementation (Chapter 2, for example), it is not evaluating the Policy *per se*, but rather shedding light on some of the actual early learning experiences being provided to the children in the rural pre-school settings, which may have long-term implications for policy implementation. The study has contributed to our understanding of the situation in rural pre-schools in Malawi with regard to practice not only in terms of early literacy development but also early learning experiences in general. Understanding the tensions that exist among the stakeholders as well as the limitations in terms of community contributions are important issues that will feed into the national ECD policy as well as related programmes promoting the development of children in rural areas of Malawi.

The first two research questions on rural pre-school capacity and pre-school–home links have been answered in Chapters 4 and 5. Specifically the first question asked what capacity levels rural pre-schools have to help children develop early literacy skills. The second research question asked whether pre-school-home links exist between rural pre-schools and their immediate communities, and what influence such

links have on children's early literacy development. Chapter 6 of the study's findings answered both the third and fourth research questions, which were concerned with what learning experiences rural pre-schools provide to facilitate children's early literacy development, and how appropriate such experiences are in the context of early literacy development respectively.

In response to the first two research questions, Chapter 4 describes in detail the four rural pre-schools in order to provide a contextual understanding of the status of the pre-schools and their immediate communities. Chapter 5 discusses the human and materials capacity in the four pre-schools. It has been argued in the two chapters that lack of capacity in the rural pre-schools has a huge impact on the quality of provision of learning experiences. Furthermore the chapter also explored the various ways in which the communities contribute (or perhaps do not contribute) to the development of the four rural pre-schools by examining the nature of the pre-school–community links. The discussion related this to the specific roles communities play in the pre-schools as far as the provision of early learning experiences is concerned. In general, it was argued that community contributions were often not stretched towards the actual provision of early learning experiences in the four pre-schools..

Chapter 6, which responds to the third and fourth research questions, is a discussion of the early learning experiences. According to the findings, specific early learning experiences, particularly those that actively facilitated early literacy development, often reflected the contextual challenges on the ground. In addition, although in all four rural pre-schools caregivers made an effort to provide some specific early literacy experiences, emphasis was on the development of oral language skills at the expense of other useful early literacy skills. Provision of learning experiences was

greatly influenced by the perceived need to prepare children for primary schooling, which determined the nature of the activities and level of content provided to children. Consequently some of the content and learning experiences were inappropriate for pre-school.

It should be reiterated that while this study might appear to have focused on the formal aspects of the rural pre-school (and of course the pre-schools themselves having tended to promote the formal aspects as previously discussed), throughout the study the researcher is aware of the fact that the National ECD Programme, more specifically, the CBCC or village pre-school, is not meant to emphasise formal aspects of children's development as conventional pre-schools in most urban areas do (see Chapter 1). In this thesis, holistic development of children as a matter of principle is considered to be plausible and essential to promote to the extent that it is feasible. However, one of the important questions the study addresses is whether those in the context of the four pre-schools see holistic development as a priority or appropriate practice for children's development, and therefore the need to find ways of balancing the equation in order to ensure that they are meaningfully involved in the development of their own children.

In concluding the thesis, the discussion is structured by looking at two major issues which have been raised in the previous chapters. The first major issue concerns the general provision of early learning experiences and pre-schooling, while the second relates directly to the provision of early literacy experiences in the context of the four pre-schools. Although it is difficult to separate the two issues, this is done for the sake of putting the discussion into perspective, and to make clear the related issues that have arisen in the study. It should also be pointed out that although the study

originally set out to research pedagogical issues, in the process pre-school–community links have clearly come out as an important issue which facilitates our understanding of the processes taking place in the four rural pre-schools. This is especially with regard to the tensions between rural pre-schools and the communities they serve as far as expectations are concerned. Therefore the next section begins by discussing these tensions, before moving on to issues related to pedagogy.

7.1 Different layers of tension in the provision of early learning experiences

Although exploration of tensions was not the focus of this study, it emerged as an important issue which poses significant questions in terms of who is defining pre-school in practice; and what is ECD Policy's understanding of what is important for communities. An attempt to respond to these important questions is made in this section.

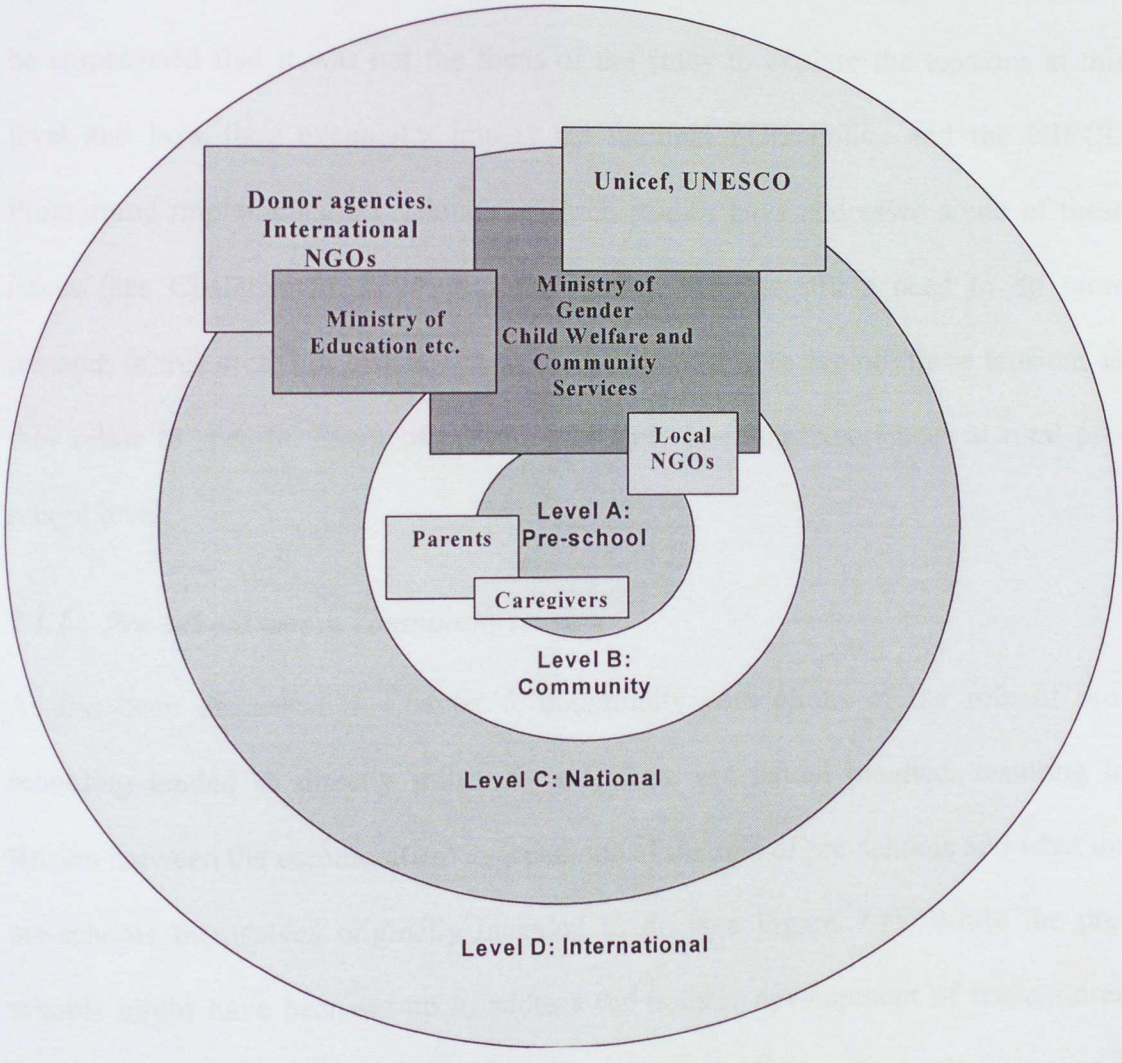
The discussion of the study's findings so far has shown that provision of early learning experiences in the four pre-schools is inextricably linked to the contextual expectations of parents and guardians. Thus, as discussed in Chapters 4 to 6, provision of early learning experiences was characterised by tensions at different levels, especially in terms of the roles of pre-schools in relation to the community and national ECD policy implementation. Figure 7.1 is an attempt to represent the tensions that the findings seemed to suggest. The first layer or level of tension is between pre-schools (Level A) and community expectations (Level B), while the second level is that between pre-schools (Level A) and the National ECD Policy intentions (Level C). Although not the focus of this discussion, the third level of tension is between national and international ECD expectations, where the latter's expectations tend to hugely influence the national policy intentions (see Chapters 2, 3

and 4). Furthermore, within the national and international tension there is also another dimension, the local and international tension, whereby in certain cases international organisations and NGOs may directly deal with some of the CBOs, especially when they donate pre-school resources such as books (see Chapter 5). This for instance, may lead to the donation of children's learning materials that are not suitable for the local context.

Although generally beyond the scope of this study, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that within and between each of the three levels in Figure 7.1, there are other tensions which could further help explain the tensions that the findings in this study have suggested. For instance, at Level A, the pre-school may have its own tensions in terms of the extent to which the CBOs housing pre-schools A, B, and C (see Chapter 4) should prioritise the pre-school section over other programmes that are often dictated by external factors, the major one being funding sources (see Chapter 5).

For Pre-school D the tension in this case would be for instance in terms of the conflict in the levels of expectations and intentions between the proprietors who are external to the context, and the community members (Chapter 5). The implications that these tensions may have for the nature and quality of provision of early learning experiences in the rural pre-schools cannot be overemphasised.

Figure 7.1: Levels of tension in early learning provision in rural pre-schools



Similarly, as has been discussed in Chapter 5, within the community (Level B) research studies have shown that there are always dilemmas in terms of commitment to education, especially when it comes to making resource contributions (see Rose, 2003a; Durston & Nashire, 2001). In this case, due to poor socio-economic background, communities are always in a dilemma on whether to prioritise pre-schooling or their own family socio-economic needs (also see Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5).

The tensions in Level C, National ECD Programme which inevitably has been influenced by external forces (see Chapter 2), may concern whether the different stakeholders or partners see Integrated ECD as a priority, and therefore whether it is worth spending their energies on IECD rather than on their sectoral priorities. It must be emphasised that it was not the focus of the study to explore the tensions at this level and how they eventually impact the national ECD Policy and the NIECD Programme implementation. Though research studies have addressed some of these issues (see Chalamanda, 2004; Kameka, 2004), there is still a need to do more research in this area. For instance, it would be interesting to explore these tensions as they relate to specific issues of provision of early learning experiences at rural pre-school level.

7.1.1 Pre-school versus community tension

As has been discussed in Chapter 5, community perceptions of the role of pre-schooling tended to directly influence and shape pre-school practice, resulting in tension between the communities' expectations of the role of pre-schools and what the pre-schools themselves originally intended to do (see Figure 7.1). While the pre-schools might have been set up to address the holistic development of the children (see Chapters 2 and 4), parents and guardians from the four communities perceived the existence of the pre-schools as a means of preparing their children for primary schooling (Chapter 5). This clearly appears to be in conflict with the intentions of the national ECD programme in Malawi, especially with regard to the expectations of the role of the community in addressing the multidimensional development needs of the children (see Chapter 1). In practice, therefore, pre-schools are likely to focus more on what the immediate communities value rather than what National ECD Policy prescribes. This raises the question of what should be the appropriate practice then if

communities feel that the needs of their children are being met. While it is necessary to be cautious about communities' expectations in terms of whether what they want will maximally benefit the development of the child, the findings at the same time suggest that the communities' expectations of the provision of learning experiences are a very powerful factor if progress in rural pre-schooling is to be made. The contextual framework that has been used in this study (see Chapter 2) emphasises the need to take into consideration the expectations of the various stakeholders in terms of what they perceive as appropriate practice and whether it meets the purposes. This does not necessarily undermine the role of national guidelines at all, but rather reinforces it by allowing some flexibility in transfer of what is considered to be "ideal" practice into the reality of the context of use (see Woodhead, 2000).

7.1.2 Pre-school versus national ECD policy tension

Based on the findings, the second level of tension in the provision of pre-school experiences is between pre-school practice and the national IECD policy implementation intentions (see Figure 9.1). As discussed in Chapter 1, rural pre-schools are directly under the supervision of the MoGCS, through the District Social Welfare Office, which often has to facilitate their establishment (see Chapter 1). This suggests that there is some expectation from the pre-schools to reflect national policy goals in practice. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, it is clear that the guidelines that the MoGCS developed are meant to standardise the activities taking place in pre-school settings in order to ensure that children's holistic development is achieved. However, communities' "pressure" on the rural pre-schools to prepare children for primary schooling raises a lot of questions with regard to the extent to which the intentions of the national ECD guidelines can be achieved, bearing in mind that the expectations have a huge influence on the nature and style of provision in the pre-

communities feel that the needs of their children are being met. While it is necessary to be cautious about communities' expectations in terms of whether what they want will maximally benefit the development of the child, the findings at the same time suggest that the communities' expectations of the provision of learning experiences are a very powerful factor if progress in rural pre-schooling is to be made. The contextual framework that has been used in this study (see Chapter 2) emphasises the need to take into consideration the expectations of the various stakeholders in terms of what they perceive as appropriate practice and whether it meets the purposes. This does not necessarily undermine the role of national guidelines at all, but rather reinforces it by allowing some flexibility in transfer of what is considered to be "ideal" practice into the reality of the context of use (see Woodhead, 2000).

7.1.2 Pre-school versus national ECD policy tension

Based on the findings, the second level of tension in the provision of pre-school experiences is between pre-school practice and the national IECD policy implementation intentions (see Figure 9.1). As discussed in Chapter 1, rural pre-schools are directly under the supervision of the MoGCS, through the District Social Welfare Office, which often has to facilitate their establishment (see Chapter 1). This suggests that there is some expectation from the pre-schools to reflect national policy goals in practice. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, it is clear that the guidelines that the MoGCS developed are meant to standardise the activities taking place in pre-school settings in order to ensure that children's holistic development is achieved. However, communities' "pressure" on the rural pre-schools to prepare children for primary schooling raises a lot of questions with regard to the extent to which the intentions of the national ECD guidelines can be achieved, bearing in mind that the expectations have a huge influence on the nature and style of provision in the pre-

school setting, even where the caregivers receive some orientation or training (see Chapters 5 and 6). While the national IECD policy proposes multidimensional or holistic development of children in the pre-school setting, rural pre-school practice is likely to continue to be polarised towards preparation of children for primary schooling as long as communities regard this as a major reason for the existence of the pre-schools. Eventually provision of early literacy experiences will be driven by the same forces, with the style of and content presented reflecting the formal primary school settings.

This scenario is further compounded by the conspicuous absence of ECD guidelines and syllabuses within the pre-schools themselves, to act as a point of reference to national intentions on provision of early learning experiences, as reported by some of the caregivers (Chapter 5). Consequently, it seems unlikely that standard provision of learning experiences, including early literacy development, may be achieved in the process, as caregivers do not purposefully and systematically exploit the various aspects of the children's development in the pre-school setting. While it seems likely that provision of copies of the ECD national guidelines to the pre-schools could in the long run promote positive responses to national level intentions on ECD, it is however, equally crucial to consider the extent to which caregivers would be able to interpret the guidelines in a context in which there are other capacity challenges within the pre-schools, such as lack of professional development opportunities and basic learning resources.

7.1.3 Poverty as an issue: is community involvement a reality for holistic development of children?

The findings in this study have isolated poverty as a significant issue, hugely influencing the participation of the community in pre-schooling (see Chapter 5).

Getting the children to consistently attend pre-school, which means providing food and clothes apart from the financial contributions parents and guardians were expected to make towards purchase of food, proved difficult for most of the parents and guardians involved in the study (Chapters 5). As has previously been discussed, this has negative implications for pre-school enrolment and attendance patterns and therefore for the extent to which the children benefit from the pre-schools' provision of early learning experiences. Furthermore, it is likely that not many children are benefiting from the pre-schools given the fact that the majority of the rural communities may not take pre-schooling as a priority, especially taking into account household economic problems threatening their survival. This raises the issue of the extent to which expansion of access to pre-schooling in the rural areas can be achieved.

The fact that even the pre-schools themselves do not have the basic resources, including food, for the children raises important questions with regard to the extent to which holistic development may be achieved. As has been argued in Chapter 2, attempts to achieve holistic development of children in ECD must go with substantial and sustained public investment of resources as well as staff development (Kamerman, 2003; Moss, 2003). Bearing in mind that caregivers will continue to play an important role in child development (as much as teachers in primary school) as long as community expectations of the roles of pre-schools remain the same, there will be need to invest hugely in their professional development, not only through training but also other means such as frequent and elaborate supervision by appropriate departments of the ministry responsible in conjunction with other institutions, as proposed in the Malawi National ECD Policy (MoGCS, 2003). As

proposed later in the chapter such capacity building should also engage a good section of the community and should take many forms to ensure sustainability.

Having discussed levels of tensions, and the issues of poverty and their implications for rural pre-schooling, the following section will look at key issues related to pedagogy, specifically, the provision of early literacy experiences.

7.2. Issues of early literacy experiences

In terms of provision of actual early literacy experiences, overall, the study has found that the four rural pre-schools made reasonable efforts to create opportunities for early literacy development, although this happened amid both capacity challenges and community expectations of the roles pre-schools should play (see Chapters 5 and 6). Further, the findings indicate that in some cases caregivers provided the opportunities by accident (see Chapter 6). This suggests that children may not be benefiting much from the general early learning experiences provided since they are not exposed to deliberately planned early literacy experiences as is generally expected in pre-school settings (Parke, 2000; Campbell, 2000; Godwin & Perkins, 2002).

Part of the problem was lack of ECD guidelines on dealing with children in the pre-school context, and the general lack of capacity (human and material) in all four pre-schools. All this has implications for early literacy development as caregivers were unlikely to stretch themselves in the use of the experiences for promoting children's early literacy development. Bearing in mind that early literacy is central to the children's current and future learning (Norman, 1992; Paulu, 1992; Hall *et al*, 2003), there is need for caregivers to deliberately manipulate the pre-school setting and experiences in order to achieve maximum learning for the children.

The findings have indicated that in some cases caregivers made an attempt to address not only the intellectual needs of the children but also their holistic development, although at the same time they did not take advantage of clear opportunities to facilitate the development (Chapters 5 and 6). However, these glimpses of proactiveness need to be recognised and exploited. Such examples are worth drawing on, and ways of disseminating them among other caregivers in rural pre-schools should be considered, which of course may not necessarily be through formal training as has been suggested in Chapter 5 and later in this chapter.

In general therefore, it can be argued that the four pre-schools provided limited quality early literacy development opportunities, one of the major contributing factors being the human and material capacity constraints of the pre-schools, as discussed in Chapter 5. Perhaps it is important that such conclusions bear in mind the overall intentions of the various stakeholders of the kinds of provisions of experiences the rural pre-schools are supposed to make. Such stakeholders include the children themselves, the pre-schools, the community, and the National ECD Programme, with influence from international organisations (see Chapter 2).

7.2.1 Community participation in early learning and literacy development

According to the study findings, while some level of pre-school–community link existed, it was limited to provision or mobilisation of material resources without engagement in the actual provision of learning experiences. At the beginning of the study (see Chapter 2), the researcher had assumed that apart from material resources, communities would also specifically be engaged in the actual early learning experiences of the children, bearing in mind that the rural pre-school was to be treated as an informal setting where parents and guardians played an active role (see Chapter

1). In other words, participation in the rural pre-school is assumed to involve both provision of material and non-material resources (MoGCS, 2003d, pp.21-22). The findings have shown that communities tended to construe their specific roles from a slightly different angle, putting themselves at the periphery, with the caregiver taking centre stage, in terms of the children's development (see Chapters 5 and 6, for example). As has been argued in the preceding chapters, this might have arisen from the perception of pre-schools as a means of preparing children for primary schooling, and therefore communities tend to see themselves as playing the same role they do for primary schools.

It appears that, while this challenge could be offset through civic educating communities on the role of ECD from the point of view of the national ECD Policy, there are other major issues that need to be addressed, especially when the quality of education is generally low and parents and guardians may assume that the village pre-school is solely meant to improve the educational situation of their children (see Chalamanda *et al,* 2001). Thus it can be argued that there needs to be some balance between the promotion of holistic development of children and preparation for formal schooling in these village pre-schools if communities are to see the need to be actively engaged beyond mobilisation of materials, especially in a context where they appear to value preparation of children for formal schooling more than holistic development related issues (Chapter 5). In the following sections some recommendations are made based on the discussion in this thesis.

7.3 Recommendations

The recommendations in this section are made cautiously bearing in mind that the study was located in only one district involving only four pre-schools and four

communities. However, it should be pointed out that this study being in-depth, it will inform a larger study, especially if other researchers want to see the identified patterns in a larger sample of pre-schools and communities across districts and regions in Malawi. The recommendations have been clustered into three, pertaining to: community; pedagogy (processes of teaching, care and learning); and national ECD policy.

7.3.1 Recommendations related to the community

This subsection outlines recommendations related to the community, given that it is central to the development of rural pre-schooling in Malawi.

7.3.1.1 Need to seriously and realistically address the poverty factor

Realistically, the success of the National ECD Policy in expanding access and ensuring quality provision may hinge on this factor. Provision of basic food resources for children in the pre-schools would make a huge difference to enrolment and attendance patterns and therefore provision of early learning experiences. It appears most parents are willing to send children to pre-schools as long as they know the children will find some food there, which is one of their major worries. Thus promotion of holistic development should also be seen to address these issues. The researcher is aware of the fact that addressing poverty issues involves a long process. However, the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services and other interested stakeholders should make small level of funding available to rural pre-schools to purchase basic food stuffs for children if pre-schools are to meet the requirements of the national ECD Policy and the developmental needs of rural children.

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However, it should be pointed out that formal feeding of children may raise further challenges with regard to who will feed the children when they go to primary school[39]. In other words, one wonders why feeding should be done at pre-school when nothing like that happens in primary schools in Malawi. Although the national ECD policy highlights this aspect, it is very expensive, and therefore difficult to achieve in the context of the constraints discussed in this thesis.

7.3.1.2 Need to strengthen meaningful pre-school–community interaction

There is need to strengthen pre-school–community links or interaction to find ways of getting the community to see their role beyond that of provision of material resources only, to participation in actual provision of learning experiences. The community's confidence in providing learning experiences needs to be built and this can best be achieved if the pre-schools themselves have the necessary professional capacity. In other words, further specific capacity building for communities could be the responsibility of the pre-schools, although it also hinges on the community's commitment and prioritisation of pre-schooling.

7.3.1.1 Need to civic-educate communities about pre-schooling

There is need to help communities understand the importance of pre-schooling: that it is not only for the purposes of preparing children for primary schooling, but also for the holistic development of the child. In educating the communities, MoGCS and other key stakeholders should use as many strategies as possible, as it is generally a

[39] School feeding is some selected primary schools is currently being experimented with by World Vision International, GTZ and World Food Programme in Malawi. At the time of the study no clear conclusions about the impact of the study on primary schooling had come out yet. However, even if there are positive results, the challenges of sustainability of the programme are likely to be huge for the Government of Malawi.

slow process to change people's attitudes. One-off meetings with communities cannot suffice. As has been suggested below, strengthening the human and material capacity of rural pre-schools could also facilitate the communities' awareness of ECD as pre-schools could share this responsibility with MoGCS.

7.3.2 Recommendations related to pre-school pedagogy: early literacy development

Recommendations on pedagogical issues in CBCCs, both generally and specifically as they relate to early childhood development and early literacy development respectively, are outlined in this subsection.

7.3.2.1 Need for more professional development for pre-school staff, especially caregivers and directors: towards pre-school based professional development

This should aim to build the capacity of rural pre-schools to meet the needs of the children holistically with some clear intentions towards intellectual development to meet community expectations. Professional development should take many forms, with emphasis on the most effective and feasible strategies, given the realities of financial and other resource constraints. For instance, a phased approach to the professional development of caregivers, which should combine some initial training with pre-school based professional development, would be feasible. Thus in order to build professional capacity at pre-school level, an initial training targeting caregivers and pre-school directors should be provided by available training institutions (see recommendation 7.3.2.2), but later more responsibility for professional development should be left to the pre-schools themselves, especially when new caregivers join in.

In this case the pre-school should not regard its responsibility as just caring for the children but also professionally equipping others who come to take responsibilities, including the community members. MoGCS should monitor how much the pre-schools are managing this aspect in their respective communities. However, this can only be achieved if the capacity of pre-schools as well as training institutions is strengthened as presented in the next recommendation. It is important to bear in mind that as caregivers become professional there is likely to be a knock-on effect, especially when the need to survive economically becomes a priority.

7.3.2.2 Strengthen professional institutions

One of the big challenges in ECD in Malawi is availability of training institutions specialising in childhood matters. Although there are a few organisations, including the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (APPM), and to some extent the University of Malawi, their capacity to meet the demand on the ground, especially with the introduction of CBCCs, is very low. Certainly there is a great need for the Government of Malawi to strengthen and empower these institutions in terms of material and human resources, so that they can in turn build capacity at pre-school level. It should be noted, however, that while training should be considered as one important means to address rural pre-school provision, it should not be regarded as a panacea.

7.3.2.3 Need to reconsider volunteerism

It is crucial for MoGCS and key ECD stakeholders to reconsider the issue of volunteerism and the central role it plays in rural pre-schooling, especially in the light of the high expectations that communities have of the specific roles of pre-schools. Unless there are mechanisms to help ensure that volunteers are properly oriented and

retained this system may not be sustainable. Eventually, it will be very difficult to achieve continuity as well as quality of provision in rural pre-schools. The community's high expectations from volunteers mean that they are likely to be under pressure to meet expectations, even if such may not necessarily be beneficial to the children.

Based on the findings, it is important to point out that volunteers may not themselves have the physical energy to concentrate on developing the children, especially if they do not have the basics in life. This is especially crucial when we consider the fact that, just as the other community members, the volunteers have their own household challenges which need their attention as they spend their time with the children for most of the day. Therefore, Government, and MoGCS in particular, needs to take into serious consideration the issue of remuneration or rather incentives for caregivers. What this all means is that practically it will require government to commit some finances towards the welfare of caregivers, whether this may be in terms of payment or allowances in order to ensure ongoing commitment to their role at the pre-schools. The study has shown that leaving the issue of incentives to the communities themselves proves to be difficult as most of the time there is little commitment from the communities to raise financial support for the caregivers. However, a balance should be struck to avoid a scenario in which the communities are too dependent on Government for everything. The researcher believes that communities can comfortably make some contributions without necessarily threatening their survival in the home.

7.3.2.4 Need for provision of basic teaching and learning resources: promotion of locally available resources should be ONE way forward.

Although ideally communities are supposed to supply materials, including teaching and learning materials, the study has shown that this contribution may not be as forthcoming as has been assumed in the National ECD policy. While it has been possible for the four pre-school communities to make some contributions to certain materials, teaching and learning resources have not been easy to come by from the communities. This is not impossible though, but the extent to which communities can consistently be stretched to generate these resources for pre-schools is questionable, as they may not consider this as a priority. It can also be argued that part of the problem is a general lack of resourcefulness in poorly educated people.

Realistically, therefore, rural pre-schools should be provided with additional basic materials to act as a starting point or "starter kit". Using the principles of MASAF, pre-schools can then be required to produce a certain level of locally available materials as a requirement to receive the "starter kit", which could include some useful resources to improve teaching and learning such as local toys, books, and furniture. Given other recommendations that have already been made, capacity of staff in rural pre-schools should be developed so that they can confidently take the responsibility to initiate materials production with the community by any possible means – whether by engaging skilled men and women in the immediate community or the CBO staff to make some useful materials. This could be one of the critical ways of encouraging or mainstreaming the culture of producing locally available materials in the pre-schools. It should be pointed out that production of locally available resources is important for its own sake, not only because there is shortage of materials. Even in developed countries where resources in the pre-school settings are more readily available than in a developing country like Malawi, there is still the practice of

developing local resources. Assessment of levels of locally available materials in rural pre-schools could be made an essential aspect of the monitoring and supervision processes by staff from Ministries and institutions concerned.

7.3.2.5 Need for the local language to take prominence in pre-schools

It is important that MoGCS ensures that pre-schools do not unnecessarily focus on English, in the process disadvantaging children's learning. The major issue here is not that English should not be taught in pre-schools but that children's long term literacy development is facilitated through their first language according to empirical research. Therefore, children's first language should take prominence in promoting their development in the pre-school setting.

7.3.3 Recommendations related to policy documents and on information management system in general

7.3.3.1 Since reliable data on rural pre-schooling is scanty, there is need for MoGCS and other stakeholders such as local and international NGOs to facilitate the development of a clear information management system on ECD in Malawi. A nation wide systematic baseline survey on rural ECD would help facilitate this important process.

7.3.3.2 MoGCS should provide rural pre-schools with policy documents and their accompanying materials to act as guidelines for pre-school practice. However, particular attention should be given to mechanisms for helping caregivers and pre-school staff in general to interpret and use the materials properly. This will ensure that what has been outlined in the ECD documents is practically achieved. Generally this recommendation could be achieved partly within the general professional development of staff recommended in 7.3.2.1.

7.3.3.3 Development of early literacy skills, being a key to all future learning for children, should receive more attention in the ECD policy than is currently happening, in order to ensure that children are equipped for the immediate future. This should be done in a balanced manner without jeopardising children's other developmental needs.

7.4 Areas for further research

Based on the study, and for the improvement of ECD in Malawi, studies dealing with practices in rural pre-schools should be conducted to establish the quality of provision that is being made. This will help improve the preparation of children for formal schooling and their future learning in general. I therefore suggest the following as areas that need further investigation.

7.4.1 A large scale study on pre-school practices and pedagogy should be done with a larger sample of rural pre-schools and communities across districts and regions in Malawi, in order to establish the extent to which pre-schools are achieving holistic development of children. Thus some of the patterns identified in this study could be followed up in a larger sample.

7.4.2 Similar studies on the development of early numeracy skills and other aspects of child development should be conducted to establish the quality of practices in rural pre-schools.

7.4.3 A study should explore various ways to improve community involvement in pre-school activities that go beyond contribution of financial and material resources, to improve learning and development by children

7.4.4 Longitudinal studies should follow up children involved in this study up to early primary school to determine the effectiveness of the pre-school experiences, including early literacy experiences[40]. This would help shape the nature of activities to be promoted in rural pre-schools.

7.4.5 Studies should be carried out to evaluate caregivers' ability to implement ECD documents in practice. For instance, how do they translate them into practice? What are the challenges and implications?

[40] Though the researcher is aware that one similar study is being carried out with one of the rural pre-schools in Zomba (see M. Chimombo, & Söderbergh, 2005), it is necessary that such efforts are complemented by other larger studies, bearing in mind that there is little research on ECD practices and their impact on schooling in Malawi.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: *QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS*

For office use			
Questionnaire ID			
District			
Traditional Authority		Village	
Date administered			

A. Personal details

1. (Name-Optional) _____
2. Sex (tick) Male = 1 Female = 2
3. Age of respondent: _____ years

4 What is your religion?
- ☐ None
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ African Tradition Religion
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

5. Have you ever attended school?
   Yes No

6. If YES, what was highest level of education you attained?

1	Primary Std 1-4	☐
2	Primary Std 5-8	☐
3	Secondary Forms 1-2	☐
4	Secondary Forms 3-4	☐
5	University	☐

7. Who supports you in meeting your daily needs? (Mention one major supporter)
   - ☐ Myself
   - ☐ Relatives
   - ☐ Husband
   - ☐ Wife
   - ☐ Other (specify) _____

B: Attitudes and responses to pre-schooling

8. Have you previously sent your children to pre-school/an ECD Centre?
   Yes No

9. Do you still send children to the pre-school/ECD Centre in your community?
   Yes No

10. If YES, how many are currently at the pre-school/ECD Centre?
    1-2
    2-3
    Above 3

11. Are they all your children?
Yes No

12. If No in question 11, why are they living with you?
Orphans
Children of my sister who is living.
Children of my brother who is living.
Other (specify)_____

13. Can you send your children to a pre-school/ECD Centre run by religions other than yours (as indicated in question 4 above)?
Yes No

14. Explain your response in question 13
_____

15. Why do you send the children under your care to pre-school/ECD center?
To relieve me of the responsibility.
It is a matter of passing time for the children.
To help them to develop their potential to learn.
Because everyone in the village is doing so.
I was persuaded to do so by the caregivers and village chief.
Other (specify)_____

16. What do you think were the reasons for establishing the pre-school/ECD centre in this area?
A business for the proprietors.
To provide learning opportunities for our children.
To relieve parents of the responsibility to rear children so that they can do other work freely.
For children to pass time.
For children to eat food.
Other (specify)_____

17. Are you satisfied with the way your children are handled at this pre-school/ECD centre?
Yes No

18. Explain your response in question 17
_____

19. Do you know of any pre-schools/ECD Centres around the community?
Yes No

20. Why do you think this pre-school/ECD Centre is any better than others?
Has good caregivers.
Has good teaching and learning materials.
Has good teaching space and rooms.
Children are taught well.
Children are given food.
Other (specify)_____

21. Do you know the procedures/guidelines that are followed in recruiting staff (especially teachers) at this pre-school//ECD Centre?
Yes No

22. Do you know the procedures/guidelines that are followed in recruiting staff
Yes No

23. If YES, what criterion is used?

C. Pre-school/ECD Centre–home link

24. Do you think it is necessary for the community to link up with the pre-school on matters concerning your children's education and development at pre-school/ECD Centre?
Yes No

25. Explain your response in 24?

---

26. Does the pre-school in the community work together with the community members?
Yes No (go to question 31)

27. If YES, describe the nature of the relationship.

---

28. What specific roles do parents and guardians play in the education and development of the child at pre-school/ECD Centre level if such structures exist? (How are parents and guardians meaningfully involved in such structures?)

---

29. Are you satisfied with such involvement?
Yes No

30. Explain your response in 29

---

31. If NO to question 26, why do you think the community does not link up with the pre-school?

---

32. In general, what do you suggest should be done to improve the levels of pre-school/ECD Centre–home link in order to facilitate children's learning and development?

D. General comments

33. In general, do you think children at the pre-school/ECD Centre in this community are adequately prepared for formal schooling?
34. What challenges in general do you face in your effort to facilitate the education and development of children in your community? Suggest ways of dealing with the challenges you face?
35. What do you think should be done to pre-schooling//ECD Centre in rural areas in order to effectively prepare children for formal schooling and development in general?

APPENDIX 2A: *INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRE-SCHOOL DIRECTORS AND ADMINISTRATORS*

A. Personal details

1. Name (Optional):
2. Sex (tick) Male Female
3. What is your highest level of education academically?

Never had formal education	☐
Primary Std 1-4	☐
Primary Std 5-8	☐
Secondary Forms 1-2	☐
Secondary Forms 3-4	☐
University	☐
Don't know	☐

B. Background

4. How long have you been proprietor/director of this pre-school/ECD Centre? What professional training/education do you have?

5. Give background on the reasons for establishing the pre-school/ECD Centre in this community.

6. What are the aims and objectives of this institution (also if the pre-school/ECD Centre is just a part of the whole)?

7. What would you consider to be the main activities of your organisation/institution? Are they linked to early childhood development? In what ways?

8. What procedures/guidelines are followed in recruiting your staff (especially caregivers)? What criteria are used?

C. Knowledge of issues in early childhood development in Malawi

9. Are you aware of any policy for early childhood development at national level? Explain.

10. Do you know any national policy that guides the running of pre-schools in Malawi? What is it? Explain

11. Do you know any services or programmes that have been put in place in both urban and rural settings to facilitate the learning and development of children? In what areas?

12. What mechanisms or structures at national level are there to support your institution in early childhood development?

D. Materials/resources and equipment

13. Comment on the levels of teaching and learning materials and equipment at your pre-schoo/ECD Centre.

14. How does the level of teaching and learning resources at your pre-school/ECD Centre affect practice in general?

15. Are the materials user-friendly? Developmentally appropriate? (i.e. do you think your caregivers find them easy to use within your pre-school/ECD Centre context? Are they relevant to the needs and interests of children at your pre-school/ECD Centre?

E. Early literacy development opportunities

16. Comment in general on the overall capacity of the pre-school/ECD Centre to build children's literacy skills.

17. What opportunities are there at your pre-school/ECD Centre to develop children's potential in reading and writing skills?

F. Pre-school/ECD Centre –home link

18. Does the school have any policy/guidelines in terms of its relationship to the immediate society/community? If yes, describe the nature of the relationship.

19. What role do parents and guardians play in the education and the overall development of the child at pre-school/ECD Centre level if such structures exist? How are parents and guardians meaningfully involved in such structures?

20. What do you suggest should be done to improve the levels of pre-school//ECD Centre – home link in order to facilitate children's development?

G. General Comments and suggestions

21. In general, do you think children in the rural pre-schools/ECD Centres are adequately prepared for formal schooling in primary schools? Explain.

22. What challenges in general do you face in your effort to develop the child? Suggest ways of dealing with the challenges you face.

23. What do you see as the major professional challenges in rural pre-schools/ECD Centres in Malawi?

24. What do you think should be done to pre-school/ECD Centre facilities in rural areas to effectively prepare children for formal schooling and future learning in general? What about at national level?

25. Do you have any additional comments to make on the issues we have been discussing?

****

14. How does the level of teaching and learning resources at your pre-school/ECD Centre affect practice in general?

15. Are the materials user-friendly? Developmentally appropriate? (i.e. do you think your caregivers find them easy to use within your pre-school/ECD Centre context? Are they relevant to the needs and interests of children at your pre-school/ECD Centre?

E. Early literacy development opportunities

16. Comment in general on the overall capacity of the pre-school/ECD Centre to build children's literacy skills.

17. What opportunities are there at your pre-school/ECD Centre to develop children's potential in reading and writing skills?

F. Pre-school/ECD Centre –home link

18. Does the school have any policy/guidelines in terms of its relationship to the immediate society/community? If yes, describe the nature of the relationship.

19. What role do parents and guardians play in the education and the overall development of the child at pre-school/ECD Centre level if such structures exist? How are parents and guardians meaningfully involved in such structures?

20. What do you suggest should be done to improve the levels of pre-school//ECD Centre – home link in order to facilitate children's development?

G. General Comments and suggestions

21. In general, do you think children in the rural pre-schools/ECD Centres are adequately prepared for formal schooling in primary schools? Explain.

22. What challenges in general do you face in your effort to develop the child? Suggest ways of dealing with the challenges you face.

23. What do you see as the major professional challenges in rural pre-schools/ECD Centres in Malawi?

24. What do you think should be done to pre-school/ECD Centre facilities in rural areas to effectively prepare children for formal schooling and future learning in general? What about at national level?

25. Do you have any additional comments to make on the issues we have been discussing?

****

APPENDIX 2B: *INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CAREGIVERS*

A. Personal details

1. Name (Optional): _____
2. Sex (tick) Male = 1 Female = 2
3. What is your highest level of education?

Never had formal education	☐
Primary Std 1-4	☐
Primary Std 5-8	☐
Secondary Forms 1-2	☐
Secondary Forms 3-4	☐
University	☐
Don't know	☐

4. How long have you taught at this pre-school//ECD Centre?

5. How were you employed into this pre-school/ECD Centre?

Was interviewed	☐
Was just invited	☐
The owner of the pre-school is a friend	☐
Had the necessary qualifications	☐
Other (Specify) _____	

6. What professional training/education do you have?

7. What is the nature of children in your class? (age range, socio-economically, etc)

8. Have you recently been trained in the teaching of children at pre-school//ECD Centre level? What was the nature of the training? Who organised it?

9. To what extent was the training relevant or irrelevant?

B. Knowledge of issues on early childhood development

10. Are you aware of any policy for early childhood development at national level? Explain.

11. Do you know any national policy that guides the running of pre-schools/ECD Centres in Malawi? What is it? Explain

12. Do you know any services or programmes that have been put in place in both urban and rural settings to facilitate the learning and development of children? In what areas?

13. What do you think are the key areas or skills that need to be developed in children at pre-school/ECD Centre level in order to develop potential for future learning? Explain.

C. Classroom Practice in relation to early literacy development

14. Which activities do you often engage children within the classroom? Why?

15. Which activities do you often engage children in outside the classroom? Why?

16. Which activities do you employ in order to developing children's (a) oral skills (b) reading and writing skills?

17. What challenges do you face as you engage children in the various oral and literacy skills?

18. How do you think such challenges can be dealt with in your context?

D. Classroom Resources/materials and equipment

19. Comment on the levels of teaching and learning materials and equipment in your teaching and learning environment.

20. How does the level of teaching and learning resources/matter in your environment affect overall practice?

21. Are the materials user-friendly? Developmentally appropriate?

22. Comment in general or the overall capacity of the pre-school/ECD Centre to build children's early literacy skills.

E. Pre-school/ECD Centre –home link

23. Does the pre-school/ECD Centre have any policy/guidelines in terms of its relationship to the immediate society/community? If yes, describe the nature of the relationship.

24. What role do parents and guardians play in the education and overall development of the child at pre-school level?

25. What do you suggest should be done to improve levels of pre-school-home link in order to facilitate children's learning and development?

26. Do you have additional comments you would like to make on the issues we have been discussing?

****

APPENDIX 2C: *INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR POLICYMAKERS AND NGOS*

A. Personal details

1. Sex (tick) Male Female

B. Policy related issues

2. How long and in what capacity have you worked for the Ministry /organisation?

3. Is there any policy for early childhood development at national level? If it exists what is your comment on the policy?

4. Are there any policy guidelines on the running of pre-schools in Malawi? If they exist what do they say? If they do not exist what happens? Explain

5. In general, can you explain the ministry's/your organisation's role in early childhood education and development in Malawi?

C. Nature, organisation and capacity of pre-schools

6. Do you know any services or programmes that have been put in place in both urban and rural settings to develop the child? In what areas?

7. What is your comment on the fact that MoGCS rather than MoEHR controls and manages early childhood development in Malawi?

8. How does your organisation /Ministry (in the case of MoEHR) collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services in the development of children? What are the challenges?

9. Comment on the capacity of pre-schools/ECD Centres in Malawi? (Quality and quantity of caregivers, facilities, etc). Explain.

10. Comment on community participation in pre-school /ECD Centre in Malawi.

11. (For MoGCS and MoEHR only) How does your ministry follow up the management of and activities taking place in the pre-schools/ECD Centres to ensure quality?

12. What specific mechanisms has your ministry/NGO put in place to monitor the activities of (a) urban pre-schools (b) rural pre-schools?

D. General comments

13. In general, do you think children in rural pre-schools are adequately prepared for future formal schooling? Explain.
14. What do you see as the major professional challenges in rural pre-schools/ECD Centres in Malawi?
15. What do you think should be done to pre-schools//ECD Centres in rural areas in order to achieve effective preparation of children before formal schooling in primary schools? At national level?

16. Do you have additional comments you would like to make on the issues we have been discussing?

****

APPENDIX 3A: *OBSERVATION SCHEDULE*

1. Name of Pre-school: _____
2. Village: _____ T/A _____
3. District: _____
4. Class: _____ Subject: _____
5. No. of children: _____
6. Caregiver's name: _____
7. Observer: _____ Date _____ Time: _____

A. Classroom Environment

Describe classroom environment – does it provide a conducive atmosphere for learning?

		Yes	No
1	Is the seating space adequate?		
2	Adequate lighting?		
3	Adequate writing surface/desks for pupils?		
4	Chair and table for teacher?		
5	Adequate space for movement between desks?		
6	Ventilation and temperature comfortable?		
7	Cheerful classroom?		
8	Floor is cemented		
9	Relevant displays on walls? Print-rich environment?		
10	Children accepted as individuals?		
13	Children's own experiences utilised?		

General Comments on classroom environment *(e.g. was the environment rich and stimulating? Why? Did the environment provide an opportunity for building children's potential in developing literacy skills?)*

_____

_____

B. Classroom Engagement (i.e. instruction methods/activities)

In what type of activities are the majority of the children *engaged*?

		Yes	No	For how long?
1	Lecturing/listening to teacher explaining a point			
2	Children work in groups?			
3	Drawing diagrams?			
4	Working with individual pupils?			
5	Marking books			
6	Demonstration			
7	Answering children's questions			
8	Group recitation			
9	Question and answer?			
10	Singing			
11	Story telling			
12	books			
13	toys			
14	Doing art/writing/colouring			
15	Playing letter/number games			

16	Ate			
17	Spoke with /called to teacher			
18	Other			

Are children *disengaged*? In what way?

		Yes	No	For how long?
1	Sitting quietly and do nothing			
2	Playing alone			
3	Isolation/time out as punishment			
4	Fighting with other child(ren)			
5	Other			

General Comments on classroom engagement

C. Surrounding Environment

(a) Does the surrounding environment provide opportunities for more learning? How?

(b) General Comments on surrounding environment

D. Out-of-class Engagement (and/or Disengagement)

(a) What are children engaged in outside the classroom? For how long?
(b) Is there any element of literacy development in activities outside the classroom?

E. Materials and equipment

(a) What materials and equipment is used in the classroom? Outside the classroom?
(b) Is there a variety of useful materials?
(c) Are the materials in line with children's interests
(d) Are materials provided for practice?
(e) Did the majority of the children share and manipulate the materials?
(f) Are children's own experiences recognised and utilised as resources for teaching and learning (are they allowed to bring to the lesson their own experiences)?

F. Questioning Skills

(a) Does the teacher ask a variety of questions that probe for children's understanding? (Does s/he ask more open-ended questions or close-ended questions?)
(b) Do the children ask questions which show creative thinking even without the teacher's encouragement?

G. Classroom Interaction (teacher and children; children and children)

(a) Is the interaction between teacher and children appropriate?
(b) Is the interaction between children and children appropriate?
(d) Does the interaction provide opportunities for some form of literacy development?

F. Use of home language

- Does the caregiver use both English and home language? Why? Why not?
- Does the caregiver use code-switching only when the majority does not seem to understand? Why?
- Does the caregiver communicate only in English even when the children do not seem to understand? Why? Why not?
- Does the caregiver use the home language only? Why? Why not?

APPENDIX 3B: *VIDEO ANALYSIS TOOL*

Name of pre-school/ECD Centre:		Lesson No:			
Caregiver (No.):		Male:		Female:	
No. Of Children:		Male:		Female:	

	Description of activity	Location of activity	length	Resources used	Specific tasks children are called on to perform	DAP levels of development [PHD, INTD, EMD, SOD]*	DAP principles for Early literacy development [PA, APR, PRW, WRD, OLS]**
1							

DAP = Developmentally Appropriate, * **PHD** = Physical Development, **INTD** = Intellectual Development, **EMD** = Emotional Development, **SOD** = Social Development

** **PA** = Phonic Awareness, **APR** = Alphabetic Principle, **PRW** = Print Awareness, **WRD** = Writing Development, **OLS** = Oral Language Skills

APPENDIX 4: *CHECKLIST*

Name of Pre-school	
Village	
Traditional Authority	
District	
Date	

A. Background Characteristics

*Who established the pre-*schoolECD Centre?

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Religious organisation
- ☐ Interested individuals
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

What is the length of each pre-schoolECD Centre day?

	Start time	Finishing Time
☐		
☐		
☐		

What is the catchment area served by the pre-schoolECD Centre? (Which villages send children to the pre-school/ECD Centre?)

Villages	
	Total

B. Pre- school /ECD Centre facilities

How many classrooms are there in the pre-school/ECD Centre?

- ☐ None
- ☐ One
- ☐ Two
- ☐ More than two

What is the state of the classrooms?

- ☐ Permanent and purpose-built
- ☐ Permanent but borrowed
- ☐ Temporary (and thatched)
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

C. Pre-school /ECD Centre Staff and Management

Total number of Support Staff and management committee

Personnel	Male	Female	Total
Support staff			
School Committee			
Management Team			
PTA			

Total number of teachers by qualification and gender

Caregiver's Name	Male	Female	Academic Qualification	Professional Qualification

Total number of Caregiver by qualification and gender

Caregiver's Name	Male	Female	Academic Qualification	Professional Qualification

D. Pre-school/ECD Centre enrolment over the past 2-4 years

Year	Boys	Girls	Orphans	TOTAL
2001				
2002				
2003				
2004				

****

APPENDIX 5A: ***PERMISSION LETTER TO THE MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILD WELFARE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES***

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

Principal
Francis Moto B.Ed., M.A., Ph.D
AFRICA

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI, SOUTHERN

Tel: 011 (265) 524 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: 011 (265) 524 046
Email: CCADMIN@chanco.unima.mw

Our Ref.:
Your Ref.:

The Principal Secretary
Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services
Lilongwe

Dear Madam/Sir

Request to carry out basic research in rural pre-schools in Zomba

I would like to request your office to grant me permission to carry out research in rural pre-schools (CBCCs) in Zomba as part of my PhD studies with the Universities of Malawi and Sussex in the United Kingdom. The title of my study is *Early literacy development opportunities for rural pre-school children in Malawi: Case study of four pre-schools in Zomba District.*

The study is central to children's development as well as preparation for formal primary schooling in Malawi since early literacy is a prerequisite for children's future learning. Your speedy permission to my request will be highly appreciated.

I look forward to your support

Yours sincerely

Foster A.C. Kholowa
Lecturer in English Language Education
Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies

Email: fkholowa@chanco.unima.mw
Tel: (265) 01 524 222
Fax: (265) 01 524 046
Cc. The Divisional Manager, South Eastern Education Division

APPENDIX 5B: *PERMISSION LETTER TO THE DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICE*

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

Principal
Francis Moto B.Ed., M.A., Ph.D
AFRICA

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI, SOUTHERN

Tel: 011 (265) 524 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: 011 (265) 524 046
Email: CCADMIN@chanco.unima.mw

Our Ref.:
Your Ref.:

The Social Welfare Officer
Zomba District Social Welfare Office

Dear Madam

Request to carry out basic research in rural pre-schools in Zomba

I would like to request your office to grant me permission to carry out research in rural pre-schools in Zomba as part of my PhD studies with the Universities of Malawi and Sussex in the United Kingdom. The title of my study is *Early literacy development opportunities for rural pre-school children in Malawi: case study of four pre- schools in Zomba District.* A formal request to that effect was made to the Ministry of Gender Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS) and I have been given a go-ahead though orally. I have been assured by the MoGCS headquarters that a formal written permission will follow later.

I intend to visit four pre-schools in the rural areas where I shall observe some of the activities. Furthermore I will also need to interview caregivers and some of the parents and guardians in the pre-school community.

I will appreciate very much if your office could provide me with information on available rural pre-schools within the radius of 10 to 20 km from Zomba town.

I look forward to your support

Yours sincerely

Foster A.C. Kholowa
Lecturer in English Language Education
Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies
Email: fkholowa@chanco.unima.mw
Tel: (265) 01 524 222;
Fax: (265) 01 524 046

APPENDIX 5C: *PERMISSION LETTER TO PRE-SCHOOL DIRECTORS*

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

Principal
Francis Moto B.Ed., M.A., Ph.D
AFRICA

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI, SOUTHERN

Tel: 011 (265) 524 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: 011 (265) 524 046
Email: CCADMIN@chanco.unima.mw

Our Ref.:
Your Ref.:

The Director/Proprietor

..... Pre-school/Centre

Dear Sir/Madam

Request to carry out basic research at your pre-school/Community Based Child Care Centre

I would like to request your office to grant me permission to carry out research at your pre-school as part of my PhD studies with the Universities of Malawi and Sussex in the United Kingdom. My study is looking at the nature of activities that pre-schoolers are engaged in at your school. The study will involve observing the various activities in and outside the classroom, interviewing caregivers and parents or guardians in the school community.

A formal request for permission to access pre-schools was made to the Ministry of Gender Child Welfare and Community Services (MoGCS) and I have been given a go-ahead, which will be followed by a formal written permission.

All information collected will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and all names of persons, children and schools will anonymised when reporting the findings of this study. Pre-schools shall also have access to the findings of the study shall they need to do so.

I look forward to your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely

Foster A.C. Kholowa
Lecturer in English Language Education
Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies
Email: fkholowa@chanco.unima.mw
Tel: (265) 01 524 222; Fax: (265) 01 524 046

APPENDIX 5D: *LETTER FROM THE MOGCS GRANTING PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY*

Telephone: Lilongwe 770 411/740/203
Telegrams: COMSEV
Telex: 44361 COMSEV MI
Fax: 770 826

MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILD WELFARE
AND COMMUNITY SERVICE
PRIVATE BAG 330
CAPITAL CITY
LILONGWE 3
MALAWI

16th September, 2004.

The Principal,
Chancellor College,
P.O Box 280,
ZOMBA.

REQUEST TO CARRY OUT BASIC RESEARCH IN RURAL PRE-SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA BY MR FOSTER A.C. KHOLOWA

Dear Sir,

I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, the receipt of your letter of 31st August 2004 on the above subject.

I am pleased to convey the ministry's approval for Mr Kholowa to carry out a Basic Research in Rural Pre-schools in Zomba to facilitate your studies. This ministry would also be interested in the findings of your research study.

The ministry wishes Mr Kholowa every success in his studies.

Yours faithfully,

T.T. Kang'ombe
For: SECRETARY FOR GENDER, CHILD WELFARE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

APPENDIX 6: *CATALOGUE OF SONGS AND NURSERY RHYMES FREQUENTLY SUNG IN THE FOUR PRE-SCHOOLS /ECD CENTRES DURING THE STUDY*

Song/Rhyme (and pre-school)	***Song/Rhyme (and pre-school)***
Loweza mlamu loweza... Aye loweza *Phikireni nsima....Ndiwo mtoliro loweza* *...Aye Loweza* Chorus *Bekeshu- bekeshu, Wakutuma ndani ...kuti ubekeshule...mwana wachipongwe...* *wawawitsa ndiwo...pamodzi ndi tsabola* [Who has sent for you to spoil the relish? You are a rude child: you have added too much salt and paper into the relish!]	*Manja mwamba,...* *manja pamutu...* *manja mmapewa...* *manja pamimba...* *manja mchiunu...* *manja mmaondo...* *mmanja mapazi* (Children touch the corresponding parts of their body as they sing)
Achimwene..iii... *Achimwene abwera x2* *Amayi asiye kuphika nandolo...* *iii...Tidye nsomba* [It's nice brother has come so will eat fish, and mum will rest from cooking "Nandolo"]	*Ife ndife tiana* *tiana tochepa* *timadziwa kuwerenga* *... 1, 2, ...10;* *...a, e, i, o, u,...* *....A, B, ...Z* [We are little children and we know how to read/count 1 to 10; a, e, I, o, u; ' A, B, C, D,.....Z)
Uku kumwamba zamadenga *Kuli Mulungu zamadenga* *Uko kutchire zamadenga* *Kuli ziromb zamadenga* *Apa pansizamadenga* *Pali nyerere zamadenga* Chorus: *mayo mayo...zamadenga (repeat)* [Up in heaven there is God There in the bush are animals Here on the ground are ants...]	*Gologolo pa mtengo wakakamira ,* *maso ali nawo sawona,* *wakakamira...*
Mwana Joni walira, *Mutu kupweteka ine,* *Mapewa kupweteka ine,* *Mawondo ndi zala* [Children touch relevant parts of their bodies as they sing]	*Gona mwana* *Uleke kulira,* *mbalame zonse zagona* *muzitsa zawo zazing'ono,* *gona mwana.* [Sleep child, stop crying for the birds have already slept in their small nests, sleep child]
Kalulu msamayende naye *adzakuudza bodza*	*Paulo ndi Sila Anapemphera, zitseko za mndende zinatseguga. Moyo wanga X3* *nyadira, sangalala, sekerera*
Nzama nzama...akathira mchere pamodi ndi tsabola... *Yelelelele Nzama* (Children sing while jumping, lifting their legs four times)	*Brother John* *Come here come here* *Come and ring the bell* *Ding dong ding*

Suyo salimwendo gwireni *Mwendò umodzi salimwendo gwireni....* [Children sing while standing on one leg]	*"Aphunzitsi tiweruseni njala kuwawa, njala kuwawa ife, njala kuwawa*
Asisi anona... *kapena tikananenepa...akulu..*	*"Galuyu wandani wadya matemba, timcheke pamimba ngati wadya matemba.. Cheke cheke ...twa...wadyapo!"* [Who is the owner of this dog that has eaten my fish. We must cut across its belly to see if it has eaten the fish]
Fanta sindimamwa ndimamwa coca cola *Awuwi amamwa* margarine Chorus: *Akununkha... aaa...iwe sununkha* [I do not drink fanta but coca cola. ...drink/eat margarine]	*Tiyamike dziko labwino,* *Tiyamike mbalame zoyimba,* *Tiyamike Mulungu wa zinthu zonse...* *Tiyamike Mulungu wathu...Amen* [Let us thank God for the wonderful earth Let us thank God for the birds that sing Let us thank God, the owner of everything Let us thank our God, Amen]
Pamchenga timatero posewera *Ichi nchiani?* *a, ..e...i...o...u* *(Pre-school C)*	*A Yesu akadzabwera, nzagwadira..nzagwadire Yesu wanga nsagwadira. Anandigula ine ndi mwazi wake* [When Jesus appears I shall bow/kneel down before Him; I shall bown/kneel down before my Jesus for He bought me with His blood]
Draw a circle in the air ...in the air...[hand clap 3 times]... hands in the air...in the air.... [sing repeatedly - four times]	*So...so...* *Solala...somayo...sobigamala* Dance ...dance....dance ...dance Walk ... walk ... walk... walk Run ... run... run...run
Ogode ...ogode... *Ena aphika nyama...* *Ena aphika thelele...* *Chikati gwegwerere...* *Chili kwa iwe* (repeatedly)	*Ana wosaphunzira, kwao kunyada atenga pensulo ayika pamutu, kulemba sadziw, o zachisoni...* **Chorus**: *Eee taona, ee anzanu kunyadira sukulu yaulere*

APPENDIX 7A: *SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT* [CHICHEWA VERSION]

Interview with caregiver at Pre-school/ECD Centre A
5 September, 2004, 8.30-9.30am
[FK = Foster Kholowa; CG = Caregiver

FK **Kodi inu.... ntchito yanu pano ndiyotani?**
CG: Aah... panopa ntchito yanga monga ndingati caregiver, ndipo ndimaonesetsa kuti nthawi imene aphunzitsi akuphunzitsa ana, ngati [ana] akubvuta kapena mwana **akulira ine ndiyenera ndimnyamule mwana amene ujayo ndipite naye panja, ndikasewere naye**. Ndikasewerea naye ndipo akasiya kulira kujako timakamulowesanso mkalasi. **Ngati akuchita phokoso timamletsa phokoso** lija kuti, asatani? Asapitirize. Ngati **akusewera timaonesetsa kuti mwanayo asatani? Asamasewere koma azimvera aphunzitsi**

FK: **Okay ...tsopano inuyo ... u care giver umenewu munauyamba liti?**
CG: Aah... u care giver umenewu ndinauyamba pakalebe, cha mu January chaka chomwe chinocho [2004] pamene gulu linaganiza kuti maziphunzitsi akuvutika ku...kuwasamalira ana chifukwa maziphunzitsi alipo awiri. Ndiyeno amabvutika kuti pa nthawi imene akuphunzitsa ija mwana amavutanso ndiye amakhala ngati amasiya maphunziro aja kumatulukanso panja kumamsamala mwana uja. Instead ndiye anthu anangoganiza kuti bwanji tikhale ndi ... anthu ena azikathandizira kuti? Kumenekoko ... eyaaa

FK: **Oh...chabwino. Aaah... ndiye tikhoza kunena kuti mwakhala pano chakha sichinathe...?**
CG: Eee...chaka sichinathe panopa

FK: **Okay... Tsopano kuti ...anthu ataona kuti pali vuto ... kuti maphunzitsi akukumanawo kuti ana achuluka komanso mwina zochitika za ana ndi zovuta, eti... pamafunika anthu angapo ndithu azithandizira. Inuyo kuti muzipezeka pano anakusankhani bwanji?**
CG: Okay. Ineyo ndine munthu m`modzi amene ndiri volunteeer wa [Pre-school A]. Ndiye mgulu mujamo, chifukwa anthu sikuti amalipidwa iyayi maziphunzitsiwo. Ndi gulu lomweli la ma volunteer li. Anangosankha kuti mmene kulili ku mudzi kwathu kuno kuyenera tikhazikitse chiyani? Aah... Nursery School. Ndiyeno Chinatitengera ifeyo anthu omwewo agulu kundisankha ineyo kuti ndikatumikire nawo pa sukulu imeneyoyo kuti tithandizane ndi anthu...amenewo, maziphunzitsiwo, kuti ntchito yawo isamakhale yovuta iyayi

FK **Okay. Chabwino, ndiye chimodzimodzinso ngati a volunteer simukulandira china chiri chonse?**
CG: Palibe chilichonse chomwe timalandira

FK **Okay?**
CG: Ndithu

FK: **Tsopano inuyo mumaziona bwanji zimenezozo zoti simulandira china chiri chonse pomwe moyo wamunthu umafunika sopo...chani...chani...zimenezo ndiye zimatha bwanji? Ngati munthu?**
CG: Kumbali ya ifeyo monga ngati munthu ndizoona kuti timakhala ...timatenga nthawi yaitali panopa kuchoka cha mm 8 Koloko mpaka 11 Koloko. Komabe sichingakhale chipsyinjo kwa ifeyo chifukwa tinachita kusankha kuti tikhala ma volunteer, ndiye sitimalira kuti anthu atipatse ndalama iyayi. Ifeyo pano tikaweruka mma 11 Kolokoijayo timatha madzulo ajawo kupita mm'aganyu kukalima kwina kwake, apo iyayi kukapanga ganyu wina wake woti ifeyo titati tipeze ka ndalama koti ife tizigulira sopo. Ndiye ife sitimadandaula pamenepa chifukwa ntchitoyi tinaifuna tokha amene sitinakakamizidwe ndi munthu. Koma tikanakhala kuti tinakakamizidwa ndi munthu bwenzi titasiya kuti aah... sitimalandira, ndiye basi tingotani? Tingobwelera pambuyo. Koma maganizo athu Sali moteromo iyayi. Ndithu.

FK: **Okay. Munapitako ku sukulu?**
CG: Kusukulu ndinapitako

FK: **Ndiye munalekezera kalasi yanji?**
CG: School ndinayimbako ndinafika form 4

FK: **Form four?**
CG: Eeèh...
FK **Munayimba kuti?**
CG: Aaa... Primary yanga ndinayimba pa Thundu primary School, mpaka 8. Form 1 ndinazapita ku Masongola Secondary School, kenaka chifukwa cha mavuto a ndalamawa ndinazachokako kupita ku Sacred Heart pa form 3... pa form 2 ndi form 3. Form 4 ndinazachoka kupita ku private, St. May Private Secondary School. Eyaa

FK: **Munamaliza liti?**
CG: Ndinamaliza last year [2003]

FK: **Last year?**
CG: Yeah

FK: **Oh... Chabwino. Aaa... mutayamba panopa ndikhoza kunena kuti ma challenges amene mumaona wokhudzana ndi ntchito yanu ya ... ngati care giver anali wotani, [kapena tinene kuti] mukuwaonabe mpaka lero panopa?**
CG: Okay. Chimene ndinganenepo ndichakuti sianthu onse amene amakondwera ndi zabwino zikamachitika pa chinthu. Ifeyo anatisankha ngati ma volunteer kuti tizithandiza anawo kuti azikhala ndi tsogolo labwino koma pali anthu ena mmidzimu omwe samathat kumvetsa kuti akamati Nursery school ndi chani, kapena volunteer ntchito yake ndiyotani. Ndiyeno tikukhala ndi zipsyinjo zosiyanasiyana kunoko monga anthu akumanena kuti ***"aah... inu mukumasiya ntchito mmakomo mwanumo mukumapita kumene kuja simukulandirakonso kanthu ndiyeno zikuthandizani chani Osamangokhala ngati ife bwanji."*** Koma ifeyo timawauza kuti ...aah ...ifeyo u volunteer sikuti ndiwokakamizidwatu iyayi koma ifeyo tokha tikuzipereka, tinafuna kuti tikagwire ntchito iti? Imeneyiyi. Ndiye ngati munganenepo za bvuto limene tikuliona ifeyo kuno kumudzi ndiloti timanyozedwa kunenedwa zinthu zosayenera chifukwa choti ifeyo panopa sitimatani? Sitimalandira koma ife sitimakhumudwa nazo... Eyaaa... So anthu amayembekezera kuti at least akhoza kumvetsetsa.... Akamaone kena kake kakusintha pa moyo wakowo monga kaya kabvalidwe, kaya ndi mmene umakhalira kwanuko, kaya chani-chani. M'madziwa munthu akakhala pena pake kuti akuphunzitsa pena pake anthu amayembekedzera kuti ...aah... munthuyo azilandirapo kanthu ko... koti azithandizikira. Koma akamona ngati kuti sukulandirapo anthu amakhala akukunyoza kwambiri, mwakuti munthu umasowa mtendere; ukayend aapa "iii...ma volunteer... eee...chani-chani..." basi kungokhala ngati ... yangosanduka ngati nyimbo tsopano. Koma ife sitimadandaula nazo ayi.

FK Okay
CG: Ndithu

FK: **Chabwino. Tsopano zikundidabwitsa kuit anthu amalankhula choncho pamene inu mukuwathandizira ana awo mmudzi muno... Sindidziwa kuti ma ... ujeni... amenewa amachokera kwa makolo kapena kapena kwa anthu ena oti mwina achinyamata anzanu...kapena chai?**
CG: Kumbali ya makolo ndisaname iyayi. Malkolo akusanagalala nayo kuti ana awo akuthandizika mmudzi muno kwambiri. Ndi achinyamata amene tiri nawo misinkhu imodzi... masaizi amodzi, amene amakhala ngati akutani? ...akuchita zonyododola chani-chani...ndithu
FK: **Chabwino. Nanga mkalasi muja muli ana a mtundu wotani amene mumaphunzitsa inuyo?**
CG: Aah... monga mkalasimu... muli ana amisinkhu yosiyana siyana komanso amkhalidwe osiyanasiyana. Pali ena ovuta kwambiri, pali ena ovuta pang'ono, ndiye pali ena wosokosa, akumasokosa kwambiri... amasokosa kwa ... kwambiri kotero aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa amakhala kuti akuchita zawo. Ndiye ... komanso anawo ali ndi makhalidwe awo wotani? ...osiyana; ena ali ndi makhalidwe abwino enanso a makhalidwe ... woyipa. Ndiyebe ifeyo timayesetsabe kuti onsewo tipange akhale level imodzi, kuti aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa asamatani... asamabvutike...ndithu

FK: **Okay. Tsopano ndingoonjezera... ndingokhala ngati ndikuchita extend question ... ndinene kuti ana amenewa ... ana amene mukuwaphunzitsawa amachokera... ma social background otani?**
CG: Aah... tinganene kuti ana amenewa tisaname anawa amakhala a ang'ono ndipo ndinganene kuti ko...koyambilira sitimagwirizanapo iyayi. Mwina mwake amatha akabwera makolo aja

kudzawasiya amatha kumalilira makolo ajawo komabe ife timatha kuwanyengerera kuti "... akubwera akukakugulira ma bisiketi". Ndiye ana aja amakhala ndi chidwi: "akukandigulira biscuit...akuti akubwera." Chonchija aphunzitsi akutani ... akuphunzitsa. Akamavutavuta timawauza kuti chani... akubwera akukakugulira biscuit. Ndiye mwana uja amakhalabe ndi chidwi kumatani ... kumaphunzira mpka nthawi yowelikira m'mazindikira kuti yatani... yafika. Tsiku lobwera lija kena kanso samatani...samabvutanso iyayi, pakuti wayamba kugwirana ndi anzake bwino bwino ndithu.

FK: Tsono ana amene mukuphunzitsawa mwina... onse ali ndi makolo awa?

CG: Aah... ifeyo pokhazikitsa ujeni imeneyi tinaganiza kuti titenge chani ... ma orphans okhaokha koma tinaona kuti sichinthu chabwino kuti pa chinthu apa pangokhala ma orphans okhaokha ayi. Makolo wena okuti ana awo ndi ang'onoang'ono okuti ... okuti ana ali ndi makolo awo amabweranso pati... amabweranso pompano komanso ma orphan amakhala mmagulu muti... mommuja moti sitimaonetsera sankho ayi – kuti maganizo awo azikhla ogwirizana bwino bwino... asamaganize kuti tikuwasala iyayi.

FK Oh... Chabwino.

CG: Ndithu

FK Chabwino. ... Tsopano ma ... sindikudziwa ngati munalandirapo maphunziro wokhudzana ndi ntchito imene mukupanga ya u care giver yi, nanga simwafotokoza kuti pali ma challenges ndithu

CG: Eyaa...

FK: Sindidziwa ngati munalandirapo maphunziro amanewa.

CG: Kumbali ya maphunziro ndiye ndisaname... tingopangira through experience ... kuti mwana tingampange handle bwanji kuti asiye zinthu izi apange zinthu izizi basi

FK: Okay... chabwino. Eee... ngakhale muli a care giver koma ndikukhulupirira kuti nthawi zina mumaphunzitsako ndithu...mumaphunzitsa ndithu.... Inuyo ndi madera ati amene ...mumafuna kuti ana aja alimbikitsidwe kwambiri, kapena aphunzire kaya ndi ma skill kaya ndi chani...madera amene mumachita emphasise ndi ati?

CG: Aa... mutabwerezanso funsolo...

FK: Ndikutanthauza zoti mwina nthawi zina tikamaphunzitsa timafuna kuti anawa akamachoka pano akhale kuti atadziwa izi ... izi...izi...izi.... Ndiye ndikufunsa kuti ndi madera ati amene inuyo mumalimbikira kwambiri kuti muonesetse kuti anawa akamachoka pano kaya ndi am skills akhale atadziwa izi... ehee...

CG: Okay... chabwino ndamvetsa tsopano. Aah... kumbali ya ma skills ... ifeyo **monga aphunzitsi** tikalowa mkalasi choyambilira timafuna kuti mwana ... akhale pamodzi ndi anzake. Kumbali ya machezedwe awo, tinganene kuti ubale apalane ubwenzi ndi nzawo. Akapalana ubwenzi, akadziwana bwino bwino mwana uja choyamba adziwe kutani, kulankhula bwino bwino. Azidziwa kuti ichi ndi chakuti... kenaka ifeyo timatha kuganiza kuti pamenepa wafika stage iyi tikamphunzitsa a, e, I, o, o, atani amva. Ndiye timayamba kutani ... kuphunzitsa kaya zinthu zina ndi zina mchichewa kaye koyambilira. Kena kaja tikaona kuti ana aja ali pa level imodzi timapita tsopano ku chizungu tsopano kuti akhalebe ndi ka interest ka chani... ka English kuti ... pamene akuzachoka pa nursey school kupita ku ... Primary asakakhale wovutika kumene akupita kuja

FK: Okay ... Chabwino. Tsopano sindidziwa kuit mungatchulepo ziti mwa ma activities amene mumapanga kawiri kawiri mkalasi kaya kunja kwa kalasi.

CG: Okay... ndizambiri. Timati tikafika pano ana aja amalowa m'makalasi. Akalowa m'makalasi timayamba kuphunzitsa phunzitsa ndiye tikaona kuti ana aja atopa timayimbitsa nyimbo mkalasi mommuja. Ndiye tikayimbitsa nyimbo ijayo akakhala kuti ali bwinobwino – chifukwa nthawi zina amakhala atatopa, ena mwina amafuna atatuluka panja kukakodza....amatuluka imene ijayo kukasewra pang'ono nkulowanso. Ndiye nthawi zina timawatutultsa panja pajapo kumakapanga masewera ngati wothamanga, kudumphadumpha, chijawa. Komanso nthawi zina timawatulutsa makalasi muja kupita nawo panja ndikumawasonyeza mwina ngati mapiri, mitengo, nsungwi, chani-chani – kumawaudza zinthu mmene zimatani, mmene zimakhalira. Komanso nthawi zina timagwilitsira ntchito kuwaphunzitsira kukhala ngati zitinin kumbali ya zinthu tikanena kuti ... ya zinthu imamveka bwanji timakhala tikugwiritsa ntchito zinthu ngati ziti... ngati zimenezo

Okay...ndiye mukatuluka panja ... zimenezo mumachita mkatimu kapena ndi panja pomwe

CG: Aah... Kumbali ya zosonyezasonyeza, mitengo izo kapena zothamangathamangazi amatuluka kaya panja ndikupangapanga zimenezo. Tikapangapanga zimenezo zamasewerozo amakalowanso mkalasi kukapitiliza maphunziro awo aja. ... Za chitinizo timatha kuchita panja olo mkalasi.

FK: **Oho..**

CG: Eya...

FK: **Tsopano ngati pakamapanga zosewerasewera inu mumaganiza kuti akuphunzirabe kapena yangokhla nthawi yongopuma?**

CG: Nthawi imene ija amakhala kuti akuphunzira, koma paku... paku... pakuphunzira poopo amapindulapo kuti azikhala ujeni, azikhala ndi fitness...eyaa... kuti zina aziyiwala ... ngati anali ndi maganizo ena ake ayiwale

FK: **Oh... chabwino**

CG: Ndithu

Aah... mmm... sindidziwa ngati anawa mumawakonzekeretsa nkhani yo... munatchula za kulankhula ... sindidziwa nkhani ya kulemba ndi kuwerenga. Ndikudziwa kuti pa stage ngati inoyo mpovuta kuti ana muzichita kuwaphunzitsa ngati ku primary school, komabe pali zina zimene ndikhulupilira kuti mumapanga ndicholinga chongofuna kuwathandiza anawa kuti asa zavutike ikadzafika nthawi yolemba ndi kuwerengayo. Ndiye sindidziwa ngati gawo limenelo mumalikhudzapo?

CG: Gawo limenelo ife timalikhudzako, chifukwa pamene akuphunzira panjapo chikakhala monga ngati Chichewa chija tikuwaphunzitsa **a, e, i, o, u.** Ndiye timaphunzitsa ... timaphunzitsa ... timaphunzitsa ndikumawaonetsa ma letters ajawo. Kumawaonetsa kaya, kaya tinalemba pa ka ...aah...**chithumba cha feteleza** manambala pamene pajapo, **a, e, i, o, u.** Komanso tinalembapo **ma shape** monga ngati triangle, circle, chani ndi zina zotero. Ndiyeno tikawaphunzitsa ... tikaphunzitsa ndiyeno timawatulutsa panja kuti tsopano mundilembere "a". Ana aja ndiye amatani ... amalemba "a" uja. Kaya timawauza kuti ndilembeleni "1", ana aja ndiye amalemba "1" uja pansi, pa ...dothi kuti pamene akupita ku Primary ko asakavutike chifukwa [.....] akakhala ngati akungopitiriza

FK: **Okay ...oh... chabwino. Zikomo kwambiri.... Ndiye sindidziwa ngati mungalankhulepo pa nkhani ya zida zophunzitsira komanso zophunzilira pa mala pano, mungakambepo zotani?**

CG: Aah ... kumbali ya zida zophunzilirazo... aah ... palibe mavuto a nkhani imeneyi ya zophunzilira chifukwa tikamaonesetsa mabuku omwe tili nawo, tisanameyi... ifeyo sitingathe kuwatsatira bwino bwino chifukwa chokuti mabukuwo ndiwosakwanira. Chifukwa chokuti ...aah... kunkhani yopeza mabuku ngati amenewo ifeyo akumakhala ngati ifeyo akumativutirapo. Ndiyeno ifeyo monga pali anzathu omwe anapita kumaphunziro kumeneko anakaphunzira ...anakawaphunzitsako zinthu zina zoti ayenera kutani... pophunzitsira. Ndiye through experience yomwe anakatenga kumene kujako ama ... amagwiritsa ntchito experience yiti ... imeneyoyo. Eyaa... monga amagwiritsa ntchito ... kuti mwina mwake ama ... ama... kuli ma ujeni awo anangowapatsa ngati ma topic kuti angamaphunzitse bwanji monga za madzi – kufunika kwa madzi, ntchito ya madzi, komanso komwe tingakawapeze madziwo. Kukhala ngati ama ... tima... timangotsata ndi mmene zinthu ziliri. Koma kumbali ya zophunzitsira tisaname zipangizo ndizochepa

FK: **Okay... moti ... palibe mabuku ndi zina ndi zina?**

CG: Monga kumbali ya mabuku ndisaname ndiye tilibe koma blackboard... ma ujeni... ma ... chall tilinacho chokuti amalembera bwinobwino. Komanso kunangobwera tizidutswa ngati ta ujeni, ta makatoni ndikulembalembamo manambala enawo. Manambala komanso zithumbazo ndi zimene timagwiritsa ntchitonso ngati kuti kulemba po ma shape wo bwinobwino – izi ndi zida zimene tili nazo

FK: **Mukati "zithumba" ndi zi chiyani zimenezo?**

CG: Matumba a feteleza aja a while. Ndiye timakhala ndi marker, ndiye timalemba, ngati tikufuna kulemba "e" timalemba a, e, i, o u. Mkatimo mukalowa mukazionatazilemba pena pake. Ma shape

wo tinalemba pali ma **triangle, square, trapezium**, chani-chani, zonsezi zili pati pamenepopo., pa chithumbacho – tinalemba ndi pental marker. Eyaa. Matumba ake ndi womwewo ndithu amene anthu amayikamo chimanga.

FK: **Chabwino. Mmene mukuneneramo mukuoneka ngati mukugwiritsa ntchito zinthu zotizikupezeka mdera lanu. Ndiye ku mbali imeneyo mungalankhulepo zotani, kuti , poti mukuti materials ena mulibe koma kumbali ngati iyoyo mumachitapo chiyani pa sukulu pano?**

CG: Aah... pasukulu panopo ifeyo monga anthu amene tikugwira ntchito tikuyesetsa kuti tipeze zinthu zokuti zili konkuno zoti sitinga...sitingathe ... kugula chifukwa cha nkhani ya ndalama. Tikanena ku mbala ya ndalamayo ndiye zimakhala ngati ... zikutivutirapo. Timagwiritsa ntchito zinthu zomwe tili nazo pafupi kuti... tizitha kugwiritsa mmalo mokuti aah tikagule chikwama choikamo zinthu, tikhoza kungodula nsungwi zomwe izo kudula mphindozo ndikusema mkatimo bowo ndikumasungamo zinthu zathu bwinobwino popanda kugula. Monganso ku mbali ya...aah... zoseweretsa seweretsazi tikhoza kuwapezera tizitini kaya kukakowa dongo uja, kuwa...kuwa... kuwaumbira tizinthu... azisewerets, eya osangolilira kuti tikagule iyayi... eyaa...

FK **... Okay... Chabwino ... mm tsopano sindidziwa... ndili gawo lomalizira... lokhudzana ndi anthu a mmudzi muno. Kodi mumalumikizana bwanji pakati pa anthu ndi inu ... kaya ndi makolo...aah... kapena amene akuwasunga ana... pamakhala kulumikizana bwanji?**

CG: Aah... pakati pa makolo ndi ifeyo maziphunzitsi , komanso kumbali ya ana awowo pali mgwirizano waukulu chifukwa chokuti ...aah... nthawi zina zake makolo ajawo tikakhala kuti zativuta ku ... ku nkhani ya zakudya... chifukwa nthawi zina anthu amathat kusonkha tizakudya ndikuwaphikira ana ajawo. Makolo ajawo amatha kutani... kusonkhasonkha. Nafenso maziphunzitsi kumbali yathu timachitapo. Chonchija ana aja amakhla akutani... akudya zinthu zimene zijazo mpaka pamene zizathere. Komanso ana aja m'makomo mwina mujamo ndimokuti ena amasowa kuti azigula zinthu tsiku ndi tsiku sizimatheka iyayi. Ndiye pamene mwana ujayo akufuna kujomba ife timalimbikitsa kuti mwanayo azitani...azibwera ifeyo kunoko ana aja ***tinawawaphunzitsa kha... khalidwe lina lake kuti azikondana, pali mawu akuti "kuganizirana"***. Ndiye tinawapatsa ana aja mawu akuti kuganizirana kuti mnzanu ngati alibe mutani, muganizireni. Ndiye ana aja amatha kutani... kumugayira mnzawo alibe uja. Ngati alibe kanthu timamuuzabe ... timauza makolowao aja kuti mwana asalephere chifukwa choti alibe chani... chakudya. Ndiye mwana uja ngati alibe chakudya anzake amamugawira nkumpatsa ... Eyaa.

FK: **Okay. Tsopano kodi pamakhala ndondomeko yoti yokumana ndi makolo kaya ndi anthu a m'mudzi muno yokhudzana ndi maphunziro a ana amenewa?**

CG: Aah... kumbali imeneyoyo zimachitika tikamatsegulira sukulu ndiponso tikamatani... tikatsekera , komanso ngati pali zochitika zina zake timawaitana makolo ajawoi kuti tizakambirane nawo mfundo zoyenera pa nthawi yoiti imeneyoyo.

FK: **Okay. Ndiye inuyo ressponse ya makolo kawirikawiri mukuyiwona kuti ili bwanji?**

CG: Aah... makolo ndisaname iyayi, makolo ambiri akuikilapo mtima, ndipo tikaona pano... panopaakubwelera-bwelerabe chifukwa akuone ndi mmene zikutani...zikusinthira. Chifukwa anthu ambiri akumanena kuti akabwera kunoko nthawi zambiri akamayamba standard 1... nzeru mmutu zikumakhalamo kuti anawa anali pena pake. Olo maziphunzitsi ku [primary] sukuluko akumayamikira kuti "...aah... akugwira chani...ntchito... ndithu". Anthu ambiri ndithu akuikapo chidwi ndipo akuona zotani... zosinta, chifukwa zinthuzo akuziona okha amene.

FK: **So ... mwina popeza zinthu sizimalephera vuto eti... mwina in the way mumachita relate ndi makolo kapena ma guardian.Ndikudziwa kutinso mmene mwafotokozera momveka mukuona ngati zinthu zikuyenda bwino ndithu. Koma mwina mukhoza kukhala maganizo oti komabe , nkutheka kuti mwina pakanachitika zakuti zakuti ubale umenewu ukanachitanso improve kwambiri. Mwina mungakhale ndi maganizo concerning that area.**

CG: Aah... ndizoonadi panagakhalebe maganizo ena oti kuwayikapo kuti ubale umenewu upitirire. Aah... mwina mwake pakufunika kuti ifeyo monga maziphunzitsi, koma... koma... komanso ma care givers, komanso ndi makolowo tizi... tizitha kukhala ndi msonkhano mwina mwake mfumu aziitanitsidwa, mafumu onse ndi anthu awo kuti tizitha kuwa...kuwa...kuwauzako ... zaubwino waa... nursery school kuti pamene ana azichoka ku nursery school kupita ukuku asamakaone chobvuta kuti mwina mwake maphunziro ...angapite patsogolo. Tsopano kuti panopa anthu

amene akupangawa ndi anthu amene ali ndi chidwi ndi ... makolo amene ali ndi chidwi ndi amene akutumiza ana awo ... kunoko. Koma ikakhala ngati compulsory kuti afune asafune azibwerabe ku sukulu kunoko ikanakhala njira yabwino. Kukambirana ndi mafumu komanso anthu ... a m'midzimo kuti azitumiza ana awo... ndithu.

FK: **Ndiye kuti mukutanthauza kuti anthu ena saonetsa chidwi kwenikweni?**

CG: Eya... anthu ena kumidziku alibe chidwi chotumiza ana awo ... makamaka ndikovuta kuti anthu amene asanapitepo kusukulu ... kumbali ya makolo, samadziwa ubwino wotumiza mwana wawo ku sukulu kapena ku nursery school kuti akaphunzire. Mmalo moti amtumize ku sukulu amamuuza kuti "...aah... basi ine ndilibe kanthu ko... ko... koti ndikakutumize kumeneko khala ...pakhomo pompano...tizicheza". Mmalo moti amtumize kusukulu. Apo iyayi mwina mwake kamwana kakang'ono amakatumiza kuti iyayi mwina mwake zikapanga ... pita ndi anzako... muzikalima, kaya muzikatani, ndiye choncho sukulu ... siyimapita patsogolo. Koma zimenezi zikachitika akamapita ku Primary kuja, akumapita atakula kale ndiyeno kumene kuja kuti ... akhale...apange cover zinthu zoyenerera zimakhala zovuta. Koma zikatheka m'mene ndikuneneramu kuti makolo azitha kutumiza ana awo ... ku school ndikuona ngati ndikuona ngati maphunzirodi akanakhala ... opita patsogolo. Eya.

FK: **Aah...tsono funso lomalizira. Mmidzi muno... masukulu a mmidzi ... a mkaka... kuti zinthu yende bwino mukuganiza kuti boma kapena kaya ndi anthu mmidzi muno achite chiyani?**

CG: Aah... choyamba ndi pamene ndanena kale kuti tiyenera mafumu ndi anthu akhale pamodzi ndikukambirana. Kachiwiri azitha ... boma kapena anthu kusonkha zinthu zoti ana ajawo akapita kumene kuja azitha ... kudya. Mwina tizakhala ngati kuwakopa kuti azibwerako. Eya.

FG: **Chabwino**

CG: Ndithu

FK: **[Mr X, ndithokoze. Koma mwina mwake ndisanamalize mwina mwake mukhoza kukhala ndi mawu omaliza kapena? [laughs]**

CG: Aaah... kwathu ndikusangalala kuti inuyo mwatiyendera kuno. Ifeyo tikamaona chonchi timakhalabe nafe ndi chidwi chifukwa chokuti ... komanso mmene mwabweramu anthu ena amapangidwa encourage, amatha kumaona kuti ...aah... kunabwera akufufuza zina zake ndiye nawonso amakhala ndi chidwi kuti nafenso titumize ana athu kuti azikakhala ... kumenekuja. Amaonanso kuti anthu akugwira ntchito akamaona anthu ngati ... inuyo. Ndiye ifeyo kwathu ndikusangalala kuti mwina mwake sukulu yathuyi ipanga ... ipitabe patsogolo, ndithu.

FK: **Zikomo kwambiri, ndathokoza kwambiri chifukwa chololera kuti tikambirane.**

End of Interview

APPENDIX 7B: *SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT* [ENGLISH VERSION]

Interview with caregiver at Pre-school/ECD Centre A
5 September, 2004, 8.30-9.30am
[FK = Foster Kholowa; CG = Caregiver]

[...]

FK: **What does your work, here, involve?**
CG: Aah...I work as a caregiver; I attend to children if they happen to cry or cause problems for others during a lesson; I make sure the child is taken out of the classroom and I play with him/her, and bring him back after he has stopped crying. If a child makes noise, we tell him to stop and if he /she plays during a lesson we make sure he/she stops and pays attention to the teacher.

FK: **Okay...for how long have you been doing this work, as a caregiver?**
CK: Aah...I have been here for quite some time, I started this work in January this year [2004] when the 'Group' realized that the teachers were having problems taking care of the children, as there were only two of them, hence if a child happened to cause problems during a lesson one teacher would take the child out and take care of him/her; thus it was decided there should be some people to help in such cases.

FK: **Oh...all right. Aah...so it means that you have been here for less than a year...?**
CG: Yes... exactly.

FK: **Okay... After the people had seen that there was a problem...that the work was becoming too much for the teachers considering children's misbehaviour... that there was need for a number of people to assist. How were you chosen for this particular job?**
CG: Okay. Actually, I am a member of [Pre-school A]. This is a group of volunteer teachers –they are not paid. This group saw that there was need to establish aah... a Nursery School in our area. So it was the members of this group [Pre-school A] who selected me to serve at this school to help the people...the teachers, so that their work is not cumbersome for them.

FK: **Okay. All right, so as a volunteer you are not paid anything?**
CG: We are not paid anything.

FK: **Okay?**
CG: Sure.

FK: **How do you feel about not being paid anything as a human being... there are may things that you need for your up keep...and...other things, how does it feel?**
CG: To us as human beings, it is true that we take...we spend quite a lot of time here, from around 8 o'clock to 11 o'clock every school day. However this is not a problem to us as we willingly chose to be volunteers. Sometimes we find pieces of work in the afternoon –working in other people's gardens or doing some other kind of work so that we find a little something for soap. We do not complain since we accepted this job out of our own free will, no one forced us to take it. Had it been that we were forced in the first place, well, we could have quitted because...aah.... a job without salary ... we would not have taken that. But this is not how we feel. Sure.

FK: **Okay. Have you ever been to school?**
CG: Yes. I have been to school.

FK: **So, how far did you go with your education?**
CG: Well, I went as far as [secondary school] form four.

FK: **Form four?**
CG: Yes...

FK: Which school did you go to?

CG: Aah…I did my primary education at Thundu Primary School, up to standard 8. I did Form 1 at Masongola Secondary School but due to financial limitations, I could not continue so I went to Sacred Heart where I did Form 3…Forms 2 and 3. I then left for a private school –St. Marys Private Secondary School where I did Form four. Sure.

FK: When did you finish?

CG: I finished last year [2003]

FK: Last year?

CG: Yeah

FK: Oh…alright. …since you started your work here, what are the challenges that you face as a caregiver?

CG: Well, some people are just not pleased with good things when they happen. We were chosen as volunteers to help shape a bright future for the children, but there are some people in this village who do not really understand about pre-school and what it means to be a volunteer. As such we meet most of the times …we are ridiculed, for instance, some people say *"aah…you are abandoning your chores in your households for that place [pre-school] where you are not even paid, what are you going to benefit? Why do you choose to be different from us?"* But we tell them that …aah…we were not forced to be volunteers but we committed ourselves to doing this job. The main challenge that we are facing in this village is that of insults and ridicule from the people, all because we are not paid. But this is not a draw back for us…sure…because we understand that… people have certain expectations from an individual…especially when he or she is working, for instance, the way you dress or your life style in general is expected to change. You know, people expect that…aah… if one teaches somewhere, he or she will be getting a little something from there, with which t…to help oneself, but if things do not happen according to their expectations, you become a subject for insults and ridicule such that you do not find peace; where ever you go people are like *"iii…these volunteers…eee…this and that…"* it is as if …it is just like a song now, but we do not complain.

FK: Okay.

CG: Sure.

FK: Alright. Now I am surprised that the very same people whose children you are helping in this village should treat you in such away… is this…[kind of kind of treatment] from the parents or just other people?

CG: Actually, we do not get such treatment from the children's parents. On the contrary, the parents are very happy that their children are being assisted in this village. It is our peers …our age mates, who are sort of insulting us and all…sure.

FK: What are the kinds of children that you teach?

CG: Aah…like in this class…there are children of various ages and also of different behaviours. We have some who are quite troublesome and some who are okay; some of them are just noisy as normal children should be, but there are some who are so noisy and troublesome…that even when the teacher is teaching, they are usually doing their own things…they do not pay attention. So…the children have different behaviours; some are well behaved while some have…bad behaviours. We try as much as possible to help the children behave well so that the teachers do not have… problems when teaching them…sure.

FK: Okay. Just to add on that…an extension of the previous question…these children you teach…what are their social backgrounds like?

CG: Aah…these children are usually so young that…at the beginning we have problems with them especially in trying to make them stay. Sometimes they cry for their parents soon after being dropped for the day but we tell them "…your parents will be right back, they have just gone to buy you biscuits" in order to soothe them. As such the children are comforted by the thought of their parents bringing them biscuits while they learn. If they become troublesome we tell them the same thing, so they remain attentive as they learn until in no time, you realize that it is time for them to go back home. As the days go by, the children are not very troublesome as they get to know and make friends with each other.

FK: **The children you have here...do all of them have parents?**

CG: Aah...when we were establishing this [Nursery School], it was originally decided that it should be for...orphans only, but later on we decided that it would not be good to have only orphans. So we have both children with parents and orphans...and segregation in any way is discouraged such that they interact and relate as normally as possible...and not feel that we discriminate against any of them.

FK: **Oh...all right.**

CG: Sure.

FK: **You explained earlier on that there are challenges that you face as a caregiver. Have you ever been trained in this [caregiver] field?**

CG: Yes...

FK: **I would like to know if you have received such training before.**

CG: I have not really been trained in this field...but I just use experience...you know...like...you treat a child in certain ways to make him do or stop doing certain things.

FK: **Okay. All right. Eee...even though you work as a caregiver, I should believe that...there are times when you teach... Which are the areas that you feel that children really need to be supported? Like...in terms of skills or anything else...which areas do you emphasize?**

CG: Aah...can you please repeat the question...

FK: **What I am trying to say is that when teaching, there are usually particular things that we want the children to know...I would like to know the areas that you emphasize to make sure that by the end of their pre-school years, children should know or be able to do certain things...such as skills they should acquire...**

CG: Okay... Aah...in terms of skills...as teachers, the first thing that we want when we are in the classroom, is for the child...to relate well with others. We also want the children to make friends with each other. After making friends and knowing each other well, the child is then taught how to speak; he or she should know certain objects...then we decide that at this stage if the child is taught a, e, I, o, u, he or she will understand. It is only then that we start teaching them...other things and these are usually taught in Chichewa especially at the beginning. After some time when we see that the children have acquired a certain level of knowledge, we then introduce English so that they develop an interest in...English such that they have no problems when they leave this place for... Primary school.

FK: **Okay... All right. Now, I would like to know some of the activities you engage in frequently both in the classroom and outside the classroom.**

CG: Okay...there are many of them. First, the children go to class where they are taught. When we see that some of them are tired we sing songs with them while still in class. After the songs, when we see that they have relaxed –as sometimes some of them want to visit the toilet...this is the time they are able to go out and play a little bit and come back to class. Sometimes we take them outside for play, where we engage in different activities like running, jumping... Sometimes we take them outside to show them things like mountains, trees, bamboos, and other things and try to explain the nature of these things. Apart from these, we also use things like tins...for instance when we want to teach them about sounds...we use such things.

FK: **Okay... Are the activities you have mentioned done inside the classroom or outside?**

CG: Aah... when we want to show them things, trees for instance, or do certain activities like running, we take them outside. Afterwards, we take them back to class where they continue with their lessons... but we also have certain activities that are done both inside and outside the classroom, for example, activities involving tins.

FK: **Okay...**

CG: Yeah...

FK: **Now, as the children engage in different kinds of play, do you feel that learning continues or that it is time for them to relax?**

CG: As they play, the children are actually learning...not only are they learning...but it also helps them physically...to be physically fit...they even every thing else and put their attention on their play.

FK: **Oh...okay.**

CG: Sure.

FK: **Aah...mhm...you said something about 'speaking' earlier on...do you prepare the children in terms of ...reading and writing? ... Are these areas touched?**

CG: Yes we also tackle the areas you have mentioned. For instance if it is Chichewa we want to teach... especially the vowels –a, e, I, o, u...we show them the letters as we teach. Sometimes we write the letters on...aah...a sack sheet. We also have different shapes for example, triangle and circle, drawn on the same material. After teaching them in the classroom...we take them outside where we ask them to perform certain tasks that they have just been taught –writing "a", "i" for instance and they attempt...writing the letters on sand [ground]. This prepares them for their primary education such that they do not have many problems, as they do not find things new when they get there...it is more like a continuation of what they have already done here.

FK: **Okay... Can you comment on the availability of teaching and learning materials at this pre-school?**

CG: Aah...we do not really have problems with that...we just make sure that the few books that we have are taken care of as well as possible. However we have difficulties in accessing books, as such most of the times we...we depend on experience. Some of my colleagues attended a training some time back where they learned some of the things that can be used as teaching materials...they would chose...like a major topic...water for instance and then develop sub topics from that for example...the importance of water, uses of water, where one kind find water etc. They learned how such topics could be approached so we use the knowledge they gained from this...and of course including experience...but the thing is, the teaching materials that we have are far from enough.

FK: **Okay...so you say there are no books and other teaching and learning materials?**

CG: We do not have books but we do have a chalkboard though...and pieces of chalk which the children use for writing. Recently we received small pieces of cartons on which we managed to write numbers. The only materials that we have are the small pieces of cartons and sacks on which we draw shapes – apart from these, no other materials.

FK: **The sacks you just mentioned, what are they exactly? Can you explain?**

CG: Well, these are sheets cut from fertilizer sack bags...the white ones. This is where we write the vowels a, e, i, o, u, using a marker. We have some of these in the classroom, I will be glad to show them to you if you would like to see them. We also have some on which different shapes like triangle, square and trapezium are drawn. These bags are usually used for maize storage; they are the same bags we use as writing materials.

FK: **It appears you are using locally available materials, from what you have said about the "sacks". However, you also said that the school does not have enough teaching and learning materials, can you explain what you do to make up for this [inadequate materials].**

CG: Aah...because of our financial status, we can not afford to buy materials...so we just try as much as possible to improvise by using materials that are locally available...which do not require money. We do not have money. We use the things we can easily find...for instance...if there is need for a bag in which to store our toys, instead of buying one, we make a box from bamboos. We do the same with toys...aah...we try to find tins for the children...and even make some toys from clay...as such we do not need to buy such things...sure.

FK: **This is the last part of our interview...and this is concerning the people in this village. How do you relate with them...the children's parents...aah...or guardians...what is your relationship with them like?**

CG: Aah...we have quite a good relationship with the parents and guardians...such that sometimes when we are in need of something...such as food...they contribute food staffs...that are to be prepared for the children. Of course we teachers also do our part by contributing what we can. Some of the households are not able to provide food for their children on a daily basis...so this prevents children coming from such homes from staying away from school due to lack of food. We also teach the children to always show kindness to others...we encourage them to love one another. We teach them to care for one another's welfare such that if some of them do not bring any food from home, what ever the others have brought is shared among all of them. However we also encourage their parents and guardians to try as much as possible to provide for their children's/ wards' food so that they do not fail to go to school because of lack of food. But still...the children share the food they bring so that all of them have something...sure.

FK: **Are their meetings that are called with the parents or the people of this village concerning the children's education?**

CG: Aah...we only have such meetings at the very beginning of the term and at the end. However if something crops up in between, we organize emergency meetings so that we discuss the arisen issues with the parents...that particular time.

FK: **Okay. How would you describe parents' and guardians response to these meetings?**

CG: Aah...the parents are quite committed...there are still more parents bringing their children....after noticing the changes brought about by this school. Most of the people are saying that when these children go to primary school, they perform well in class...they are obviously different from others. Primary school teachers are also impressed saying that "aah... these people [Nursery School teachers]...are doing quite a remarkable job." Because people are able to see the difference, they are showing more interest than before.

FK: **I believe...from what you have said concerning your relationship with parents and guardians...that you feel that you relate quite well with them. Do you however still feel that there is something that can be done to improve this relationship...if you have any suggestions on what could be done?**

CG: Aah...it is indeed important that something should be done to sustain this relationship. Aah...one of the things that I feel should be done is that there should be meetings organized where parents, teachers, caregivers...and also Chiefs and their subjects...would discuss the importance...of this nursery school. We would explain to the people how this helps prepare the child for education in future and how this...promotes education in general. At the moment, it is only the parents who are really interested who are bringing their children...here. I feel that it would have been better if it were compulsory, as all the parents would be obliged to bring their children here whether willingly or not. We need to discuss such issues with the chiefs and their...subjects in these villages...encouraging them to bring their children here...sure.

FK: **Are you trying to say that there are some parents who do not really show interest in this pre-school?**

CG: Exactly...some people do not have the interest to send their children to school...especially parents who have never been to school themselves...you know...it is very difficult for such to understand the importance of sending their children to a Nursery School or any other school. They are like "...we don't have enough resources...to send you to school...just stay at home with us..."they would rather have the children at home than send them to school. Sometimes the children are sent to do different chores like doing some piece of work in the garden...instead of going to school; as a result they go to primary school at an age where they find learning...much difficult. I feel that if all the parents could send their children to Nursery School...education would really be promoted...Sure.

FK: **This is the last question. What do you feel should be done by the people in the village and may be the government to contribute to the success of rural pre-schools?**

CG: Aah...firstly, like I have already said, there is need for chiefs and the people to meet and discuss. Secondly, there is need for donations of children's food stuffs from the government or any other well wishers, may be this would be like some sort of a motivation for the children...Sure.

FK: **Alright.**

CG: Sure.

FK: **Thank you. May be you have some comments before we close this interview**

CG: Aah...we appreciate your coming here. We are encouraged by such visits...and so are some parents such that bring their children here...as they feel that..aah... researchers visit the school...they begin to be interested in the school. When they see people like...you, they feel that we are really doing our job. We are glad you paid us a visit and we... hope that this will help promote our school, sure.

FK: Thank you very much for sparing your time to be interviewed

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APPENDIX 8: *SAMPLE VIDEO TRANSCRIPT (ON PRE-SCHOOL D)*

	Description of Activity	Location of activity	Length (Min)	Resources used	Specific Tasks Children are called to perform	DAP levels of Development*	DAP Early literacy Development **
	Caregiver uses English as the medium of instruction throughout the lesson. Occasionally Chichewa is used						
1.	Caregiver announces that they will start with prayer and teacher leads and children say after her: "*Thank you God for keeping us through the night up to this day"* Then asks children to raise up their hands, clap, etc. Then sing the national anthem	Inside	4	Chalkboard	Children pray after the caregiver: "*Thank you God for keeping us through the night up to this day"* Children raise up their hands, clap, jump five times and then sing the national anthem		
2	Asks the children "What the day is today?" Then says "On Monday I go to school…" Then asks individual children to mention the seven days of the week	Inside	4		Children respond "Today is Monday" And then they continue: *On Monday we go to school,* *On Tuesday we go to school* *On Wednesday we go to school* *On Thursday we go to school* *On Friday we go to school* *On Saturday and Sunday we play at home* Then individual children mention the seven days of the week and the rest		

* **PHD** = Physical Development, **INTD** = Intellectual Development, **EMD** = Emotional Development, **SOD** = Social Development
** **PA** = Phonic Awareness, **APR** = Alphabetic Principle, **PRW** = Print Awareness, **WRD** = Writing Development, **OLS** = Oral Language Skills

3.	Asks individual children to say self-introduction	Inside	6		Individual children say self-introduction: name, where they live, sex, where they learn		
4.	Tells children to jump, walk, run, etc followed by the "Jump" song	Inside	5		Children jump, walk, run, etc, and say "I am jumping…I am walking … I am running…". Then the jump song: *Jump…Jump…Jump…Jump* *So…so…* *Solala…somayo…sobigamala* *Dance …dance….dance …dance* *Walk … walk … walk… walk* *Run … run… run…run*		
5.	Caregiver announces: "Days of the week…Seven days make a week… Sunday…"	Inside	7		Children mention the seven days of the week, and then: *On Monday we go to school,* *On Tuesday we go to school* *On Wednesday we go to school* *On Thursday we go to school* *On Friday we go to school* *On Saturday and Sunday we play at home* One boy, Benjamin, is busy beating up fellow friends around him. The teacher rebukes him and then shifts him to another place. Another boy, beats others near him and the teacher rebukes him and this time takes him out of the group and tells him to sit alone away from the rest of the group. Most of the children look at him and laugh[41].		

[41] Generally it appears management of the children is difficult for the Caregivers, with the younger children posing more problems. This could be as a result of the nature of activities being provided, among others

6.	Caregiver asks children to count 1-10 while running around	Inside	4		Children count 1-10 while jumping up and down the classroom		
7.	Caregiver asks children to say alphabet letters from a chart on the wall (Alphabet letters combined with pictures of objects or things such as animals, plants, etc	Inside	3	Alphabet Chart	Children say the alphabet with corresponding names and pictures: *B for Bear* *D for Dog* *E for Everybody* *H for House* *I for Insect* .... *Z for Zebra* Children repeat after the teacher		
8.	Caregiver writes on the chalkboard small: **Aa, Bb** Then asks children to sing the alphabet song "A, B, C, D, E…Z". Then based on the alphabetic chart Caregiver points and calls out each letter and corresponding name for children to say after her. Asks individual children to say the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding names.	Inside	8		Children sing the alphabet song "A, B, C, D, E…Z". Children "read" after teacher: "*A for Astronaut ….B for Bun….Y for Yoghurt ….etc*" Individual children say letters of the alphabet and the corresponding names [Most of the children are not concentrating on what the teacher is doing with individual children – they are busy talking to each other or doing something else]		
9.	Caregiver starts a counting song (1-10) expecting	Inside	4		Children join in the counting song (1-10). Then some individual children do so.		

	children to take over the singing				(Some of the children look bored and they collect the alphabet chart lying on the floor and keenly look at them, practising the reading the alphabet letters. However the Caregiver sees them and goes there and grabs the charts from them and puts them away.		
10.	Then Caregiver says "I am counting numbers 1-20…" as she sticks a number chart on the wall to use in the next few minutes. She reads out the numbers for children to repeat after her	Inside			Children say the numbers after the Caregiver : *12 (12leaves); 13 (13 fish); 14 (14...)* [most of the children now not concentrating at all. They look tired and bored; they opt to play with each other)		
11.	Caregiver take children outside – open space for various activities that children get interested in. Caregiver gets the smallest kids to form a circle and count while jumping, clapping hands, etc. Then play "here – there –here" game (enlarging or making circle small) – looks like an equivalent of "*bwalo likule...bwalo likule Chalosi*"	Outside	15	Rope (1), ball (1)	The smallest kids are guided by the Caregivers in terms of the specific activities they do. Caregiver gets them to form a circle and count while jumping, clapping hands, etc. Then play "here – there –here" game (enlarging or making circle small) – looks like an equivalent of "*bwalo likule...bwalo likule Chalosi*" Other older children play in various activities: some playing with ball, playing with ropes, running around. Although in some instances girls and boy mix during play it appears generally girls play with girls most of the times		
12.	Caregiver announces that they will sing	Inside	3 min		Children sing songs including "*Chikondi cha Yesu ndi chopambana zedi*"		

10.	Then Caregiver says: "God is like a Law, He never changes. Islam is always there and is always the same" The calls individual children to say the statement	Inside	6 min		Children repeat after the teacher: "God is like a Law, He never changes. Islam is always there and is always the same" Then individual children say the statement, with the help of the teacher in most cases.		
11.	**BREAK TIME** Caregiver leads children to pray for the food Caregiver gets children to wash their hands outside.	Inside	20 min		Children pray for the food, with Caregiver's guidance: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless our food. Amen"* Children sing while they wash their hands *"This is the way we wash our hands, Wash our handsx2 This is the way we wash ours hands early in the morning...."*		
	[.....]				[.....]		
12.	Caregiver guides children say closing prayer: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless us as we go home"* Caregiver then says: "Goodbye children...."				Children say closing prayer: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless us as we go home"* Children respond to Caregiver: *"Goodbye teacher we shall meet again tomorrow..."*		

10.	Then Caregiver says: "God is like a Law, He never changes. Islam is always there and is always the same" The calls individual children to say the statement	Inside	6 min		Children repeat after the teacher: "God is like a Law, He never changes. Islam is always there and is always the same" Then individual children say the statement, with the help of the teacher in most cases.		
11.	**BREAK TIME** Caregiver leads children to pray for the food Caregiver gets children to wash their hands outside.	Inside	20 min		Children pray for the food, with Caregiver's guidance: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless our food. Amen"* Children sing while they wash their hands *"This is the way we wash our hands, Wash our handsx2 This is the way we wash ours hands early in the morning...."*		
	[.....]				[.....]		
12.	Caregiver guides children say closing prayer: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless us as we go home"* Caregiver then says: "Goodbye children...."				Children say closing prayer: *"We thank you God for the nice day, bless us as we go home"* Children respond to Caregiver: *"Goodbye teacher we shall meet again tomorrow..."*		

APPENDIX 9: *STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN'S EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT*

(based on the five key components in early literacy development)

	STRATEGY	SUGGESTED EARLY LITERACY ACTIVITIES
1.	**Read aloud to children in an interactive style that engages them as learners (Halle, Calkins, Berry & Johnson, 2003). Reading activity "stimulates children's imaginations, enhances their vocabularies and print awareness, introduces them to components of stories, and provides them with useful information about the surrounding world" (Green, 2004, p.2)** **Target Key Principles:** ▪ *Print Awareness* ▪ *Oral Language Skills*	❑ Set aside a special time each day to read to children. With is practice children will always look forward to it with a lot of expectations. Children who are read to frequently become superior readers and do better in school. ❑ Make reading time a fun experience for the children. Show enthusiasm when you read – changing your voice appropriately to match the characters in the story ❑ Help children learn as you read by asking questions about the book you read, pointing out letters, words, numbers, colours, shapes, etc, i.e. use **"dialogic reading" approach** (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001) – which involves ***asking analytical questions*** to children (e.g. "What is the child doing in the book?", ***providing feedback*** (e.g. praising, correcting errors, etc) and ***adapting your reading style to the children*** in your reading programme (Green, 2004, p.3). The intention is to encourage children to become active participants rather than passive listeners as this improves their vocabulary and comprehension abilities ❑ Have children help you select books to allow them have a say in the type of books they want to read and hence more interest in the process. However, age-appropriate books should be selected ❑ Read and re-read a variety of books: story books, information books, alphabet and number books, and nursery rhymes
2	**Teach children about books and other print materials** **Target Key Principle(s):** *Print Awareness*	Teach children: ❑ how to handle books properly – how to hold a book, how to turn pages ❑ how to recognise features of the book – front and back covers, top and bottom, title, author, and illustrator ❑ that printed letters run from left to right across the page, and from top to bottom in English language. These can be taught during one-to-one or small group reading sessions. As you are reading to children, place your finger under the beginning word in a sentence and follow along as you read

APPENDIX 9: *STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN'S EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT*

(based on the five key components in early literacy development)

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2	**Teach children about books and other print materials** **Target Key Principle(s):** *Print Awareness*	Teach children: ❑ how to handle books properly – how to hold a book, how to turn pages ❑ how to recognise features of the book – front and back covers, top and bottom, title, author, and illustrator ❑ that printed letters run from left to right across the page, and from top to bottom in English language. These can be taught during one-to-one or small group reading sessions. As you are reading to children, place your finger under the beginning word in a sentence and follow along as you read

3	**Familiarise children with letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds** **Target Key Principle(s):** ▪ *Alphabetic Principle* ▪ *Phonic Awareness*	Help children to: ❑ learn to say the alphabet ❑ recognise and name letters ❑ distinguish between capital and lower case letters ❑ understand the sounds that letters make ❑ recognise beginning letters in familiar words, e.g. their names
4	**Arrange the child care environment so that children have an opportunity to interact with books and other print materials. This exposes children to a variety of books and other print materials and gives opportunity to them to interact with the books and materials** **Target Key Principle(s):** *Print Awareness*	❑ Build up a large collection of children's books and other print materials ❑ Arrange the classroom or childcare environment in a way that encourages children to interact with print resources. Research indicates that how a room is physically arranged can promote or hinder a child's ability and /or willingness to interact with books. So have special space where children can look at books and print materials, and ensure that the children can access the materials on they own is interested ❑ Label items and different parts of the room(s) as children learn more when exposed to labels signs, and other kinds of print they see around them. Children will incorporate literacy in their dramatic play when the environment is print rich ❑ Visit the library regularly to gain access to high quality children's literature bearing in mind that books and other print materials for children can be very expensive
5	**Provide opportunities for children to experiment with writing. Early writing activities, even if rudimentary, significantly contribute to children's early literacy development.** **Target Key Principle(s):** *Writing Development*	❑ Keep writing materials including paper, pencils, crayons and markers handy ❑ Encourage children to scribble, draw and write letters ❑ For infants and toddlers, allow them to experiment with crayons, markers, and larger paper ❑ For pre-school –age children, encourage them to incorporate writing activities into their dramatic play e.g. making a grocery list [Also see, Campbell, R, 2000, in Drury, et al 2000 pp.112-119)

6	**Involve children in activities that promote children's phonemic awareness and oral language skills (Phonemic Awareness = a child's understanding and conscious awareness that speech is composed of identifiable units) is strongly linked to children's subsequent reading achievement (Green, 2004, p.4)** Target Key Principle(s): ▪ *Phonic Awareness* ▪ *Oral Language Skills*	**Singing or saying familiar nursery rhymes** and **choosing books that focus on sounds, rhyming, and alliteration** are two specific strategies for promoting children's phonemic awareness The use of the following activities in which phonemic patterns such as rhyme and alliteration are salient (prominent, conspicuous): ❑ Songs ❑ Jingles ❑ Finger plays ❑ Games ❑ Poems ❑ Stories *"The only way that children will learn about the sounds of language is when they are exposed to language. The moment they are born, children need relationships with careering adults who engage them in frequent verbal interactions that support their oral language development. By making a conscious effort to talk t. sing to, and play with the children in your care centre. you facilitate children's oral language abilities and lay an important foundation for later literacy learning"*

NOTE: This developmentally appropriate framework assumes that ideal and adequate resources for the children are available.