

AN ASSESSMENT OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN MZUZU CITY

M.Ed (Policy, Planning and Leadership) Thesis

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DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis/dissertation is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used acknowledgements have been made.

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To my Lord and personal Saviour, Jesus Christ, God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

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ABSTRACT

Education has been characterised by increases in the provision of educational programmes for preschool age children in the second half of the twentieth century. This has been as a result of benefits of investing at this level. These benefits however occur if the programmes are of high quality. Efforts to improve the quality of Preschool education in Malawi have been made by the Malawi Government through the Ministry of Women and Child development in conjunction with APPM. These efforts have however not been assessed. The present study therefore assessed the quality of Preschool education services and its environment in Mzuzu City in line with ECD policy implementation.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches because it is recognised that education programmes are complex social systems that require a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of study. Data were collected through a questionnaire, oral interviews and an observation schedule. Quantitative data was analysed by using Microsoft excel and SPSS versions 8.0 and 9.0 and qualitative data was analysed by categorising it using pre-coded themes and emerging issues were identified and coded appropriately.

The study found that many teachers have low academic qualifications (as many had JCE) and were not adequately trained. Teacher- child ratios were low. Many Preschools had problems with hygiene and written policies on the same were not available. Instructional materials like playing materials, books, charts still remain inadequate or unavailable. It was however noted that all preschools under study had a

syllabus which they used though they did not have teachers' guides and pupils books to accompany them. Teacher-child and child-child interactions were generally good. In many Preschools, there was a friendly atmosphere. Government of Malawi standards on Preschool education were not adhered to in many Preschools because Preschool owners and teachers were not aware of the standards.

Much as efforts to improve the quality of Preschool education in Malawi have been made, this study reveals that the quality of Preschool education is still low. It is against this background that the study recommends that the minimum academic qualification for Preschool teachers should be revised to MSCE, the issue of preschool teachers training should be considered seriously and that there should be proper communication of preschool education issues between the Ministry of Women and Child Development and APPM.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APPM	Association for Preschool Playgroups in Malawi
CATS	Curriculum and Teaching Studies
CERT	Centre for Education Research and Training
DFID	Department for International Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
GOM	Government of Malawi
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MINED	Ministry of Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoGCS	Ministry of Gender and Community Services
MoGCWCS	Ministry of Gender Child Welfare and Community Services
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
NCREL	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
NSO	National Statistical Office
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
SDNP	Sustainable Development Network Programme
TTC	Teacher Training College

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UPIC-ADA Universities Partnership in Capacity Building-Advanced Degree Activity

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The importance of preschool education and its impact upon subsequent school achievement has received growing attention in recent years worldwide. For example, Governments in the UK and New Zealand have recognised the potential of investing in the early childhood education (Fleer, 2000: 3). And African governments are also placing an emphasis on improving the status of health and education of children (Jaramillo & Mingat 2006:3).

The need to invest in pre-school education in Malawi has grown out of several factors. Two of them are explained. The first is the need to fulfil international agreements signed in international meetings or education forums. These conferences include:

- (a) World conference on Education for All in 1990. Article 3.1 of the agreement signed at the above named conference stipulates that 'Basic Education services should be provided to all children, youths and adults. To this end quality basic education should be expanded and consistent measures should be taken to reduce disparities' (UNESCO, 2000c: 75).
- (b) The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000, which culminated in the adoption of the Dakar Framework for action, which

embodies a revitalised collective commitment to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000a: 2). In relation to pre-school education, is the first goal of EFA where countries committed themselves to "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (Dakar Framework for action cited in UNESCO, 2000a: 11). This made the Malawi Government to develop Education for All (EFA) action plan in 2004. This document is currently in draft form (see GoM, 2004).

Secondly, research findings show considerable evidence of the importance of pre-school education. For example, EFA (2003) cited in MoGCS (2003b: 8) report that research in many countries shows that investment in preschool education provides savings in government education budgets due to lower repetition and dropout rates in primary schools. The problem of repetition is a serious one because it contributes to overcrowding, particularly in the lower grades. UNESCO (2000d: 34) writes that repetition is regarded as wasteful because it increases the number of pupils per class and thus leads to higher schooling costs. When pupils leave school before the end of the term or the final grade of primary school ('drop-out') they are less likely to have obtained basic competencies, including literacy and numeracy skills. Further to this, children who repeat become over aged for the grade, eventually lose interest and dropout (Jere, 2000). Introduction of pre-school education was therefore considered to be one of the solutions to these problems.

Pre-school education was offered by commercial people whose syllabus varied and the Association of Pre-School Play groups in Malawi (Chiuye, 1988). It was not

until 2001 that the Malawi government proposed policies for Pre-school education 2000-2015 where the Malawi government commits itself 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 development of pre-school education facilities so that an increasing number of children have access to pre-school facilities,
- ❖ Promote strong partnerships with other basic education providers with the aim of strengthening the involvement of private education providers" (MoEST, 2001:14).

Currently (starting from January, 2007) The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Malawi Institute of Education, has embarked on implementation of a reform of the Primary School Curriculum and assessment (PCAR). This reform aims at improving the quality of primary education in schools. Attempts have been made to address the many challenges children face when they first go to school in MIE, 2006a and MIE, 2006b and posters. These attempts include trying to bridge the gap between home and school (MIE & MINED, 2006).

The Ministry of Gender, child welfare and community services formulated the Early Childhood Development policy called National Policy on Early Childhood Development, approved by cabinet in February 2003 and was officially launched on 1st March 2004 (Pence, 2004:16). The National Policy on ECD 'aims at promoting the provision of high quality ECD services to the Malawian children to ensure their survival, growth and development that would lead to their active participation in

national development. This will be achieved by empowering the household, the community, institutions and organisations to effectively provide required basic and essential Early Childhood Development services that will uphold human dignity (Ministry of Gender and Community Services, 2003a: 10). Within ECD is the pre-school playgroup. These are centres organised for pre-school education with very little to do with health related provisions (UNESCO, 2000b). There are twelve objectives that the policy would like to achieve. Three of them pertinent to this study are:

- (a) Expand quality early learning and stimulation services in Malawi.
- (b) Facilitate the provision of acceptable standards of early care, early learning and development that are in line with the guiding principles of ECD policy
- (c) Enhance the provision of psychosocial care for holistic development of the child (MOGCS, 2003a:11).

Preschool education falls within Early Childhood Development programmes since according to the Ministry of Gender and Community Services (2003b: 12), the period for Early Childhood Development programmes is segmented in the following areas:

- (a) Prenatal to birth
- (b) Infancy to 18 months
- (c) Toddlerhood and post-toddlerhood (18-36 months)
- (d) Preschool (3-6 years)
- (e) Early primary school (6-8 years)

In relation to EFA, the ECD major objective is to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable

and disadvantaged children (GOM, 2004). The ECD policy is being implemented in all districts in Malawi.

1.2. Brief Background of Pre-school education in Malawi

The origins of pre-school education in Malawi can be traced as far as 1966 when the first pre-school was started at Blantyre mission by a wife of a Scottish Missionary, Pasty Colvin (SDNP, 2005). Mrs Pasty Colvin was supported by Mrs Mkwaila and Mrs Lillian Matenje in establishing the centre (MoGCWCS, 2005). The purpose of the playgroup was to serve children from low-income families around the mission including traditional housing areas, which had no facilities for children to play with (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996:15).

In April 1969, the University of Malawi organised a seminar, which focussed on "commencing Action towards Urban Development". During this meeting, pre-school education featured highly. A topic was raised specifically for 'pre-school playgroups as the focus for community action' (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996:15). As a follow-up to the seminar, social workers and teachers joined forces, mobilised communities and facilitated formation of 9 pre-schools in Blantyre (SDNP, 2005). As a result the association of pre-school play groups in Blantyre was established on 3rd October 1970 and by 1974, the association was operating at national level and was known as Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996:16). The major objective of the Association is to facilitate the provision of Early Childhood Development and Care Services to as many Malawian Children as possible (SDNP, 2005). According to the APPM Policy document, the Pre-school Programme in Malawi aims to promote the social, intellectual, emotional and physical development

of children between the ages of three to five and half years. As such, it focuses on "education through play" and proper care of children in a healthy and friendly environment. The Pre-school programme is also supposed to support mothers and their families in the vital years of the child's life (USAID-Malawi, NGOIES, 1994 cited in UNESCO, 2000b).

The provision of pre-school education in Malawi is directly under the Ministry of Gender, and Child Welfare and Community Services. At the district level, all pre-schools are under the responsibility of District Social Welfare Offices, which provide technical logistical, and material support to only those pre-schools which are registered under the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi and operating on non commercial basis.

The District Social Welfare officers work hand in hand with the Association of Pre-school Playgroups in Malawi in working out matters related to teaching materials, training of pre-school attendants and supervision (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996:17).

1.3. Statement of the problem

Concern has been expressed by parents who send their children to commercial preschools that they do not know what types of facilities are provided (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996: 20). Service providers have relied on their own curricula and philosophies thereby compromising outcomes of such services (Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, 2005). Paradoxically, Preschool provision is entirely private in most districts, 77 percent of the 3625 early Childhood centres that were available in Malawi in 2004 were privately owned (Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, 2005). Unfortunately, there has been little

empirical investigation into the quality of preschool education. This study therefore assesses the quality of pre-school education services with reference to Early Childhood Development Policy.

Considerable evidence has shown that attending preschool helps provide a foundation for learning, and that children who attend preschool are better prepared for primary school and for learning throughout their life (NSO & ORC MACRO, 2003:3). It however takes quality preschool education to make these positive impacts in children (Dawson et al, 2004, Schweinhart, 2003 and Weikart, 2000). On the contrary 'simply providing a bad quality education to more children risks wasting scarce resources. Unless governments are committed to improving quality, education outcomes will not be delivered and the broader developmental impacts in terms of growth, better health and so on will be jeopardised' (Department for International Development cited in Macjessie-Mbewe, 2002: 100). And low-income children are especially vulnerable to the ill effects of poor quality early care and education and gain the most from high quality programs (Currie; Karoly cited in Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanaka & Wardfogel, 2005).

1.4. Purpose of the study

The study aims at assessing the quality of pre-school education services with reference to Early Childhood Development Policy and the extent to which the services and their environment provide opportunities for holistic development of children.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to assess the quality of pre-school education services and its environments in Mzuzu City in line with Early Childhood Development Policy

implementation and the extent to which it offers opportunities for children's holistic development. In particular the study seeks to achieve the following objectives,

- (a) Explore the structural and teacher characteristics of pre-school education, such as teacher-child ratios, group size, qualifications.
- (b) Investigate how healthy and safe the indoor and outdoor of preschool environment is.
- (c) Assess the availability of instructional materials and the extent to which preschool children access them.
- (d) Assess interactions that occur in preschool settings, such as child –teacher, child-child.
- (e) Describe how pre-school environment and structural and teacher characteristics of pre-school education compare with Government of Malawi standards of pre-school education.

1.6. Justification of the Study

There are a number of reasons that justify the pursuance of this study. Firstly, the study will uncover the most needed information on quality of pre-school education and this will add onto the existing literature on the quality of Preschool education in Malawi. This will assist in monitoring the progress towards achieving Education for All objectives in the area of Early childhood or pre-school education. Secondly, the study will reveal whether initiatives in pre-school education are being implemented as planned 'as implementation is the time when one discovers that schedules are unrealistic and that programmes are over ambitious' (Haddad & Demsky, 1995: 36). Lastly, the results of the study and the comprehensive literature review on the

importance of pre-school education presented in the next chapter will assist in advocating for preschool education.

1.7. Definition of Key Concepts

Authorities define different concepts differently. But in this study, the following definitions will apply:

- ❖ Pre-school- a school for children aged 3-5 years.
- ❖ Pre-school education- it is an educational service provided for young children before the age at which they are required to attend school by law (Woodhead, 1979:3) In case of Malawi it is before the age of 6.
- ❖ Early Childhood- is the period of a child's life from conception to age 8 thus from prenatal development through to the early primary school years (MoGCS, 2003b).
- ❖ Early childhood Education (ECE) - Consists of organised supervised programs with social and educational goals for children in the temporary absence of their parents, and encompasses a diversity of programmes, varying in hours of operation, ages of children and social economic status (SES) of families (Smith, 2005).
- ❖ Environment- includes those spatial, programmatic, and interpersonal features that affect the children and adults in an early childhood setting (Harmas et al cited in Lewis & Archer 2003).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this section the researcher will give a general introduction of preschool education, present benefits of preschool education as revealed by research, discuss quality of preschool education, and will finalise by looking at dimensions of quality and how selected aspects of dimensions of quality affects children's school achievement. A summary of the literature review will be presented at the end.

Preschool education, as a distinct form of education, was essentially non-existent prior to the 1800's. Mc Carthy & Houston (1980) write that it was only during the 1800 that people began to think of children as anything more than 'small adults,' and to recognise that they need and thrive upon special attention and consideration. Contributions of famous and influential champions of preschool education like Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Friedrich Wihelm Froebel (1782-1852) are outlined in McCarthy & Houston (1980:3-7).

It is however in the second half of the twentieth century that education has been characterised by increases in the provision of educational programmes for preschool age children (Cotton & Conklin, 2001).

2.1 Benefits of Preschool Education

The increase in provision of preschool education in the world has been as a result of the benefits of investing at this level. For example Fleer writes that` Governments

in the UK and New Zealand have recognised the potential of investing in the early childhood education' (Fleer, 2001: 3). Research literature on the benefits of preschool education services is enormous. Selected research findings will be discussed in this section.

The most remarkable study is the high scope Perry Preschool study, which is a longitudinal experiment, designed to study the effects of a high quality preschool programme of children born in poverty. The study shows that a high quality program for young children living in poverty, over their life times, improves their educational performance, contributes to their economic development, helps prevent them from committing crimes and provides a high return on tax payer investment (Schweinhart, 2003). This study was the most frequently cited in research reviews between 1983 and 1997 (Reynolds cited in Olsen, 1999). Infact it is still cited in literature in support for preschool education (see UNESCO, 2006: 6).

Olsen (1999) however raises four criticisms. Firstly, Olsen (1999) argues that in more than 40 years, no other programme or study has produced results as dramatic as those found for Perry. That suggests that there may have been unique conditions at the Perry Preschool that simply cannot be duplicated. Secondly, benefits were obtained only for severely disadvantaged children at risk of "retarded intellectual functioning." On this, Olsen argues that it is simply inappropriate to generalise the effects of Perry to all children. Thirdly, Perry children may have outperformed children in the control group, but they still fared poorly with mainstream children. Lastly, Perry differed significantly from regular preschool programmes and according to Zigler cited in Olsen (1999:14), "It is very unlikely that a preschool program mounted in the typical

public school will be of the quality represented by the Perry Preschool project." It is against this background that Schweinhart (2003) writes that the continuing challenge is to take such programs to scale so that all preschool programs for young children living in poverty have similar effects. Despite the criticisms, results of the Perry Preschool are still respected and quoted.

Weikart (2000) reviewed studies of preschool program evaluation. He notes that the most carefully drawn studies of early childhood education programs suggest a pattern of cause and effect that stretches from early childhood into adult years. He contends that the weight of the evidence from many studies suggests that: Poor children who attend a high quality early childhood education programme are better prepared for school intellectually and socially.

This better start probably helps them to achieve greater success in school. Far fewer poor children, who have attended good school programmes need special remedial education, have to repeat a grade, or experience major behavioural problems. Their greater success in school tends to lead to greater success in adolescence and adulthood. Their rates of delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and welfare usage are lower, and their rates of high school completion and subsequent employment are higher. Thus both their economic performance and their social performance greatly improve (Weikart, 2000: 22-23).

With the evidence shown from the studies above, Weikart (2000) continues to argue that early childhood education, when offered as a high quality programme, is a powerful antidote to poverty. But he is very quick to point out that such programmes are obviously not the only solution. For example, not all children who attended the

Perry Preschool programme benefited or graduated from high school and as adults, 71 percent earned less than \$2,000 a month. Yet, programme participation did improve the life chances of participants and did significantly reduce the pool of those needing additional help or creating major social problems for the community (Weikart, 2000: 56).

Studies by Biachi and McArthur (1993) and Collins and Brick (1993) cited in Franzen (2001) indicate that centre based preschool or childcare program attendance significantly reduces a child's chances of having to repeat kindergarten or first grade. Participation in Headstart and other preschool programmes has shown evidence of increased cognitive test scores.

In her literature review of the meta-analyses conducted on the plethora of small-scale research, Raban (2000) cited in Flear (2000) found that many of the meta-analyses have demonstrated that Early childhood Education programs are cost effective, reduce later school year repetitions, have reduced the resourcing needs for special education, have increased school completion rates and have diminished later delinquency. In particular, Raban (2000) showed strong evidence for:

- ❖ Increased secondary school completion (Roderick, 1994).
- ❖ Positive socialisation outcomes (Johnson and Walker, 1991)
- ❖ Increased outcomes for girls (Caughy, DiPietro, and Strobino, 1994),
- ❖ A lack of year repetitions and reduced interventions (Barnett, 1995; Campbell and Ramey, 1994),
- ❖ More settled behaviours (Rowe & Rowe, 1997),

- ❖ Aspirations for education and employment, motivation and commitment to schooling (Rutter, 1985; Sylva 1994a, 1994b),
- ❖ Prevention of chronic delinquency (Yoshikawa 1995),
- ❖ Reduced crime /antisocial behaviour (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999) and
- ❖ Increased benefits with longer periods of time in early childhood programmes (Reynolds, 1995, Mc Cain & Mustard, 1999; Kolb, 1989).

From the studies presented above, it is clear that there has to be a move from an investigation of the difference early childhood education makes to learners' subsequent achievement. There has therefore to be a shift to investigating the factors in the provision of early childhood education that have lasting cognitive and social outcomes for children.

Carneiro and Heckman (cited in Committee for Economic Development, 2004) suggest that *skill begets skill in a dynamic process* meaning that skills gained early in life help students gain additional skills in the next stage of development. As a corollary, missing out on developing skills early in life is hard to compensate for later (Committee for Economic Development, 2004).

From the above discussion on the benefits of preschool education, it has been observed that these benefits only occur if the programmes are of high quality. This is further supported by Huntley (1998) who also observes that more recent research however points to the fact that children only benefit if the service they attend is one of high quality. That is why Dodge (1989: 44) suggests “ if it takes quality programmes to make a positive impact on children’s lives, then we have a professional obligation

to provide children and families with such programmes.” With such a challenge, it is important to understand what high quality preschool education means. But before looking at this, the theoretical framework of the study will be discussed.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by theories of child development and learning. There are as many theories of child development and learning as authors. And classical derivations from these developmental theories, together with contemporary extrapolations, provide conceptual rationales for model applications. Selections of curriculum instructional strategies and program priorities reveal the theoretical commitments of early education programmers (Johnson, 1988:10). According to Powell (1991) cited in North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)(2006) three theories have had profound impact on preschool practices. These three theories include the Maturationist, Environmentalist, and Constructivist perspectives of development.

2.2.1 Maturationist Theory

According to the Maturationists, the most important consideration in attempting to understand and nurture the development of the child is to realise fully the great extent to which it unfolds according to a maturationist or biologically-based timetable (Johnson, 1988). In other words, Maturationists believe that development is a biological process that occurs automatically in predictable, sequential stages over time (Hunt, 1969 cited in NCREL, 2006). As such, providing a generally ambient environment is really all that is necessary to ensure normal growth since the child's

development is under the primary control of inevitable natural process (Johnson, 1988: 10).

2.2.2 Environmental Theory

According to the environmentalists, the most critical facet of development to keep in mind is the degree to which the external environment shapes its course. From the vantage point of the educator, special attention needs to be paid to the way the child interacts with the environment (Johnson, 1988). This perspective leads many families, schools and educators to assume that young children develop and acquire new knowledge by reacting to their surrounding. As such, many environmentalists' influenced educators and parents believe that young children learn best by rote activities, such as reciting the alphabet over and over, copying letters, tracing numbers (NCREL, 2006). In Malawi, some members of the community also hold this view. They however mistake it for preschool effectiveness as alluded to by Kulemeka-Kishindo (2005). She states that "there is a common fallacy in Malawian communities that confuse the effectiveness of ECD programs with children's ability to parrot the English Language" (Kulemeka-Kishindo, 2005:6). Environmentalists' view is evident in preschool classrooms where young children are expected to sit at desks and listen attentively to their teachers (NCREL, 2006).

2.2.3 Constructivist or Interactionist Theory

Constructivists believe that learning and development occur when young children interact with the environment and people around them (Hunt, 1969 cited in NCREL,

2006). According to this perspective, the most important characteristic of development is its dynamic constructivistic quality. Knowledge of the external world is built, cognitive abilities develop through the child's active involvement with the surroundings. Processes internal to the child are most important, knowledge and development come from the dynamic relation between the child and the environment (Johnson, 1988) and children initiate most of the activities required for learning and development (NCRL, 2006).

Constructivists' influenced schools and educators pay a lot of attention to the physical environment and the curriculum of the early childhood classroom. Kindergarten classrooms are often divided into different learning centres and are equipped with developmentally appropriate materials for young children to play with and manipulate. Teachers and adults have direct conversations with children, children move actively from centre to another, and daily activities are made meaningful through the incorporation of children's experiences into the curriculum (NCRL, 2006). A sharp distinction is drawn between development and learning with the latter subordinated to the former. Qualitative stages of development determine what the child can be expected to learn. This view is predicated on the belief that cognitive, social, and affective behaviour and development need to be conceptualized holistically and that education should promote an integration of function (Johnson, 1988:11)

It is observed that the Early Childhood Development policy and curriculum are based on the theory of constructivism. The policy "calls for holistic approach to childcare by integrating all development concerns into existing operational systems (MoGCS, 2003a). Further to that, MoGCS (2003c: 18) note that "since the main aim

of preschool education is to foster the all-round development of the child, the teacher must ensure that s/he plans the programme in such a way that it facilitates this growth and development." This being the case, the timetable and the daily programs must be based on both the needs and the abilities of preschool children. Each days' programme should include both educational and welfare services. It should allow children to acquire knowledge and skills and help in sharing their attitudes. It should also cater for their health needs (MoGCS, 2003c: 18).

"Holistic development" or all-round development referred in the ECD policy and the Curriculum is a term used by the early childhood community to mean that the child's development cannot be compartmentalised into health, nutrition, education, social-emotional, and spiritual variables. All are interwoven in a child's life and developing simultaneously. Progress in one area affects progress in others" (Evans et al, 2000: 15-16). To this end Evans et al (2000) concludes that interventions should include attention to physical development (through health and nutrition), mental development (through education and stimulation), social-emotional development (providing affection and opportunities for social participation), and spiritual development (as defined within the child's culture).

2.3 Quality Preschool Education

Quality is an elusive concept. In the research and education literature, the issue of quality is generally taken for granted as a given or some universal known and identifiable construct: "Quality is presented as a universal truth that is value- and culture - free and applicable equally anywhere in the field under consideration: in short, quality is a decontextualised concept" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence cited in Fleer,

2001:30). However Peter Moss cited in Kamerman (2001:5) carried out a study in child care quality in early 1990's and he concluded that quality is a relative concept, reflecting the values and beliefs of the society in which the programs are embedded. No wonder Vonta (2000) adds that we still do not have the definition of quality in Early education that is universal. Probably we could agree that young children need physical health, healthy and safe environment, love and support from family members and other institutions which take care of their development and individual appropriate care and education (Vonta, 2000).

In an attempt to define quality in preschool education, Johansson cited in Abbot and Rodger (1994:11) states that "in my opinion quality may be defined in a process oriented way, that is to say via continuous judgement of what happens in specific situations where various factors interplay in a dynamic way". The researcher views this definition as wanting because it does not define quality but explains how quality in preschools may be defined. The researcher will however go for the definition by Kruithof and Ryall in Huntly (1998). They define quality as a "way to think about things, it is a way to treat other, it is a way to constantly improve everything we touch."

2.4 The Nature of Quality

Literature on preschool education quality indicates that there are two main dimensions of quality in preschools: structural quality and process quality (Smith, 2005; Kulemeko- Kishindo, 2005; Smith, 2003; Espinosa, 2002; Flee, 2001; Vonta, 2000; Plisco et al, 1986).

2.4.1 Structural Quality

This is the observable organisational characteristic of quality (often reflected in regulations). These include:

- ❖ Staff- child ratios
- ❖ Teacher qualifications
- ❖ Group size
- ❖ Staff training and development
- ❖ Staff experience
- ❖ Staff wages
- ❖ Class size
- ❖ Staff stability

2.4.2 Process Quality

Process quality emphasises the actual experiences (social relationships and interactions) that occur in educational settings. These include:

- ❖ Interaction between staff and students
- ❖ Interaction between staff and parents
- ❖ Materials available
- ❖ Health and safety provision
- ❖ Children's activities
- ❖ Appropriateness of environment to children and families individual needs and preferences.

Unlike structural dimensions that can be regulated (Smith, 2003), process quality is typically measured by observing the experiences in the center and classrooms and

rating the multiple dimensions of the program such as teacher interactions, type of instruction, room environment, materials, relationship with parents and health and safety routines (Espinosa, 2002).

2.5 Effects of selected aspects of Quality on learners academic achievement

There are three key aspects of structural quality, described as the “iron triangle” (to describe their importance and their interrelationship) (Ochiltree cited in Smith, 2003). The iron triangle includes group size, staff-child ratios and teacher qualifications. The effect of these three aspects will be looked at in detail.

2.5.1 Teacher Qualifications.

Staffing is an important component of the quality of Early Childhood Education and care programs and there is consensus that staff requires specialised training (Kamerman, 2001). In this case interest is in the percentage of teachers /caregivers who are qualified. According to Hyde and Kabiru (2003) it is commonly assumed that more highly qualified teachers or caregivers will provide better attention to young children. But they however warn that teacher qualification is at best only a rough indicator of quality, and in some settings may not be particularly valid or useful unless the definition goes beyond formal paper qualifications to include experience and training courses that are outside the certification process (Hyde and Kabiru, 2003).

The World Bank commissioned a review of research on the relationship between quality and training of teachers and student achievement in the 1970's (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985). After examining thirty two studies, the review concluded that trained teachers do make a difference and in particular that teacher

qualifications, experience and the amount of education and knowledge are positively related to student achievement (Husen, Saha, and Noonan cited in Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985: 220).

The qualifications of staff have been strongly linked to outcomes for children in New Zealand and United States (Smith; Kaman and Neuman cited in Fler, 2001).

“The impact of Early childhood training was strongest when there were more staff with three years of training and there were significant relationship between lower levels of training and quality. Centres with more staff with 3 years training had better planned resources and managed programmes and children had more positive and responsive interactions (Smith, 1996a) the general level of staff education also proved a strong predictor of quality (the second strongest predictor of quality on a stepwise regression analysis) so that centres with larger percentages of staff with no school leaving qualifications tended to be lower quality (beta=-0.30, p=0.0001). Also the percentage of staff with 3 year training was the strongest negative predictor of children wandering and waiting beta=-0.22, p=0.0006”(Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powel, Massee and Barnett cited in Fler 2001: 32).

2.5.2 Staff child ratios.

Ratios have been reported as making a significant contribution to outcomes for children in many countries (Scarr, Eisenberg & Deater – Deckard; Mc Gurk cited in Fler 2001). After reviewing many studies, Smith (2005) shows that teacher-child ratio demonstrated mixed relations to quality primary because of regulatory practices that constrained extreme variations in teacher: child ratio (Smith, 2005: 41). It is assumed that fewer children per teacher/ caregiver is usually preferred because it

allows the adult to pay more individual attention to the child, which in turn is assumed to promote better learning and development. A very large number of children per teacher tend to restrict one-on-one activities by requiring much more attention to group control and management instead of promoting learning through exploration and attention to individual needs (Hyde and Kabiru, 2003). Further to this, Love et al (2002) write that lower child –staff ratios and smaller group sizes are important because they make possible more- positive dynamics. When teachers have to interact with fewer children, they can better respond to individual children, pay attention to each child, give appropriate care and create a developmentally appropriate classroom environment (p160).

2.5.3 Group size

Group size as it is with teacher: pupil ratio is usually regulated. In studies of group size, Dunn; and Kontos and Fiene, cited in Smith (2005), found positive relations between group size and centre quality. According to Espinosa, when groups are smaller, teachers tend to have more positive, supportive, and stimulating interactions and warm and nurturing interactions are directly linked to children's social competence and future academic success (Espinosa 2002: 3).

Emphasising on the need for small groups, Hurst and Joseph (1998) write on the need to plan and organise for more opportunities to work in groups and on a one- to one basis. They contend that practitioners themselves gain much knowledge and understanding of children from being able to converse and share ideas and negotiate plans in this way. The children's sense of security and wellbeing is much enhanced, leading to their becoming more successful learners (Hurst and Joseph, 1998: 86-87).

Furthermore, American research suggests that small group participation can benefit or hinder children's development, depending on the values that govern small group life (Lewis 1995). When students participate in groups that are helpful, collaborative, and friendly, more frequent participation is associated with a host of positive outcomes for children, including increased academic motivation, liking for school, and concern for others. In contrast, when students participate in groups that are unfriendly and unhelpful, increased small group experience is associated with negative academic and social outcomes. So the effect of small – group participation depends on the quality of interaction in the groups (Battstich, Solomon and Deluchi cited in Lewis 1995: 97).

Turning to process dimension, it was earlier on explained that process quality emphasises the actual experiences (social relationships and interactions) that occur in educational settings (Espinosa, 2002).

We could find the foundation for those dimensions (process) in constructivism (Vonta, 2000). Constructivists believe that learning occurs as children strive to make sense of the world around them. Children construct their own understanding of the world. They make sense of what is happening around them synthesising new experiences with what they have previously come to understand. Learning becomes an interactive process involving the child, adults, other children and the environment. From this point of view, we can predict that a child will learn and develop better if the quality of interaction between himself and another child, small group, whole group, adults, physical environment, classroom arrangement and contents is better (Vonta, 2000: 177-178).

It is also worth mentioning that young children learn best through engaging in spontaneous and reciprocal interactions, meaningful activities and caring relationships. And participating in stimulating warm and responsive Early Childhood Education programs support children's excitement and pleasure in learning and encourages on going engagement in learning activities (Smith, 2003). It is therefore important that activities should be meaningful and there should be reciprocal interactions because "when the activities and interactions are rated higher, children develop more advanced language and mathematics abilities, as well as social and conversely poor process quality has been linked to increased behavioural problems" (Peinsner-Feinberg cited in Espinosa 2002: 3).

It should also be noted that there is significant body of research evidence which demonstrates that infants who are in relationships which are secure and where adults are responsive to infant's needs, are more socially adjusted later in life (Fleer and Linke; Smith cited in Fleer, 2000: 32).

2.6 Ensuring quality in Preschools

This section looks at how one can determine whether a centre is offering high quality preschool education or not. Knowing how a high quality preschool looks like may enable preschool operators provide a conducive environment for children.

Espinosa (2002) describes how a high quality preschool should look like. She focuses on children, families and teachers.

For children, she writes that;

- ❖ Children are respected, nurtured and challenged

- ❖ Children have ongoing opportunities to learn important skills, knowledge and dispositions
- ❖ Children are able to make meaningful decisions throughout the day
- ❖ The children some language and culture are respected, appreciated and incorporated into the curriculum and classroom
- ❖ Children participate in individual, small group, and large group activities
- ❖ Children learn the skills necessary for future academic success
- ❖ Children have the opportunity to learn basic school readiness skills
- ❖ Children's natural curiosity is used as a powerful motivator
- ❖ Children are given variety in their daily schedule

And for teachers, curriculum and classroom;

- ❖ Teachers have, at a minimum, a four year college degree and specific training in early childhood education
- ❖ Teachers have frequent, meaningful interactions with children
- ❖ Teachers teach important concepts such as mathematics and early literacy through projects, every day experiences, collaborative activities and active curriculum
- ❖ Teachers regularly assess each child's progress and make adjustments as necessary
- ❖ Teachers refer children who may have special learning needs for comprehensive evaluation and diagnosis
- ❖ Teachers are paid a professional salary with benefits
- ❖ Teachers and other staff are provided with ongoing professional development

- ❖ Teachers communicate respect for the families and warmth for the children
- ❖ Teachers are able to have respectful, collaborative relationships with other staff, parents and other professionals
- ❖ Teachers use a curriculum with specified goals, approach toward learning, expected outcomes and assessment procedures
- ❖ Children have opportunities to learn in spacious, well equipped classrooms.

Byers et al. (2004) seem to be agreeing with Espinosa(2002) and they consider the following as areas of practice that will principally determine the quality of provision of service in preschool settings

- ❖ A child centred approach – incorporates children’s interests as the central focus of all aspects of learning and care within the setting.
- ❖ Early years setting should offer a range of learning opportunities that meet the diverse needs of children
- ❖ Children are treated as individuals
- ❖ Equal opportunities – programme and centre must offer all young children high quality experiences that reflect their individual needs and abilities
- ❖ Inclusion – the centre should integrate children with special educational needs and those without
- ❖ Children’s self esteem is enhanced
- ❖ considers play as a vehicle for learning

Further, Gallagher, Clifford & Maxwell (2004) summarise what a good quality preschool should be like. They write that an ideal preschool should have the following components; Information & Support, Universal Screening, Continuum of High-

Quality Services, Competent Personnel, Appropriate Curriculum, Constructive Learning Environment and Adequate Financing. The table 1 below gives more information

Table 1: Components of an ideal preschool

Components	Rationale
Information & Support	All families would have access to information and support about parenting, child development, and community services.
Universal Screening	The ideal early childhood system would offer systematic, ongoing health and developmental screenings for all young children.
Continuum of High-Quality Services	The ideal early childhood system would offer a continuum of high-quality care and education services to meet the diverse needs of families and children.
Competent Personnel	Well-prepared teachers and aides would be present in proper proportions to deliver the services to the preschool children.
Appropriate Curriculum	A well-accepted program of developmental activities would be applied to help enhance children's health and motor development, cognitive abilities, language development, and social and emotional development.
Constructive Learning Environment	Constructive learning environments, meeting professional standards, would provide sufficient space and equipment in attractive surroundings.
Adequate Financing	Direct services would have adequate funds to achieve goals for children, provide adequate compensation for staff, and purchase supplies and necessary equipment to aid program delivery.

It can be observed from the literature presented above that ensuring quality preschool education service involves creating an environment that will allow the child to develop holistically and it takes good planning for this to happen. It should be noted that there

are variations in the minimum qualification of teachers in preschools in many countries. In Malawi for example, the minimum qualification is Primary School Leaving Certificate and four year college degrees in early childhood education are not offered in any of the tertiary institutions available in Malawi.

2.7 Preschool Education Quality in Malawi

Literature on Preschool education quality in Malawi is very scarce. A presentation of what the researcher came across follows.

The Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT) (2005:18-19) presents the following challenges faced by early childhood education in Malawi;

- ❖ most of them operate under very poor conditions due to lack of support by the community at large,
- ❖ inadequate trained teachers,
- ❖ lack of standard instructional materials such as syllabuses and operational guidelines, still remain unavailable,
- ❖ no systematic monitoring and evaluation tools for Early Childhood Development (ECD) resource centres,
- ❖ inadequate information for the public on how ECD Centres started, are managed and monitored,
- ❖ Relegation of pre-school education in Government public funding policies.

These challenges may adversely affect the quality of Preschool Education. It is however observed that some of these challenges presented by the CERT have now been addressed (see Ministry of Gender and Community Services (2003b and 2003c).

The government of Malawi recognizes the need for investing in children of the age group 0-8 years in order to reduce poverty as stipulated in its policy objective of “Poverty Reduction” among the 65% of its population that lives below the poverty line (Matola et al 2001:28). With this in mind, The ECD Policy as well as other important ECD documents (curriculum, syllabus and operational guidelines) have now been put in place. The challenge is however, the implementation of the contents of the aforesaid documents. Effective implementation will facilitate the provision of quality ECD/Preschool programs.

2.8 Summary

In summary, preschool education as a distinct form of education was essentially non-existent prior to the 1800’s. It was only in the 1800’s that people began to think of children as anything more than ‘small adults,’ and to recognise that they need and thrive upon special attention and consideration. Research has shown that preschool education is a sound investment academically, socially and economically. It was however observed that for preschool education to be a sound investment, it has to be of high quality.

Literature on Preschool education has shown that there are two dimensions of quality. These are structural and process. Structural dimension includes observational characteristic of quality like staff-child ratios and teacher qualifications while process dimensions emphasises the actual experiences that occur in educational settings like interaction between staff and students, children’s activities and Health and safety provision. In addressing the issue of quality in Preschools, it is therefore important that

emphasis should be put on both dimensions to achieve quality improvements.
Literature on what to expect to see in a high quality preschool has also been presented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the researcher outlines the methodology that was used in the study's data collection and analysis. Research design, the sample, instruments that were used and procedure are outlined.

3.1 Design of the study

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This is so because ' increasingly it is recognised that education programs are complex social systems that require a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of study' (Harms and Clifford (1993) cited in Huntly 1998: 7). The mixed method enabled confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation and assisted to elaborate or develop analysis, providing richer detail (see Rossman & Wilson cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994:42).

3.2 Setting of the Study

The study was limited to the Northern Region of Malawi, Mzuzu to be specific. The study targeted pre-schools in Mzuzu City. Since the concentration of Pre-schools is mainly in the urban areas (UNESCO, 2000, MoCGS, 2003b), Mzuzu was therefore considered to be an appropriate area for the study. Further to this, it is the only urban city close to Karonga District where the researcher is based and has the highest

number of preschool compared to other districts in the Northern Region of Malawi (see appendix 8).

3.3 Sampling Procedures

It was established that there are 88 preschools (77 privately owned preschools and 11 CBCC's). The focus was however on the 77 privately owned Preschools. These seventy-seven Preschools were distributed in six zones (see table 2). Stratified random sampling was used to come up with a sample of 13 Preschools from the 77 Preschools available in Mzuzu city. This ensured that the resulting sample was distributed in the same way as the population in terms of the stratifying criterion (see Bryman, 2001: 90). The size of the sample was (to a large extent) affected by the time and cost of the research process.

Table 2: Distribution of Private Preschools in Mzuzu City and the Sample

Name of Zone	Total # of Preschools	# Of Preschools Selected
Chibavi	11	2
Mchengautuwa	11	2
Luwinga	13	2
Stadium	12	2
Zolozolo	11	2
Katoto	19	3
Total	77	13

Directors/ Proprietors of Preschools were involved in the study. A maximum of three teachers per Preschool were also involved. There were however some Preschools that had less than three teachers. This therefore made the total number of Preschool teachers to be thirty-three.

Preschool Education activities in Private Preschools in Mzuzu are coordinated and monitored by the coordinating Committee of APPM – Mzuzu-Ekwendeni. In particular the objectives of the committee are:

- ❖ To coordinate the activities of Nursery Schools in Mzuzu and Ekwendeni.
- ❖ To organize courses to equip the preschool teachers with proper knowledge,
- ❖ To inspect or monitor preschools.

Five officials from this committee were therefore involved in the study.

3.4 Access to pre-schools

Access to pre-schools that were studied was an issue that was considered carefully. A letter of introduction (see appendix 8) was taken from the Head of Education Foundations department to the District Social Welfare Officer in Mzuzu who later referred the researcher to the Coordinating Committee of APPM (Mzuzu-Ekwendeni). This Committee gave the researcher another letter of introduction (see appendix 9) that was used in all the Preschools that were visited. With this letter, accessing Preschools was not a problem. Permission to conduct the study in all the 13 Preschools was sought from the Directors or the Proprietors of the Preschools. This was made easy because of the letter that was taken from the Coordinating Committee (Mzuzu-Ekwendeni) of APPM.

3.5 Instrumentation and Data collection procedures

The data collection exercise was conducted from 15th March to 18th May 2006. The researcher used three data collection tools; The Preschool Classroom observation

schedule, Questionnaire and an Interview Schedule. This was done to ensure internal validity of results.

3.5.1. The Preschool Classroom observation schedule

An observation schedule (see appendix 1) was used during the visits to preschools in order to assess the condition of the preschools. In using this instrument, observations were made on the following variables: Physical environment, Caregiver/teacher - Child interactions, Children relationship with adults, children relationship with their peers, Caregiver/Teacher Characteristics, Health and safety and Daily routines. This was supplemented by questions to the preschool teachers. In the observation schedule, there are fifty-five guiding questions. Apart from just circling Yes, No, or Not observed, the researcher wrote down detailed description of his observation of the classes and surrounding. A field notebook was used for this purpose. Observation data was collected because this leads to deeper understanding than interviews alone, because it provides a knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may enable the researcher to see things that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss (Patton, 1990). To ensure that good quality data was collected, the researcher alerted the preschool classroom teachers before hand and asked to be introduced. It took two days for classroom/surrounding observations to be noted down. This enabled the students to become accustomed to my presence and go about their usual activities (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000).

3.5.2. Questionnaire

There was one type of questionnaire and it was administered to selected teachers of each of the thirteen Preschools. The tool demanded for anonymity and confidentiality but respondents were asked to be honest. Generally the questionnaire required respondents to give out information on their Background information like sex, age, and job experience; training and professional development; curriculum; professional morale and benefits (see appendix 2 for more details). These questionnaires were given to preschool teachers/caregivers and they filled them on their own. In total there were thirty-three questionnaires.

3.5.3. Interviews

The researcher also employed a structured interview. The researcher was supposed to interview directors/ proprietors of the thirteen preschools that were selected. However, one proprietor was not interviewed for she withdrew. As such, the researcher conducted twelve interviews. Directors /proprietors were asked to respond to eighteen pre-planned questions (see appendix 3). This was done to assist in corroboration.

3.6 Piloting of Instruments

All data collection tools were pilot tested at a Pre-school within the Municipality of Zomba. This gave feedback. And this feedback "help investigators to refine their data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedure to be followed" (Yin as cited in Robson 1993: 165). As such appropriate amendments to the three data collection tools were made after this exercise.

3.7 Data Analysis

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. As such, both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data analysis were applied.

Quantitative data mainly included data from questionnaires. In the analysis of this data, descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of pre-school environment, teacher and structural characteristics of pre-school education. Microsoft excel (a computer package) and Statistical package for social scientists (SPSS) versions 8.0 and 9.0 were used for this analysis. These packages were used to generate tables in which data were placed, generating frequencies, working out percentages and carrying out statistical tests.

Analysis of qualitative data began soon after collection of the data. As such transcribing of recorded interviews started soon after the recordings. Qualitative data consisted of texts from interviews with directors/proprietors, interview transcripts and field notes. This data was categorised using pre-coded themes and emerging issues were identified and coded appropriately.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Since this study involved human participants, it was important to look at ethical issues. The following was therefore how the researcher negotiated his relationship with participants to meet ethical requirements.

3.8.1 Informed consent

The researcher informed the participants of some aspects of the research and consent was obtained from them before the study. Since data was also collected

through observation, those that were observed were asked to give consent to their being observed before the start of observations.

3.8.2 Deception

The purpose of the study was partially explained and the objectives of the study were not explained to avoid the outcome of the study being affected. This is supported by Robson (1993: 472) who says that it may be impossible to study some psychological processes without withholding information about the true object of the study.

3.8.3 Confidentiality

Participants were informed that all the data that was collected was confidential. As such names of participants were not collected. Though names of Preschools were collected, the write up does not bear these names.

3.8.4 The Right to Withdraw

There was a case in which the management of a Preschool exercised their right to refuse to participate, a replacement was therefore made. Blaxter et al (2001: 156) write that one strategy to consider if access is refused is by approaching other individuals, institutions.

3.9 Limitations

It would have been better if the study were carried out in all the three regions of Malawi. The limited period over which all research activities of the programme the researcher went through were supposed to be carried out resulted into the study being carried out in Mzuzu city only. As such generalisability of the results has been possible within the confines of the study but *cautious* generalisation has been made for preschools in urban areas and the nation as a whole. It would however be interesting to carry out a similar study nationwide.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to assess the quality of pre-school education services and its environments in Mzuzu City in line with Early Childhood Development Policy implementation and the extent to which it offers opportunities for children's holistic development. Specifically the study aimed at achieving the following five objectives:

- ❖ To explore the structural and teacher characteristics of pre-school education, such as teacher-child ratios, group size, qualifications and others.
- ❖ To investigate how healthy and safe the indoor and outdoor environment is.
- ❖ To assess the availability of instructional materials and the extent to which preschool children access them.
- ❖ To assess interactions that occur in preschool settings, such as child – teacher, child-child
- ❖ To describe how pre-school environment and structural and teacher characteristics of pre-school education compare with Government of Malawi standards of pre-school education.

Twelve directors and thirty-three preschool teachers participated in this study. Three data collection tools were used; preschool teacher's questionnaire, interview schedule for Directors of Preschools and an observation schedule (see appendices 1- 3). In this

chapter, research findings are presented and discussed. Before looking at the results, it is important to understand the context in which children learn in Mzuzu city. Two of the preschools under study have been described. The one the researcher considered to have low quality education services and that which was considered to have relatively ‘good quality’ education services. The rest of the preschools under study fall between the two extremes. The two preschools are preschool 2 and 11(See appendices 4 and 5 for details)

4.1 Structural and Teacher Characteristics of Preschool Education

The first objective of the study was to explore structural and teacher characteristics of Preschool Education. To achieve this, data on the following areas was collected; teachers' background information like sex, age, length of service, highest level of education, training and professional development. This section therefore presents and discusses the results.

4.1.1 Sex of Teachers/caregivers

Teachers were asked to indicate their sex in the questionnaires they were given. Results are shown in the pie chart below.

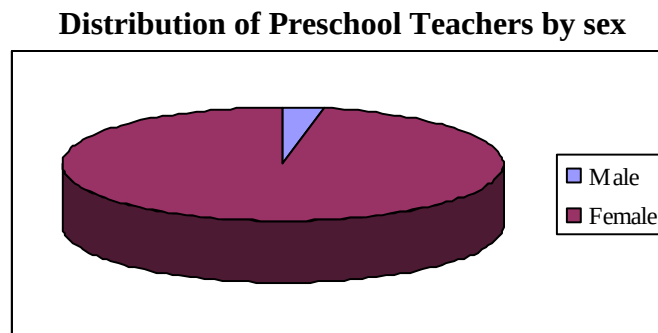


Figure 1: Distribution of Preschool teachers by sex

From the pie chart above, only one (3%) teacher in the preschools under study was male, this shows that the majority were female. These differences were found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 29.121, df = 1, p = 0.000$). These results therefore indicate that there is low male participation in preschool education. This may be as a result of how people look at the status of Preschool education. Many people look at it as having a low status. Fler (2000) supports this assertion and she writes, “the status of early childhood profession was deemed to be extremely low, making it an unattractive career option” (Fler 2000: 49). Further to this, Carrington (2002) cited in Lyons et al (2005), write that the small proportion of male workers may be because of low pay and the status, and the connotations of work with ‘mothering’.

4.1.2 Ages of Preschool Teachers

Preschool teachers/caregivers were also asked to indicate their ages. These ages were later grouped as follows, 20-25, 26-45 and 46+. Results are therefore presented in the bar chart in figure 2 below.

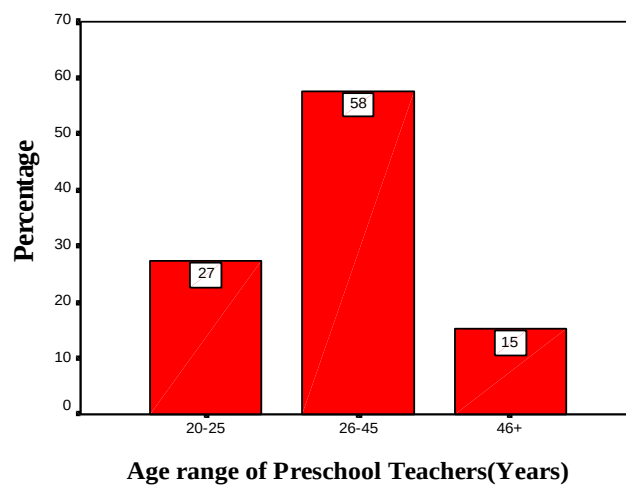


Figure 2: Distribution of ages of teachers

From the bar chart above (figure 2), the majority of teachers (58%) are aged between 26 and 45 years. This is a very critical age where according to Super cited in Sullivan (2003), individuals try to make a place for themselves in their chosen occupation. Security is their objective. This means that individuals are getting firmly settled into an occupational field, making contributions to that field of work and being very productive, they would like to be promoted to higher levels of responsibility. This suggests the need for Preschool owners to assist this group of teachers to get established in the profession.

4.1.3 Staff Experience

The study also explored the period over which teachers have been handling children. Figure 3 below shows their experience in months.

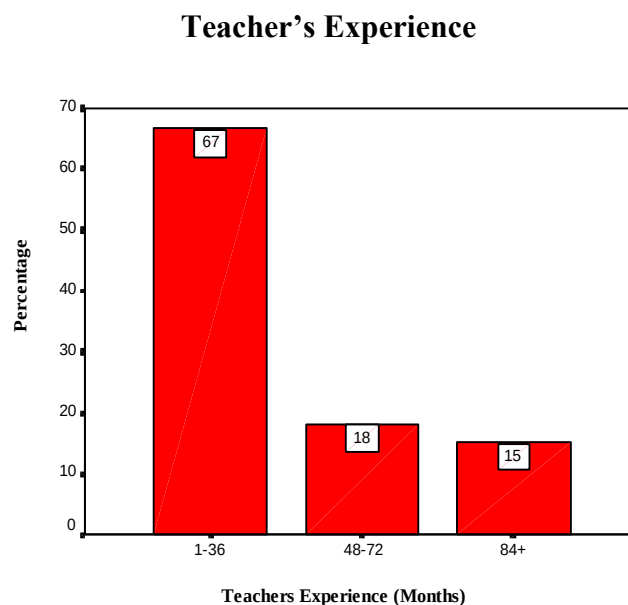


Figure 3: Teachers' teaching experience in months

From the bar chart above (figure 3), 22 (67%) teachers have been teaching in Preschool for 36 months or less. In other words, many teachers do not have adequate experience in handling children. Only 5 (15%) have vast experience. They have been in the preschool education sector for not less than 84 months (7 years).

4.1.4 Qualification of Preschool Teachers

It was noted in chapter 2 that teacher qualifications, experience and amount of education and knowledge are positively related to student achievement. The study therefore explored the highest level of education of the teachers in the Preschools under study. The bar chart in figure 4 below shows the results.

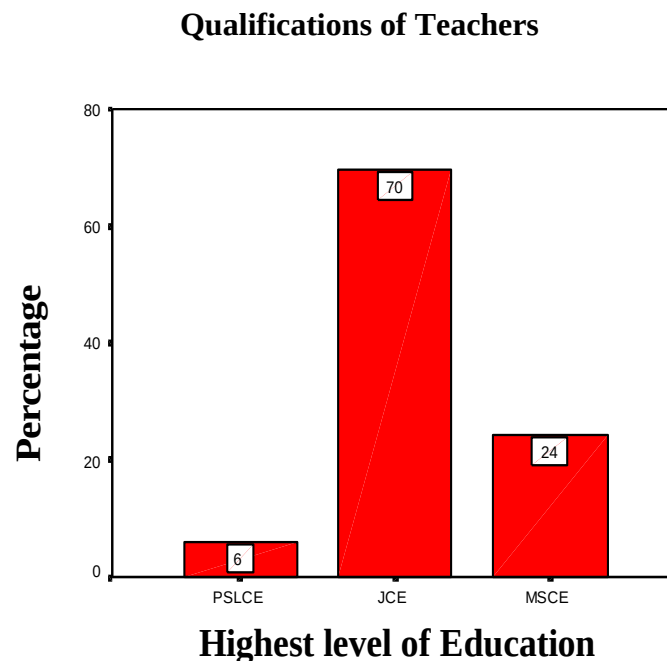


Figure 4: Preschool teachers' highest qualification

From figure 4 above, 23 (70%) teachers are Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) holders. While 8 (24%) have Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) as their highest level of education. Two (6%) teachers in the sample had Primary School

Leaving Certificate (PSLCE). This distribution of qualification was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 21.273, df = 2, p = 0.000$). According to the Ministry of Gender and Community Services (2003c), the minimum qualification for caregivers/teachers is the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLCE) but preferably JCE or above. It therefore follows that all the teachers in the schools under study had the required qualifications. It should however be pointed out that the minimum qualification is very much on the lower side such that many teachers are less educated. There is a great need for better-educated teachers, preferably from MSCE. This is so because better-educated teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences, and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached. The result is better social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development for the child (Barnet, 2003:14).

4.1.5 Staff Training and Development

Training of teachers/ caregivers working in preschools is very crucial. Rhodes & Hennessy (2001) write that training is one of many factors which contribute to the quality of care children receive in childcare and preschool settings. Preschool teachers were therefore asked about whether they were trained in preschool education or not. The results showed that 61% of the preschool teachers indicated having received training in preschool education while 39 % did not receive any training in preschool education as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Number of Teachers trained and untrained

	Frequency	Percent
Trained	20	61 ¹
Not Trained	13	39
Total	33	100

Table 4 below was generated to look at qualification of teachers and their training status.

Table 4: A Cross tabulation of Preschool Teachers Qualifications and Training

TRAINING			QUALIFICATIONS			
			PSLCE	JCE	MSCE	
	Training	# of teachers	1	14	5	20
		% of Total	3%	43%	15%	61%
	No Training	# of teachers	1	9	3	13
		% of Total	3%	27%	9%	39%
TOTAL		# of teachers	2	23	8	33
		% of Total	6%	70%	24%	100%

From table 4 above, it was observed that of the 39% teachers that are untrained, 27% are JCE holders. A very critical situation is a case where some teachers (3% of the 39% untrained teachers) are Primary School Leaving Certificate holders and have not undergone training.

There is great need to have the untrained teachers trained if quality of Preschool education is to be improved. Teachers were further asked about areas in which they would need more training. Table 5 below shows the results.

¹ These had attended a two week training in Preschool education organised by the Coordinating Committee of APPM (Mzuzu- Ekwendeni)

Table 5: Areas Preschool Teachers need more training

AREA	NO. OF TEACHERS	PERCENTAGE
Education and Care of Children of 3-5 years	20	61
Education and care of people with disabilities	17	52
Classroom Management/Organisation of a group of children	17	52
Health and safety practices	12	36
Early Literacy Skills (reading, writing).	12	36
Measuring children progress	10	30
Helping children get along with others	10	30
Behaviour Management e.g. discipline	10	30
Early number skills	8	24
Early language skills	8	24
Working with families	7	21

Note: The column on the right titled **percentage** in table 5 is not adding up to 100% because of multiple responses.

From table 5 above, we observe that many teachers expressed that they need more training in three areas i.e. Education and care of children of 3-5 years (61%), Education and care of people with disabilities (52%) and classroom management/organisation of a group of children (52%). It is however not surprising because some teachers expressed concern over the period over which the training is carried out. Below are comments from a teacher and a director,

“The course that we are having is not enough. We need more weeks for us to improve.”(A preschool teacher)

“The period of training I feel is short. It needs to be a little bit longer. There is congestion of materials to be taught.”(Director of preschool)

These comments suggest that the two-week trainings were not enough for them to adequately cover the necessary areas.

4.1.6 Staff Wages

Discontent related to low remuneration among others can prevent paper qualifications being converted into sound practice (Hyde and Kabiru, 2003: 108). With this in mind, Directors of all the preschools under study were asked as to how much is given to their employees as their salaries. Table 6 below presents the responses given.

Table 6: Average salary per month given to Preschool Teachers

AVERAGE SALARY PER TEACHER PER MONTH (MK)	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
5000	1
3500	1
3000	2
2000	4
1500	1
1200	1
1000	1
Not revealed	2

From table 6 above, each preschool teacher in the 13 preschools under study receives K2381. 82 ± K1163.46 per month. From these results, In 55% ($n=13$) of preschools, teachers were given a salary that was below the recommended minimum wage and housing allowance². Looking at the rise in cost of living, this money may

not be adequate to meet their daily basic needs. In support of the statement, one director succinctly said;

“I am paying them K2000 per month. But this is not enough to pay the teachers and even the teachers themselves it is not enough for the cost of living has gone up so it is more like they are doing voluntary work.”

With such salaries, it is therefore difficult to have many MSCE holders taking preschool teaching posts. This was observed in figure 4 where only 24% of the teachers are MSCE holders. It is however not surprising that 50% (4 out of the 8 teachers) of the MSCE holders would not be teaching in 10 years time (see table 7 below)

Table 7: Teachers teaching status in 10 years time

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	THINKS WILL BE TEACHING IN 10 YRS TIME		TOTAL (%)
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
PSLCE	6		6
JCE	55	12	67
MSCE	12	12	24
Total	73	24	97

4.1.7 Staff stability

To establish whether members of the teaching staff were stable in the preschools under study, Directors were asked about the number of teachers who had left the institution in the past one year. The table 8 below shows the results.

Table 8: No. of Teachers that have left Preschools under study in the past one year

SCHOOL ID	No OF TEACHERS WHO LEFT THE SCHOOL
1	1
2	2
3	0
4	0
5	1
6	1
7	4
8	0
9	3
10	2
11	0
12	4
13	2
Average	2

From the table 8 above, on average, 2 teachers per Preschool left the preschools in the past one year. Many teachers (4) in Preschools number 7 and 12 left the job. It is however observed that teachers are stable in most of the preschools (7 preschools) where either one teacher or nobody left the preschool. Interviews with the Directors revealed the following reasons for leaving the institutions:

- ❖ Lady teachers following their husbands who were posted out of the District.
- ❖ Quarrel between the teachers. On this, a story was told of a teacher who ate a child's food and other teachers were not happy with that and they quarrelled. The teacher who ate the child's food had to leave the job immediately.
- ❖ Some teachers left because of low salaries so they left for greener pastures.

4.1.8 Teacher -child ratios

Smith (2003) writes about teacher –child ratios as being an element of the three key aspects of structural quality described as the “iron triangle” which comprises of group size, staff-child ratios and teacher qualifications. These teacher –child ratios are supposed to be low enough to permit frequent interaction and personal attention when needed. The number of teachers in all the preschools under study was recorded and the number of children was also taken to establish the staff child ratios. The table below therefore presents the number of teachers, children and the child- teacher ratios.

Table 9: Child - Teacher ratios

PRESCHOOL	# OF TEACHERS	# OF CHILDREN	CHILD-TEACHER RATIO
1	2	20	10
2	3	39	13
3	1	23	23
4	2	21	11
5	3	35	12
6	3	33	11
7	3	30	10
8	4	42	11
9	2	55	28
10	2	25	13
11	3	36	12
12	2	40	20
13	3	52	17
13 Preschools	33	451	14

Results in table 9 above show that on average, the child-teacher ratio in the schools under study is 14. With the highest child-teacher ratio at school 9 being 28 children to one teacher and the lowest at schools 1 and 7 with child teacher ratio being 10 to 1. Generally the child-teacher ratios are closer to the requirements of the

Ministry of Gender child welfare and community development. The requirement is that the teacher child-ratio should not exceed 1:20 for children aged 3-6 years (MGCS, 2003c). From table 9 above, only two preschools had their teacher-child ratio exceeding the recommended 1:20. In these two preschools, management of children was seen to be very poor. There was a lot of noise in class and teacher-child contact was minimal. And there was a lot of wandering of children in class.

4.1.9 Professional Morale

Data on this aspect was taken to check how motivated preschool teachers are in executing their duties. The bar chart in figure 6 below shows how satisfied teachers are in being preschool teachers.

How satisfied preschool teachers are



Figure 5: Teachers satisfaction in being preschool Teachers

From figure 5 above, 96% of the teachers are satisfied to be Preschool teachers. It is however surprising to note that 24% of these teachers indicated that they will not be

teaching in the next ten years. This was however understood when reasons for leaving were sought. These reasons are given in table 10 below:

Table 10: Reasons for leaving and not leaving preschool teaching

Reasons for leaving	Frequency (%)	Reasons for not leaving	Frequency (%)
To further Education	6	Love caring for children	39
Want to change career	6	Its my career	18
No benefits and little salary	12	To develop the nation	6
		To gain experience	9
Total	24		72

One would expect that teachers who would not be teaching in the next 10 years (24%) are not satisfied with being Preschool teachers. But this is not the case. This may be attributed to reasons associated with problems of Preschool Education sector.

4.2 Availability of materials in preschools

The study also investigated the availability of instructional materials and equipment. The providers of these materials were reported to be teachers/ caregivers, parents, school management (Directors and proprietors), donors and the National Library Service. The table below shows some instructional materials available and the extent of their availability.

Table 11: Availability of equipment and learning/play materials

School	Pupils furniture	Textbooks	Playground	Toys	Outdoor Equipment
1	Very Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Not Available	Sufficient	Very Insufficient
2	Sufficient	Insufficient	Available	Sufficient	Insufficient
3	Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Available	Not Available	Insufficient
4	Very Insufficient	Insufficient	Available	Insufficient	Very Insufficient
5	Very Insufficient	Insufficient	Not Available	Insufficient	Very Insufficient
6	Very Insufficient	Insufficient	Not Available	Sufficient	Very Insufficient
7	Very Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Available	Insufficient	Insufficient
8	Sufficient	Very Insufficient	Available	Not available	Very Insufficient
9	Very Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Not Available	Not Available	Very Insufficient
10	Very Insufficient	Insufficient	Available	Sufficient	Very Insufficient
11	Very Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Available	Not Available	Very Insufficient
12	Very Insufficient	Very Insufficient	Not Available	Insufficient	Very Insufficient
13	Very Insufficient	Insufficient	Not Available	Not available	Very Insufficient

Table 11 above shows that in many preschools (10) there was very insufficient pupil furniture. In these preschools, children were sitting on mats. And most of these mats used were either not enough for all children such that children were just clustered on it or the mats were worn out-they had many holes in them. At two preschools (preschools 9 and 13) in table 11 above, though the space per child was big, children were made to sit on mats that were not even enough for the children. They were parked on a small area where there was a mat. It should however be pointed out that the researcher is not against children sitting on the mats but the concern is on the

number and sizes of the mats available in these preschools. It could have been better if there was enough space for each child on the mat unlike how the situation was. Some schools like school 2 had a combination of chairs and a mat. The chairs used were not appropriate for the children. They were all adult size. Many children were observed to have had problems in seating on them properly.

In the schools that had sufficient pupil's furniture, all children were seated on child-sized forms. These children sat on them comfortably.

It is however surprising to note that there is little information on the issue under discussion in the programme document. It just stipulates that furniture should be light, easy to move and kept clean. Moveable fitments could be used both for storing toys and smaller playthings (MGCS, 2003c). There is no mention about the chairs to be used by children.

Almost all preschools had very insufficient number of textbooks. In fact in some schools less than five books were observed. Apart from the syllabus that was written for Malawian Preschools, no other books written for Malawian Preschools were observed. It was therefore not a surprise when some directors expressed their concern over the absence of textbooks to go along with the newly introduced syllabus. Teachers were therefore using textbooks that were not specifically written for Malawian children. In some cases, teachers were using the notes they got from the two weeks training they attended.

Only three preschools had play ground where one could clearly say that it was meant for play for the children at the preschool. In three Preschools where the playground was indicated to be available, there was a large area outside the room used

for learning where children could do their play. In some preschools, children were not observed playing there, but the teacher/caregiver pointed out that they use the place for play. In the remaining seven Preschools where playgrounds were not available, the preschools were at an area that did not provide them with an open space where children could play.

During indoor playtime, observation of the availability of toys and playthings was done. It was only in three preschools where all children had toys to play with. These are preschools 1, 2 and 6. Where “insufficient” was indicated in table 11 above, some children did not have toys to play with during the time for indoor play. This in many cases caused quarrels among children as each child wanted to have a toy. This made some pupils to snatch toys from other children. This was observed in preschools 4, 5 and 12. In the remaining preschools toys were not seen. In these Preschools, the focus was on intellectual development.

The study found that only two preschools had some outdoor equipment. This outdoor equipment included; swings, seesaws, tyres and slides. Considering the number of children available in these two preschools and the number of equipment, it was observed that some children were idling. This of course was as a result of the insufficient number of outdoor equipment. In the remaining preschools, no outdoor equipment was observed. In these preschools, focus was on indoor play. Children were either given little or no time for play outside the classroom.

4.3 Floor space per child and child toilet ratio

The study also investigated the availability of space in rooms used for teaching and took note of the number of children to establish the amount of floor space per child. The number of toilets was also taken note to establish child –toilet ratio. To give a clear picture of the space available for children in the Preschools under study, dimensions of the rooms used for learning were taken and the surface areas of the rooms were calculated. The table that follows gives out the details.

Table 12: Amount of floor space for preschool children

School	No of Children	Length (m)	Width (m)	Surface area (m²)	Floor space per child (m²)
1	20	4	3.0	12	0.60
2	39	6	4.0	24	0.62
3	23	6	3.5	21	0.91
4	21	7	5.0	35	1.67
5	35	3	2.5	7.5	0.21
6	33	6	3.0	18	0.55
7	30	4	2.5	10	0.33
8	42	10	5.0	50	1.19
9	55	12	10.0	120	2.18*
10	25	6	3.5	21	0.84
11	36	6	3.0	18	0.50
12	40	6	5.0	30	0.75
13	52	24	8.0	192	3.69*
Average	35	7.69	4.46	34	0.99

*Big surface areas observed because the rooms used were either a church or a hall.

From table 12 above, the average floor space per child is smaller than the recommended maximum floor space per child which is 1.12m².As a result of this, congestion was observed in five Preschools (Preschools 1, 5, 6, 7 and 11). These results suggest that preschool owners do not take the amount of floor space into consideration when enrolling children. It should however be noted that the amount of

floor space is very important in Preschool Education because it is supposed to determine the number of children to be enrolled. This is so because in Malawi, the maximum number of children to be received at any centre shall be determined by the amount of floor spaces in the rooms and number of toilet facilities within the ECD centre (MGCS, 2003c: 13).

Turning to the issue of toilets, MGCS (2003c) states that each unit of a maximum of 20 children of 3-6 years old will require 2 toilets designed for children. The number of toilets in each preschool under study was therefore noted and the table below shows the results.

Table 13: Distribution of toilets in Preschools under Study

School	No. of Children	No. of Toilets	Children: Toilets
1	20	1	20
2	39	2	20
3	23	1	23
4	21	1	21
5	35	2	18
6	33	1	33
7	30	1	30
8	42	1	42
9	55	1	55
10	25	1	25
11	36	1	36
12	40	1	40
13	52	1	52
All Preschools	451	15	30

No Preschool had the recommended number of toilets for the children available. In all the Preschools but one, the toilets available were not designed for children. The situation was worse in four preschools (Preschools 8,9,12 and 13). In these schools, children were observed to be queuing for a long time, waiting for their friends to come out of the toilet during break time.

4.4 Interactions, health, safety and the Preschool Environment

In addition to exploring the structural and teacher characteristics of preschool education in Mzuzu city, the study also set out to assess interactions (like child-teacher and child-child) that occur in preschool settings and to investigate how healthy the indoor and outdoor environment is. To do this, an observation schedule was used. What was therefore observed is presented in this section. The results have been presented according to the subtitles that were used in the preschool observation schedule. The figures in the tables are showing the number of preschools in which there was occurrence or non-occurrence of a particular item under discussion in the 13 preschools that were under study. For example in the first table (table 14), the number 2 indicates that 2 preschools had teaching and learning materials that deepen the awareness and knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism. “Nob” in the table shows that the variable under observation was “not observed” in the given number of preschools. Where the “Nob” column is not there it means that all items in that category were observed. While “No” means that there was no occurrence or no evidence.

Table 14: Physical Environment

Item	Yes	No	Nob
Does it have teaching and learning materials that deepen awareness and knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism	2	10	1
Does it allow children easy access to materials	1	12	0
Are ample supply of materials provided	5	8	0
Are opportunities for solitary, parallel and group play offered in view of an adult	13	0	0
Does it provide space for individual, small group experiences both indoor and outdoor	10	3	0
Children are grouped by age	8	5	0
Children in class are grouped by ability	7	6	0
Children are grouped by both age and ability	8	5	0
Children are grouped by sex	1	12	0
Are materials displayed at a convenient height for children?	7	6	0
Does it create a literacy rich environment through a variety of sources for print and non print media	5	8	0

From the table we observe that it was only in 2 preschools where there was evidence that the environment had teaching and learning materials that deepen awareness and knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism. In these preschools, there was music and art from different cultures. In the rest of the Preschools, there was no evidence of this variable.

In the table 14 above, many Preschools (12) did not allow children easy access to learning/ play materials. This was so because all activities were teacher-led as such it was the teacher who was responsible for deciding when to give out materials and the type to be given to the child. In some preschools, teachers had to snatch toys from children when they wanted to play with them if they happened to take the materials on their own.

In all the Preschools, children's activities were offered in full view of an adult. But not all Preschools provided space for individual or small group experiences

outdoor. There were some preschools as stated earlier on that did not have space that could be used for out door play.

About grouping children in class, many preschools were observed or indicated that they grouped their children by age (8 preschools), ability (7 preschools) and both age and ability (8 preschools). It was however observed that children were grouped by sex in only one preschool. This was observed when children were playing. Groups of boys were playing with toys like toy vehicles, trains while groups of girls were playing with plastic dolls and they were throwing balls at each other using hands.

Looking around in different classes revealed that in 7 out of the 13 preschools under study, materials were displayed at a height that was not convenient for children. In some cases, charts with very small letters were observed to be hanging high up on a wall such that children were having problems in seeing what was written on them. It was in very few preschools (5 preschools) where a literacy - rich environment created through a variety of sources for print and non print media. In these preschools, the walls were either blank or had very few hangings on them, not even literacy rich.

Table 15: Caregiver/teacher-child interactions

Is there evidence that the adult when interacting with a child:	Yes	No
Gives the child time to listen and respond?	13	0
Values children contributions and provides positive comments and praise	13	0
Does not attempt to force a response if the child is not yet secure enough (for example, is new to the setting, or has English as a second or third language)?	9	4
Provides a friendly commentary on the activity	12	1
Asks open-ended questions?	6	7
Listens responsively and attentively?	12	1
Provides supportive body language and gestures?	12	1
Possesses a high degree of awareness of what is going on and regularly reviews the extent to which children are involved in their tasks	5	8
Keeps children informed of events and changes that are going to take place?	12	1
Does the caregiver/ teacher reasonably handle child – child conflict	10	3
Responds to the child's success and failure	12	1

Generally, by looking at table 15 above, teacher child interactions were observed to be good in all the 13 Preschools under study. Teachers were giving children time to listen to what they were saying and adequate amount of time was given to pupils to respond to them. When children performed the activities they were asked to do, teachers were observed to value children's contribution because positive comments were made. It was only at one Preschool where a teacher did not value a child's contribution. When a child failed to give the right answer to a question the teacher posed, the teacher asked other children to boo off the child. This made the child wear a sad face. This is not a healthy situation for children because it can make a child stop reporting for classes, negatively affecting the child's development.

From table 15 above, 10 Preschools had teachers who reasonably handled child-child conflict. In the remaining Preschools, cases of poor handling of child-child conflict were observed. Several cases of conflict among children were observed in

which teachers/caregivers did not assist children in resolving their conflicts. It is important that these instances should be reduced. Modelling positive social behaviour might assist in resolving these conflicts.

Table 16: Children relationship with adults

	Yes	No	Nob
Do children approach adults confidently?	11	2	0
Do children seek adult participation?	7	3	3
Do children perceive adults as partners in play?	8	3	2
Do children demonstrate a degree of independence?	6	7	0
The child call his /her success to the attention of the caregiver	9	2	2

From table 16 above, children were observed to approach adults confidently in 11 Preschools. This was mainly observed during snack time. Several instances where children approached teachers (to either have their bottles containing their drink or containers containing their food opened) were observed. This was an indication that teachers/caregivers were generally showing warmth, listening to children and responding to them sympathetically.

Children sought adult participation in 7 Preschools. This was mainly during play. In such cases, children perceived other children as partners in play and therefore sought their participation. In such instances, teachers were observed to be playing with children. This was very important for the social development of the children. It was however only in 6 Preschools where children demonstrated some degree of independence. Where children did not show independence, activities were teacher led/directed. Pellegrini & Blatchford (2000) write that if we want to maximise the sorts of behaviour associated with social competence, then it is important to provide

opportunities that maximise peers interacting with each other, with minimal adult direction.

Table 17: Children's relationship with their peers

In children's relationships with their peers, is there evidence that:	Yes	No
They usually treat each other with respect	12	1
They are supportive of each other and others contributions in work and play?	12	1
They share and take turns reasonably often, allowing for their emotional and developmental levels	12	1
They respond positively to most other children and adults most of the time	10	3
They exhibit enthusiasm and positive attitudes most of the time.	8	5
They have some degree of choice over their playmates and the activities which they undertake.	11	2

Young children learn best through engaging in spontaneous and reciprocal interactions, meaningful activities and caring relationships (Smith, 2003: 3). Children's relationships with their peers were therefore observed. From table 16 above, it is observed that children were treating each other with respect in 12 Preschools. And again children were supportive of each other and others' contributions in work and play. In observing children's relationship with peers, it was found that children were sharing food to each other in 12 Preschools. This was observed during snack time. Some children went to school without food/snacks, but those who brought their food had to share their food to their friends. In some cases the sharing was done under the influence of their teachers.

Children did not exhibit enthusiasm and positive attitude most often in 5 preschools. In these preschools, children were observed to be passive in class.

Children had some degree of choice over their play mates in 11 preschools. It was however not the case with the activities they undertook. Most of them were teacher

directed. It was only in 6 Preschools where children demonstrated some degree of independence as seen in table 17 above.

The results presented in this section suggest that the relationship children had with their peers was a caring one and it was warm. This kind of relationship is essential for social development of the children. This may also promote good moral values as children learn to treat each other well.

4.5 Caregiver Characteristics

In addition to Preschool teachers' structural characteristics got from the questionnaires, the study sought to find out caregiver characteristics as they were doing their work. These characteristics were observed and table 18 below gives out a summary of the results.

Table 18: Caregiver/Teacher characteristics

	Yes	No	Nob
Does the caregiver/teacher show self confidence in work	8	5	0
Does the caregiver/teacher interact freely with children and other caregivers in the preschool	10	3	0
Does caregiver /teacher show some skillfulness in adequate handling of children	8	5	0
Does caregiver /teacher use local materials to prepare teaching and learning materials (creativity)	8	4	1

Table 18 above shows that teachers showed confidence in their work in 8 Preschools. It is however possible that my presence affected the teachers in 5 Preschools where teachers did not show self-confidence in their work.

It was observed that teachers were interacting freely with children and other teachers in 10 preschools.

After having gone to all the 13 Preschools under study, it was in 6 Preschools where there was evidence of teaching and learning materials made from local materials. These materials included cartons, which were used as charts, plastic bottles, toys made from cloths. This suggests creativity of teachers in making learning and play materials available. There were however very few learning materials made from these local materials. It was therefore not surprising to learn that some teachers need training in the construction of teaching and learning materials from locally available materials. Training like the one conducted in the project by Day (2004) would be appropriate for these teachers. Day's study titled "A community-driven Rural Early Childhood Development (ECD) Project, with Emphasis on culturally and Developmentally appropriate Exploratory Learning Concepts" involved among other things, training and constructing teaching aids and at the end of the project, a kit of learning aids constructed from locally available materials was assembled.

Further to the characteristics observed, observations on daily routines carried out in preschools under study were made. Table 19 presents a summary of the observations.

Table 19: Daily routines in Preschools

	Yes	No	Nob
Is curiosity encouraged?	7	4	2
Is problem solving encouraged?	2	10	1
Is generation of ideas and fantasy through exploration encouraged	9	3	1
Are activities to meet individual needs of all children included	0	13	0
Are opportunities for success provided (e.g. recognizing that a particular child would benefit from more fine motor activities by collaborating on a painting activity?)	12	1	0
Are opportunities for talk and self-expression in English and in the child's home language provided?	7	6	0
Is questioning stimulated during all activities?	8	5	0
Are discussions stimulated during all activities?	3	10	0

In the observation of daily routine activities, it was observed that curiosity was encouraged in 7 Preschools. In these Preschools, teachers encouraged questioning. Problem solving was however not encouraged in most of the Preschools (10). To encourage problem solving for children, Gold & Gibson (2000) suggest that a teacher should provide a variety of materials like unit blocks, art materials, water, clay, play dough and sand. They write that these materials encourage children to create and solve problems (Gold & Gibson, 2000:5).

The study was also interested in the inclusion of activities that meet individual needs of all children. It was however observed that they were not included in all the Preschools under study. All activities were teacher-initiated and directed. Hence all pupils were doing uniform activities. This made some children to be idle, as they seemed not to be interested in what was happening.

Children (3½-5) years talk a lot, ask many questions and they need to be given opportunities to expand their language skills by talking, reading and singing (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). But only 7 Preschools (see table 19 above) provided opportunities for talk and self-expression in English and in a child's home language. In these Preschools, apart from chorus answers to questions posed by teachers, teachers were seen to have a one-on-one talk with children. This was evident in Preschools with a small number of children. Because of this, only in 3 Preschools were discussions stimulated. This indicates that few opportunities for language development are offered to children.

Table 20: Health and Safety of indoor and outdoor environment

	Yes	No
Are staff alert to health and welfare of each child?	8	6
Does staff ensure that children are clothed appropriately for indoor and outdoor Play?	1	12
Is food stored /prepared hygienically?	13	0
Does staff adhere to hygiene principles that reduce the spread of infectious diseases?	6	8
Does staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene?	8	6
Are potentially dangerous products inaccessible to children?	4	9
Are buildings and equipment safe and hygienic?	8	6
Does the center have written policies on hygiene, medical, emergency and accident procedures	1	12
Does staff supervise children at all times?	9	4
Is information on health and other related issues readily available?	0	13

From table 20 above, 8 Preschools had members of staff that were alert to health and welfare of each child.

During play, 12 Preschools had staff that did not ensure that children are clothed appropriately for indoor and outdoor play. Children were observed to use the same clothes for learning as well as playing. This in some cases led to some children putting on dirty clothes as their clothes were made dirty during outdoor play. It was only in 1 Preschool where children dressed appropriately for play.

Children had time to take snacks in all the preschools under study. In addition to the snacks carried by children, one preschool prepared porridge for all the children. In all the preschools, food was hygienically stored/ prepared. The areas where the bags were stored were well taken care of. In most cases, the bags were placed on tables. And these tables were well cleaned in all the thirteen Preschools.

Teachers were encouraging children to follow simple rules of hygiene in 12 Preschools. This included washing of hands before eating and after visiting the toilet.

In these Preschools, the Caregiver was pouring water on the hands of children by using a cup after having drawn water from a bucket containing water. In Preschools where hygiene principles were not followed, all children were dipping their hands in the only basin available. As a result, many children had to wash their hands in very dirty water. This is not healthy and hygienic. This may easily lead to children contracting infectious diseases.

Staff did not adhere to hygiene principles in 6 Preschools. In these Preschools, children were seen to visit the toilet barefoot, children were not washing hands after visiting the toilet, classrooms were dirty and there was a lot of dust inside the classrooms and toilets were dirty both inside and outside in some cases urine and faeces were seen in these toilets.

Potentially dangerous materials were accessible in 9 Preschools. In some of these preschools, piles of *chairs* and desks were seen at the back of the rooms used for lessons. The way they were piled, it was very easy for them to fall on the ground. In fact, at one preschool, one chair fell on the ground. Fortunately, it did not hit anyone as all children close to the chair that fell ran away from it. In some preschools, many stones were seen on the playground. In addition to this, in many preschools (9), it was observed that pupils were taking soft drinks from the bottle. Considering the ages under consideration (3-5) years, this was not good for children because they can easily drop the bottles down. This was actually observed at one preschool and the bottle broke into pieces. Fortunately, nobody was hurt with the pieces from the bottle. At another preschool, the bottle fell down and the drink got out of the bottle making the

owner cry profusely. She calmed down when her caregiver bought her another soft drink bottle.

There were 8 Preschools that had buildings and equipment that were not safe. In some of these Preschools, the rooms that were used for lessons were dark inside because the rooms did not either have a window or the windows were very small. Most of the rooms had poor ventilation. Many buildings had a small floor space area per child (see table 12). This made the rooms to be congested. This may easily lead to transmission of infectious diseases. A discussion with some Directors revealed that they were not aware of the amount of floor space required per child. When the study sought views on the same issue from the Coordinating Committee of the Association for Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (APPM-Mzuzu-Ekwendeni), it was discovered that they were also not aware. This explained why Directors of Preschools did not know these measurements because as private schools, they get information on the operation of their Preschools from the Coordinating Committee of APPM- (Mzuzu–Ekwendeni).

In some Preschools, younger children were playing on seesaws designed for older children. This was dangerous for children because it could lead to accidents leading to injury. Another situation was observed where an older child was using a swing designed for very young children. On the issue of swings, the seats of the swings were very close to each other at one Preschool. When the Director was asked on appropriate measurements for the swings, the Director indicated that she was not aware of the sizes. Indeed even operational guidelines on ECD (MGCS, 2003c) are silent on measurements of swings and other outdoor equipment. It is therefore important that

appropriate measurements for this outdoor equipment should be arrived at for use in all Preschools in Malawi. This will go a long way in assisting Preschool owners who have the capacity to have this equipment available in their Preschools.

Written policies on hygiene, medical, emergency and accident procedures were not available in 12 Preschools. The absence of such policies may be linked to the reason for teachers not adhering to hygiene principles that reduce the spread of infectious diseases in 8 Preschools.

Teachers supervised children at all times in 9 Preschools. While in 4 preschools, teachers did not supervise children at all times. In these Preschools, children were loitering around the class when the teacher was teaching. In some cases, children were playing beyond the area where the teachers could see. In yet other cases, children were left alone in a play area while teachers were busy with other children somewhere. Supervising children in Preschools all the time is very important. This ensures that some very dangerous incidents like children beating each other or children playing with harmful materials like sharp objects are reduced. If children are therefore not supervised chances of these dangerous incidents occurring might be increased.

Written information on health, nutrition and other related issues was not available in all Preschools under study. As a result, parents were not guided on the type of food they should be giving to their children to be eaten at the Preschool.

4.6 Management of Preschools

Directors of Preschools were interviewed to find out how preschools are run in a bid to understand some of the issues raised by preschool teachers and to understand why the preschool environment is in the state it is.

The first issue to be considered was the mode of sourcing money for the operations of the Preschool. Many directors indicated that they get money from fees paid by parents of pupils whose children were at the preschools under study. This was the major source of money. In addition to this source, some Directors indicated that they get money from some of the following sources: Firstly, from salary, this included directors who are both working and running these preschools. But in such a case they were quick to say that a big amount of money comes from the fees parents pay for their children's education. Secondly, small scale business. Only one director mentioned this source. This involved the production of fritters and selling of soft drinks at the director's house. Thirdly, from well-wishers, these well wishers in some cases involved donors from outside this country. Fourthly, from institutions in which these preschools are. There were two cases of this nature. These institutions were the church and a barracks. Of course, their contributions were said not to be very much as they also heavily relied on school fees. From the previously mentioned modes of raising money for the operations of the preschools, it is evident that if there are fewer children in the preschool small revenue follows. This therefore affects the way teachers are paid (see table 6 above showing salaries of Preschool teachers per month). This is also contributed by the small amount of fees paid by pupils in many Preschools. Table 21 below shows the amount of fees paid by each pupil per term in all the schools under study.

Table 21: Amount of fees children pay in preschools under Study

SCHOOL ID	SCHOOL FEES PER TERM (MK)
1	1200
2	7500
3	600
4	2000
5	3500
6	2500
7	900
8	1800
9	1050
10	900
11	900
12	1500
13	750

The relationship between fees children pay and the salaries given to preschool teachers was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a medium positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.462$, $p = 0.153$, $n = 11$). This means that fees that children pay explain nearly 21% of the variance in salaries teachers receive in the Preschools under study. From these results, we cannot boldly conclude that when school fees for children are high, teachers receive higher salaries because the sample size was small and correlation coefficient (r) was not significant. This medium relationship might also have arisen because the money realised from school fees is also used for other services like, payment of house rent, bills (water and electricity).

4.7 Challenges faced by Directors in running Preschool Centres

It should however be noted that directors face many problems in the running of preschools. These challenges negatively affect the quality of Preschool education offered in their centres. Following is a presentation and discussion of the challenges.

4.7.1 Lack of funds to purchase school materials like children size chairs.

In many Preschools, the source of money for the operations of their Preschools is fees. The money they get from fees was said not to be enough for the operations of the site. This is complicated by the problem they have in fees collection. Some parents have problems in paying school fees for their children. In some cases, *“parents don’t send their children here when we tell them that we want school fees”* lamented one Director. Some parents don’t pay school fees in time, some even reach to the extent of paying after three months and worse still some don’t even pay. The inadequacy of funds has caused the unavailability of other very important items in many Preschools. For example teaching and learning materials like toys, charts, number cards, mats are not enough. In addition, seesaws and other playing materials are not available in many Preschools. This has also affected payment of teachers. One director was quoted as saying,

“I am paying them K2000 per month. However, with the money I am getting from fees, it is not enough to pay the teachers and even for the teachers themselves it is not enough for the cost of living has gone up. So it is more like they are doing voluntary work”

Apart from getting a meagre salary, in some cases teachers were not paid in time and this was said to be affecting their performance. This was happening because sometimes parents could pay school fees beyond the end of the month.

4.7.2 Lack of room for storage

This was a general challenge for many directors. This therefore forced teachers to take the few available teaching and learning aids to either their houses or the director's houses (in cases where the director's houses were close to the preschools).

4.7.3 Inappropriate environment for the learning of children

On this point some Directors pointed out that the places they are using are not their premises and it was therefore very difficult for them to do other things like erecting some structures like stationery tyres, for the owners of the premises would not support this development. For example, at one preschool that operates on church premises, the director said that such structures would not be raised at the preschool for this would act as a disturbance for children during church services. Instead of being inside the church, children would want to be playing. In addition to this, some Directors indicated that they don't have toilets for preschoolers only. Those available are shared with the primary school children. This was evident in preschools where there was both primary school and preschools. On the same point of having inappropriate place for children, another director had this to say,

“The room is not divided into learning centres and imitation centres, we lack these things but they are important for child development.”

4.7.4 Absenteeism of teachers

Absenteeism of teachers due to sickness and lack of seriousness on the part of teachers is another challenge. One director had to fire one of her employees because of

this. This led to one teacher having more work as there were more pupils than the teacher could handle. Fortunately, she had to employ another teacher immediately.

4.7.5 High Competition among Preschools

Another challenge is that there exists very high competition since many preschools have been opened and they are close to each other. This made some directors and teachers to be involved in “poaching” so that there should be a lot of children at their preschool.

4.7.6 Qualified teachers are not available

Qualified teachers are not available but when they get the qualification after training with the APPM, they leave the preschool that sent them for training. In some Preschools this challenge led to Directors asking their teachers to be responsible for their training expenses themselves.

4.7.7 Children coming to school without food

This puts the teacher in problems for s/he tries to find food for that particular child. In many cases teachers used to get food from other children who had brought food. Sometimes teachers would ask children as to who can share food to the child who did not bring food. This of course induced the spirit of sharing food to each other. In some Preschools that were involved in this study, in both the two days that the schools were visited, some children were observed going to school without carrying food.

4.7.8 Care of the premises

One of the directors said “we see that the place is not cared for, may be because our children are young such that they cannot sweep and even mop”. Through observation, it was evident that some preschools were indeed not well cared for. Surprisingly, in some preschools, teachers were saying that cleanliness was highly observed at their Preschools but when toilets were visited, many human faeces were observed in the toilet and children were washing their hands in dirty water after visiting the toilet. In these Preschools, all children were using the same container for washing their hands, dipping their hands in it.

Looking at most of the challenges discussed above, it is evident that they are associated with lack of finances. Temptations might be there to raise school fees for the children. However considering that 52.4 percent of Malawi's population is poor (NSO, 2005), raising the fees further than the present condition might reduce access to Preschool education for many children in the city. It would however be important if directors could find other sources of raising money for the operations of the sites.

4.8 Challenges faced by Teachers in implementing the ECD Curriculum

In 2003, the Government of Malawi through the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Development developed a curriculum that is supposed to be implemented in all the preschools in the Country. It was in 2004 when implementation of the curriculum started. Teachers were therefore asked about the challenges they face in implementing it. Following are therefore the responses they gave.

4.8.1 Absenteeism of children

Teachers claimed that absenteeism of children heavily affected the delivery of the content. One teacher said, “because of absenteeism of children, I am teaching one thing for several times which results into delays in completing the curriculum”. In relation to the issue of absenteeism is that children are enrolled at different times. This also affects the coverage of the work that teachers do.

4.8.2 Teaching Materials

Teachers said that recommended teaching and learning materials are hard to find because either they are not available here in Malawi or they are expensive. This agreed with the observation that the researcher made on the availability of learning/play materials. Many Preschools did not have learning/ play materials. In some preschools, teachers expressed their concern on the lack of commitment on the part of the school management to purchase the required learning and play materials. In relation to the issue of unavailability of learning and play materials is the issue of improvisation of these materials. Many teachers do not have the skills of improvising them. They therefore expressed the need to have training in the making of materials from locally available resources.

4.8.3 Interpretation of the syllabus used in Preschools

One other challenge was the teacher’s inability to interpret the syllabus. Teachers indicated that this came about because of a number of reasons. Firstly, the period in which the training they attended was carried out. The duration was short and a lot of

work was covered in a short period. Secondly, because some teachers had not been trained in using the syllabus. Two teachers made the following comments on this issue

“It is not easy to understand for I have not been trained. As an untrained teacher, I am unable to understand it. It is not easy to understand and follow everything well because I have not been trained.”

“There are songs, poems that we teach but we find it difficult to recite and sing because we don’t know them”

Inability to interpret the syllabus is a serious issue because wrong information may be passed on to children, exposing them to poor quality instruction, which may in turn affect their cognitive development.

4.8.4 Writing of schemes of work

Some teachers indicated that they have problems in writing schemes and records of work. On this problem one teacher had this to say,

“I have problems in writing schemes and records of work due to short course that we underwent and it is somehow complicated, it becomes too difficult to write it”

All Preschool teachers are expected to plan their work. MGCS (2003c) writes that once the teacher has familiarised himself/herself with the ECD curriculum, s/he should make both long term and short-term plans. These plans could be yearly or termly schemes of work. These plans help the teacher to reflect on the sequence of the activities and to select simpler skills that must be achieved before other more difficult ones are acquired.

4.8.5 Problems with teaching children

Some teachers have problems with teaching children. Two teachers were quoted as saying

“For children it takes time to get what we teach and learn it at a short period of time.”

“Some topics are hard to tackle because children are under aged”

This challenge agrees with what teachers said as an area where they need more training. It was observed in table 5 that 61% of the teachers needed training in education and care of children of 3-5 years.

4.9 Fringe benefits Teachers have in Preschools under study

The study investigated the benefits preschool teachers have in their preschool. The areas of interest were, sick leave/personal days, retirement benefits, and free or subsidised childcare. Table 22 below gives a summary of the results

Table 22: Fringe benefits received by Preschool Teachers

Fringe benefits received	Yes (%)	No (%)
(a) Paid vacation	58	42
(b) Retirement benefits	35	65
(c) Childcare (free or reduced fees for your children)	52	48
(d) Paid sick leave/personal days.	68	32

In the Preschools where there was no paid vacation, directors pointed out that teachers are paid when they are working so when they are on holiday no salary was therefore given to them. This, they said, was as a result of the small amount of fees they get from children.

About 52% of the teachers indicated that they received either free childcare or subsidised fees for their children. It was 48% of the teachers who said that they were not receiving childcare. In these schools, directors said that teachers are not allowed to even take their children to their Preschools. They claimed that these teachers might end up focussing on caring their children instead of taking care of other children as well.

On sick leave, many teachers (68%) said that they still get their salaries when they are sick. When Directors of Preschools were consulted, they pointed out that when the period of sickness exceeds two months then no salary is given to them. A replacement is made immediately to ensure continuity of learning of children.

4.10 Preschool Teacher's views on how Preschool Education can be improved in Mzuzu City

Preschool teachers look at Preschool education as being very essential in the development of any child and they think it is important that parents should be made aware of the importance of preschool education, such that they must stop thinking of it as a luxury to be enjoyed but rather necessity for the academic welfare of the children.

Preschool Teachers feel that many teachers should be trained so that more children should attend Preschool Education in preparation for primary education. They however feel that the period of training is short. They need the course to be extended to one year so that they finish the work in the training package properly. Some even suggested that if possible, the government should open TTCs for Preschool Teachers.

Many teachers see teaching in Preschools as a very big challenge, they felt that their directors should consider adjusting their remuneration package upwards. They felt that they are getting a very small salary.

Some Teachers expressed the need to have a teachers guide besides the ECD syllabus. Currently it is not there. Having it developed will go a long way in assisting Preschool Teachers.

4.11 The role of the Coordinating Committee of the Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (Mzuzu –Ekwendeni)

The Coordinating Committee of the Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (Mzuzu- Ekwendeni) plays a very crucial role in the improvement of the quality of preschool Education in Mzuzu city. This was after having learnt from teachers and Directors of Preschools under study. Teachers claimed that they got the syllabus which they are using and learnt many things about nursery school operation from the Coordinating Committee of the Association of Preschool playgroups in Malawi in Mzuzu. With this, it was found to be important to have an interview with the Committee.

It was learnt that inspection was conducted once a year. However by the time I was conducting this research they had not yet conducted the inspection. The inspection team was said to comprise different groups of people i.e. District Social Welfare Officer, The Coordinating Committee, City Assembly personnel and Health officials. These different categories of people offer their input according to their area of specialization. During the inspection, the Chairperson reported that

“We inspect preschools to ensure that they (teachers/caregivers) are teaching the children the right material, we see if the building used for learning is up to date. If the ventilation is there, the toilets are up to date, the ground where the children do play is far away from the main road”

Much as the Committee would like to do many things to improve the quality of Preschool education in Mzuzu and Ekwendeni, it faces many challenges that impede their work. Some of these challenges include:

- ❖ They lack finances. This is their biggest challenge. They do not have any Income Generating Activity (IGA).
- ❖ They do not have an office from which they can be operating. Currently, they are using the Chairpersons Office who works with the City Assembly.
- ❖ The Committee does not have transport facilities. This becomes a challenge especially when they want to conduct inspections or monitoring visits. They do not have any means of going to the Preschool they would like to visit. They sometimes walk. At times they are forced to use personal money.
- ❖ Schools are opening too close to each other within the same locality and owners of the Preschools sometimes tend to quarrel. They therefore have a big challenge in settling down their quarrels.
- ❖ Collection of affiliation fees. Each preschool is supposed to pay affiliation fees to the Committee so that it is recognized to be part of the preschools within Mzuzu city and Ekwendeni. But many Preschool owners do not pay this affiliation fee.

- ❖ Some preschools have teachers that are untrained, so it is difficult for them to pass the right subject matter that is in the syllabus appropriately.
- ❖ Some of the places used as Preschools are not fit to be used for the learning of kids. There are small rooms and they are just close to the road. A member of the Committee succinctly said “Preschool owners open Preschool as business, as such they are not worried with how the place is as long as they make money.” This agrees with the observation made by Matola et al (2001) that the free market economy has greatly boosted the ECD in Malawi in the sense that while schools are opening up with the aim of raising money (IGA) for the owners through school fees, children are benefiting from the availability of more learning establishments which would otherwise not be provided by government alone. Nevertheless, the government needs to control quality of the preschools (Matola et al, 2001: 5).

With these challenges, it is not a surprise therefore that the Committee had not yet conducted the yearly inspection by the time the research was being conducted.

In this chapter, results and discussions have been presented. Results have given us a picture of the quality of Preschool Education in Mzuzu city and in urban areas to some extent. In the following chapter, conclusions and recommendations based on these results will be made.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

The study aimed at assessing the quality of Preschool education services in Mzuzu City in line with ECD Policy implementation and the extent to which opportunities for children's holistic development were offered. This section therefore, presents conclusions made from the results and gives out recommendations. In the first place, it should be pointed out that these results cannot be generalised to all urban private Preschools in Malawi. They are particular to Mzuzu City Preschools where the study was conducted. However, a general idea of the state of Preschool education in Malawi may be obtained from the results.

Literature on preschool education revealed that there are structural and process dimensions of quality in preschool education. The study therefore, looked at these aspects in detail.

In studying structural dimensions of quality, it was generally found that preschools had low teacher child ratios, many preschool teachers had low qualifications as many had JCE as their highest educational qualification. Staff salaries were generally low. These low salaries and lack of benefits led to preschools having teachers who are poorly qualified and have low morale. This in turn led to high teacher turn over. This therefore jeopardizes the development of preschool children.

Many preschool teachers were trained in preschool education. The training offered however, did not adequately prepare them to handle children.

When aspects of process dimension of quality were looked at, it was found that interaction between teachers and children was generally good in that there were positive relationships between children and teachers. The limited funds that preschools generate mainly through fees have resulted in insufficient or lack of materials needed in preschool education. Consequently, the environment in many preschools was not appropriate for children. For example, health and safety provision was poor in many preschools. In many preschools, it was also found that children's activities were mostly led by teachers. Children were therefore, denied independence and opportunities for creativity. Considering that the ECD curriculum appears to be based on the theory of constructivism, one would expect that the implementers of the curriculum would be constructivist teachers. Evidence of such was however not seen in many preschools as children were not active learners. It may be that the teachers are not familiar with constructivists tenets.

If planners and policy makers are serious with improving the quality of preschool education in Malawi, structural and process features must be addressed together. In so doing, the EFA's goal of expanding and improving comprehensive early care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children will be achieved. From the study, it is clear that much still needs to be done to meet the target date of 2015.

5.2 Recommendations

From results of the present study, the following recommendations are made.

- ❖ The study found that many preschool teachers have low qualifications, 70% of them have JCE. The minimum qualification of Preschool teachers should therefore be revised preferably to MSCE. This will ensure the availability of quality teachers.
- ❖ The Ministry of Women and Child Development in conjunction with APPM should consider taking the issue of preschool teachers training seriously. The training period should be extended to 1 year to produce high quality preschool teachers. This therefore calls for establishment of institutions that will be responsible for such training and these are nonexistent presently.
- ❖ The Ministry of Women and Child Development should develop standards of play materials and equipment like see-saws and swings. Much as many Preschools do not have these items, but those who have them seem not to have an idea of the requirements for the sizes of the equipments.
- ❖ And on the same issue of standards, Preschool owners and teachers are not aware of some standards though they are documented in the operational guidelines (MGCS, 2003c). There should therefore be proper communication between the Ministry of Women and Child Development and APPM to make sure that private Preschool owners get the required information for the proper running of their Preschools.

- ❖ The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the APPM should enforce procedures for opening preschools to avoid having preschools that are not fit to be used for the learning of little children.
- ❖ Many problems faced by Directors in the running of the Preschool are connected to lack of finances. Considering that most of these Directors source out money for the operations of their Preschools from school fees, it would be important if directors could find other sources of raising money for the operations of their sites.
- ❖ The study revealed that teaching and learning materials are hard to find because they are either not available in Malawi or they are expensive. Preschool teachers should therefore be encouraged to use locally available materials. The study however revealed that these teachers do not have the skills of improvising learning and play materials. The Ministry of Women and Child Development in Conjunction with APPM should therefore mount training sessions aimed at equipping serving preschool teachers with skills of improvising them.
- ❖ Preschool teachers expressed the need to have a teachers' guide besides the syllabus. SDNP (2005) indicates that this document is in draft form. APPM and Ministry of Women and Child Development should therefore work on making the document available to the preschool owners.
- ❖ Written policies on medical, emergency and accident procedures are not available in Preschools. Deliberate effort should therefore be made by

Preschool administrations to establish rules and policies for the environmental conditions, health, nutrition and safety.

- ❖ To retain teachers, preschool owners should ensure that teachers are paid a professional salary with financial incentives and career advancement opportunities should be made available.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Observation Schedule Number _____

Name of Preschool _____

Name of Observer _____

Date of Observation _____

Number of staff Present _____

Number of Children Enrolled in Class _____

Highest Number Centre allows in class at one time _____

Highest Number of Children present during observation _____

Time Observation began _____

Time observations ended _____

Note: "Nob" stands for not observed

A PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		1	2	3
1	Does it have teaching and learning materials that deepen awareness and knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism	Yes	No	Nob
2	Does it allow children easy access to materials	Yes	No	Nob
3	Are ample supply of materials provided	Yes	No	Nob
4	Are opportunities for solitary, parallel and group play offered in view of an adult	Yes	No	Nob
5	Does it provide space for individual, small group experiences both indoor and outdoor	Yes	No	Nob
Are children in class grouped by (for questions 6- 9)				
6	Age	Yes	No	Nob
7	Ability	Yes	No	Nob
8	Both age and ability	Yes	No	Nob
9	Sex	Yes	No	Nob
10	Are materials displayed at children's eye level	Yes	No	Nob
11	Does it create a literacy rich environment through a variety of sources for print and non print media	Yes	No	Nob

B CAREGIVER/TEACHER - CHILD INTERACTIONS				
	Is there evidence that the adult when interacting with a child:			
12	Gives the child time to listen and respond?	Yes	No	Nob
13	Values children contributions and provides positive comments and praise	Yes	No	Nob
14	Does not attempt to force a response if the child is not yet secure enough (for example, is new to the setting, or has English as a second or third language)?	Yes	No	Nob
15	Provides a friendly commentary on the activity	Yes	No	Nob
16	Asks open-ended questions?	Yes	No	Nob
17	Listens responsively and attentively?	Yes	No	Nob
18	Provides supportive body language and gestures?	Yes	No	Nob
19	Possesses a high degree of awareness of what is going on and regularly reviews the extent to which children are involved in their tasks	Yes	No	Nob
20	Keeps children informed of events and changes that are going to take place?	Yes	No	Nob
21	Does the caregiver/ teacher reasonably handle child – child conflict	Yes	No	Nob
22	Responds to the child's success and failure	Yes	No	Nob

C CHILDREN RELATIONSHIP WITH ADULTS				
23	Do children approach adults confidently?	Yes	No	Nob
24	Do children seek adult participation?	Yes	No	Nob
25	Do children perceive adults as partners in play?	Yes	No	Nob
26	Do children demonstrate a degree of independence?	Yes	No	Nob
27	The child call his /her success to the attention of the caregiver	Yes	No	Nob

D CHILDRENS RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR PEERS				
	In children's relationships with their peers, is there evidence that:			
28	They usually treat each other with respect	Yes	No	Nob
29	They are supportive of each other and others contributions in work and play?	Yes	No	Nob
30	They share and take turns reasonably often, allowing for their emotional and developmental levels	Yes	No	Nob
31	They respond positively to most other children and adults most of the time	Yes	No	Nob
32	They exhibit enthusiasm and positive attitudes most of the time.	Yes	No	Nob
33	They have some degree of choice over their playmates and the activities which they undertake.	Yes	No	Nob

E	CAREGIVER/TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS			
35	Does the caregiver/teacher show self confidence in work	Yes	No	Nob
36	Does the caregiver/teacher interact freely with children and other caregivers in the preschool	Yes	No	Nob
37	Does caregiver /teacher show some skillfulness in adequate handling of children	Yes	No	Nob
38	Does caregiver /teacher use local materials to prepare teaching and learning materials (creativity)	Yes	No	Nob

F	HEALTH AND SAFETY			
39	Are staff alert to health and welfare of each child	Yes	No	Nob
40	Does staff ensure that children are clothed appropriately for indoor and outdoor Play?	Yes	No	Nob
41	Is food stored /prepared hygienically?	Yes	No	Nob
42	Does staff adhere to hygiene principles which reduce the spread of infectious diseases?	Yes	No	Nob
43	Does staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene?	Yes	No	Nob
44	Are potentially dangerous products inaccessible to children?	Yes	No	Nob
45	Are buildings and equipment safe and hygienic?	Yes	No	Nob
46	Does the center have written policies on hygiene, medical, emergency and accident procedures	Yes	No	Nob
47	Does staff supervise children at all times?	Yes	No	Nob
48	Is information on health and other related issues readily available?	Yes	No	Nob

G	DAILY ROUTINES			
	Are the following encouraged? (for questions 49-51)			
49	Curiosity	Yes	No	Nob
50	Problem solving	Yes	No	Nob
51	Generation of ideas and fantasy through exploration	Yes	No	Nob
52	Are activities to meet individual needs of all children included	Yes	No	Nob
53	Are opportunities for success provided (e.g. recognizing that a particular child would benefit from more fine motor activities by collaborating on a painting activity?	Yes	No	Nob
54	Are opportunities for talk and self-expression in English and in the child's home language provided?	Yes	No	Nob
55	Is questioning stimulated during all activities?	Yes	No	Nob
56	Are discussions stimulated during all activities?	Yes	No	Nob

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS OR CAREGIVERS

Thank you for accepting to fill this questionnaire. Please fill it honestly. This information is for academic purposes only. Whatever information you will provide will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shown to other people. The information you will provide will assist me in understanding preschool education services and its environment.

Questionnaire number: _____

Date: _____

Name of Preschool _____

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your sex? Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Please indicate your age in years years.
3. For how long have you been teaching? years.
4. What is the highest level of education (Tick in the appropriate box)

No formal education	☐
PSLCE	☐
JCE	☐
MSCE	☐
DIPLOMA	☐
Bachelors Degree	☐
Other (Specify)	☐

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5. Have you had any professional training in Preschool education (ECD)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

6. If yes , What was the duration of the training?

7. What other kind of training in Preschool Education/ECD have you received over the past one year

8. In which of the following do you feel that you need more training? (Circle the appropriate answer)

	Yes	No
(a) Health and Safety practices	1	2
(b) Education and care of children ages 3-5 years	1	2
(c) Education and care of people with disabilities	1	2
(d) Working with families	1	2
(e) Early number skills	1	2
(f) Early literacy skills (reading, writing)	1	2
(g) Early language skills	1	2
(h) Helping children get along with others	1	2
(I) Behavior management e.g. (discipline)	1	2
(j) Measuring children's progress	1	2
(k) Classroom Management/Organization of a group of children	1	2
(l) Other (specify)	1	2

9. From 8 above, in which two areas do you feel there is great need for more training?

List down.

(a) _____

(b) _____

PROFESSIONAL MORALE

10. How satisfied are you with being a preschool teacher?

11. If you could start your life all over again, what occupation would you most like to have?

12.(a) Do you think you will be teaching in the next 10 years?

(b) Give a reason for your answer

CURRICULUM

13. Do you have a curriculum? (tick in the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

14. If yes, what percentage of the curriculum are you able to cover during the year? If

no, go to question 16)

30 - 45% ☐

46-60% ☐

Over 60% ☐

15. What challenges do you face in using the curriculum?

16. What teaching aids/ materials do you require but are not available? List down.

17. Do any of the following provide the learning/ playing materials? (Tick in the right box on the right)

	Yes	No
(a) Parents	☐	☐
(b) Older siblings	☐	☐
(c) Children	☐	☐
(d) Community	☐	☐
(e) Teacher/caregiver	☐	☐
(f) Other Specify)_____		

18. From question 14 above, who provides MOST of the learning/ playing materials?

BENEFITS

19. Do you receive any of the following types of benefits? (Circle appropriate answer)

	Yes	No
(a) Paid vacation	1	2
(b) Retirement benefits	1	2
(c) Child care (Includes free reduced care in your facilities)	1	2
(d) Paid sick leave/personal days	1	2
(e) Other (specify)		

20. Do you have any general comment to make related to pre-school education?

(Write down)

Thank you very much for sparing your time in filling this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PROPRIETORS/DIRECTORS

Name of Preschool _____

Date of interview _____

1. What is your title?
2. Are you a profit or a non-profit making centre?
3. Where is your facility located (such as public or private school, an independent centre, a home, in a religious institution.
4. How do you source out money for operations of your site (& percentage of source)?
5. What challenges do you face in running the centre?
6. How much fees does each child pay?
7. How many teachers/ caregivers do you have?
8. What are their qualifications?
9. How long has each served with your centre?
10. What are their average salaries?
11. Do you offer the following to your teachers/ caregivers?
 - (a) Paid vacation
 - (b) Retirement benefits
 - (c) Childcare (includes free or reduced care in your facility)
 - (d) Paid sick leave/personal days
 - (e) Any other benefits
12. Has any of your staff received training in preschool education in the past one year?

13. Do you pay for training expenses such as registration fees for your staff to attend such trainings?
14. In which area do you feel that your staffs need more training?
15. Do you have problems in having your staff trained?
16. If yes, what are they?
17. How many of your staff have left the centre in the past one year?
18. Do you have anything to say in relation to preschool education?

APPENDIX 4: THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION SERVICE IN PRESCHOOL

2

The Preschool is in stadium zone. It is about 3 km from the centre of the city. The preschool was established in 1989. Apart from the preschool there is also a primary school at the same centre. The preschool serves children from almost the whole city.

The school started using the curriculum by the Ministry of Women and child development in 2005.

The average enrolment of the learners in the preschool was 40. There were 38 learners (15 boys and 23 girls) at the time of the study. Absenteeism was reported not to be a problem.

The school is a profit making centre. Children pay K7500 per term. It is from this money that salaries to workers and bills are paid. The same money is also used for infrastructure development. Teachers' salaries range from K7, 800 to K15, 200. This depended on experience and qualification. There are four teachers in the preschool section. Two are in nursery 1 and the other two in nursery 2. All the four teachers are female. Their age ranged from 22 to 31. Two of them had MSCE and the other two had JCE as their academic qualification. They were all involved in teaching children but they could do minor cleaning where necessary since there is a person employed as a cleaner in the school.

There are two rooms that are used for preschool. The rooms were built using baked bricks, the roof has corrugated iron sheets and there is cement on the floor. The floor was very clean. The wall had a lot of charts and hangings. Most of them were professionally made and placed within reach of children. There is a chalkboard and a

teacher's table which is sometimes used as a TV screen stand. Children were seated on children sized benches. The screen was watched by the children during a set time, this was usually about 30 minutes before going home at 12:00pm. The rooms have a lockable door and a store room. All the windows can be closed.

The school has toilets that are used by children only. When children come back from the toilet, a plastic pail with a cup besides it awaits the learner to use. It is located close to the entrance of the classroom.

The surrounding of the preschool was a big area. Construction work was observed to be taking place at the time of the study. There was an area specifically designed for play for children. On the area, there were 4 seesaws (3 of which were not child appropriate), 2 swings all were used by children and 2 slides. Learners were observed to be enjoying the play during the time of playing. And they were all putting on clothes appropriate for play.

APPENDIX 5: THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION SERVICE IN PRESCHOOL

11

The Preschool is in Mchengautuwa zone. It is about 6 km from the centre of the city. The preschool serves children from the surrounding areas.

The school started using the curriculum by the Ministry of Women and child development in 2005.

The average enrolment of the learners in the preschool was reported to be 39. There were 36 learners (17 boys and 19 girls) at the time of the study. Absenteeism was reported to be high at the centre.

The owner of the preschool could not avail herself for the researcher to get information on the amount of money children pay and the teachers' salaries. There are three teachers in the preschool. All the three teachers are female. Their ages were 23, 30 and 32. They all had JCE as their academic qualification. One of them had not received training in Preschool education. They were all involved in teaching children. One of the teachers carried a reed and taps it on any child who misbehaves.

The preschool had one room. The rooms were built using baked bricks, the roof has corrugated iron sheets and there is cement on the floor. The windows are very small such that it was dark inside the classroom and the preschool did not have electricity. The wall had very few hangings. They were placed at a level where children had problems in reading what was written on them. Children were seated on a mat that had a lot of holes. There was only one mat about 1.5m by 1m for 36 learners. This situation forced some learners to sit on the bare floor which was very dirty.

The school has one pit latrine which was not well taken care of as a lot of faeces were observed around the hole and outside the pit latrine. When children came back from the toilet, a basin full of dirty water awaits the learners to use as each learner was dipping his/her hands in it. It was located close to the entrance of the classroom.

The surrounding of the preschool was surrounded by houses such that there was no room for expansion. There was no area specifically designed for play for children the one that was used for play for children very small. The school operates from 8:00 am to 11:30 am when learners go home.

APPENDIX 6: DISTRIBUTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN MALAWI

REGION/ DISTRICT	SOCIAL WELFARE STAFF	CBCCs	Pre- schools	Crèches	Baby Day Care Centers	TOTAL	CHILDREN		
							F	M	TOTAL
Southern Region									
Balaka	3	76	35	4	3	118	11216	11044	22260
Blantyre	8	233	301	11	11	556	13688	12881	26569
Chikwawa	4	97	32	3	10	142	2511	1440	3951
Chiradzulu	5	152	31	3	3	189	1330	1004	2334
Machinga	3	106	34	2	2	144	1003	988	1991
Mangochi	4	163	42	3	2	210	3877	2961	6838
Mulanje	3	61	28	3	1	93	871	710	1581
Mwanza	3	42	12	2	1	57	435	512	947
Neno	1	55	5	1	1	62	1985	2411	4396
Nsanje	2	43	14	0	1	58	542	406	948
Phalombe	2	34	9	4	0	47	815	678	1493
Thyolo	3	144	61	4	15	224	6931	9132	16063
Zomba	5	112	139	6	5	262	12396	10771	23167
	46	1318	743	46	55	2162	57600	54938	112538
Central Region									
Dedza	3	102	34	3	4	143	13511	13244	26755
Dowa	3	53	21	3	2	79	1844	1971	3815
Kasungu	3	189	47	3	2	241	13109	15011	28120
Lilongwe	5	218	281	14	17	530	27661	16933	44594
Mchinji	2	240	50	1	3	294	5311	5612	10923
Nkhotakota	2	85	18	2	0	105	817	812	1629
Ntcheu	3	62	18	3	1	84	2354	2122	4476
Ntchisi	3	73	11	1	0	85	324	322	646
Salima	4	56	21	2	1	24	987	888	1875
	28	1078	501	32	30	1585	65918	56915	122833
Northern Region									
Chitipa	2	81	11	2	3	97	1120	987	2107
Karonga	3	44	33	2	1	80	1645	1122	2767
Likoma	1	7	5	0	0	12	412	367	779
Mzimba	4	87	19	1	2	109	10813	7018	17831
Mzuzu	5	149	114	4	4	271	11822	9988	21810
Nkhatabay	2	149	11	1	1	162	13411	9133	22544
Rumphi	3	37	17	1	3	58	1121	998	2119
	20	554	210	11	14	789	40344	29613	69957
TOTAL	168	5309	2681	79	181	9072	287,380	253,319	538580
						Centers			Children

(Source: Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (2005): Social Welfare: ECD, Electronic version)

APPENDIX 7: PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION STANDARDS (SOME)

INDICATOR		STANDARD
Teacher Qualification	Staff/Teacher/Caregiver or helpers	PSLCE or above
	Principal	JCE or Teaching Qualification or Nursing Qualification or Social Worker.
Teacher/Pupil ratio	0-2 years	1: 10
	3-6 years	1: 20
Infrastructures	Location	Greater than 20m away from the road
	Maximum floor space/child	1.12 square metres
	Height of room	Above 3m without ceiling
		Above 2.6m with ceiling
	Toilet /child 3-6 years	1: 20
	Playground	18.50 square metres/child

(Source MOGCWCS, 2003c)

**APPENDIX 8: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATIONS DEPARTMENT**

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
Department of Educational Foundations

Acting Principal: Emmanuel Fabiano B.Ed., M.Sc., Ph.D

P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI
Tel: (265) 01 524 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: (265) 01 524 046
Email: principal@chanco.unima.mw

Our Ref.: Edf/6/4/5
Your Ref.:

13th February 2005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: INTRODUCTION OF MR. T. SAKA

Mr. T. Saka is a Master of Education student in the Educational Foundations Department, Chancellor College and would like to collect data for his thesis.

Any assistance rendered to him will be greatly appreciated.

Dr. Samson MacJessie-Mbewe
HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

APPENDIX 9: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM APPM

**THE CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE (MZUZU- EKWENDENI)
ASSOCIATION OF PRE-SCHOOL PLAY GROUPS IN MALAWI
(APPM)**



C/O P.O. BOX 1, MZUZU
Cell: Chairman: 08 300 794
Secretary: 09 261 934
Treasurer: 01 332 177

TO:

- The Managing Director, St. Andrews International Nursery School
- The Managing Director, Stadium Nursery School
- The Managing Director, Wukani Education Facility
- The Managing Director, Bright Future – Area 1B
- The Managing Director, Kusile Learning Centre
- The managing Director, Starlight – Mchengautuwa
- The managing Director Yewo Nursery School at Chiwavi
- The Managing Director, Mamas Love Nursery School – Chibanja
- The Chairman, Police Nursery School

THROUGH : The Commissioner, Northern Region Police Headquarters , Mzuzu

Date : 15th March 2006

INTRODUCTION LETTER

The bearer of this letter is Mr. T.W. Saka a student at Chancellor College in Zomba. He is doing research in Nursery School administration within Mzuzu.

Please welcome him and assist by providing information about nursery school Management and care for young Children while at ECD centre .

Yours faithfully,


B.M.H. KAJANI
GENERAL SECRETARY