



Midlands State University

Established 2000

Our Hands, Our Minds, Our Destiny

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies.

**INFLUENCE OF A FAMILY'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEARNERS' COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN
ZVISHAVANE DISTRICT.**

By

CHAKUYA LILIAN

R14083F

This research project is submitted to Midlands States University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree.

NOVEMBER, 2016

GWERU, ZIMBABWE



Midlands State University
Established 2000

Our Hands, Our Minds, Our Destiny

Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies.

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to Midlands State University acceptance of a research project entitled;

Influence of a family's socio-economic status on Early Childhood Education learners' cognitive development in Zvishavane district.

By

ChakuyaLilian

R14083F

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Degree.

Signed

Date

Student

Supervisor.....

Dr E. Manyumwa

Chairperson

Prof E. Mangwaya

External examiner

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to;

my husband Simon Hungwe,

my daughters Patience and Caroline,

my extended family,

as well as my supervisor Dr E. Manyumwa,

for all the support and encouragement throughout all of my endeavours.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special gratitude to Dr E Manyumwa for her invaluable counsel in undertaking my research, for proven experience and constructive criticism in respect of supervision.

I also extend my special thanks to: The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture through the Gweru Provincial Education Office which allowed me to conduct my research in Zvishavane District.

Above all, i thank God Almighty for none of this would have been possible if it were not for his grace.

ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the influence of socio-economic status on Early Childhood Education learners' cognitive development. The study was motivated by the variance in learners' cognitive abilities even though learners are of the same age. The researcher therefore looked at factors that influenced the learners' cognitive development and the relationship between the learners' socio-economic background and their cognitive development. The problem was that some pupils were lagging behind the others and if given homework they were not doing the homework, or the homework would not be correctly done. A critical literature review was done which revealed that there are various factors that affect the cognitive development of children such as poverty, low level of education from parents, parent-child interaction, lack of exposure to cognitive stimulating materials, the size of the family among other factors. The accessible population comprised of seven schools and a sample of two schools was chosen by stratified random sampling technique. This gave each school equal chances of being chosen. Ten Early Childhood Education teachers responded to questionnaires while twelve parents were interviewed. The study employed the descriptive research design. The findings revealed the children from low socio-economic backgrounds are negatively impacted which affects their cognitive development. It was therefore concluded that the parents should be educated on the importance of the cognitive development of their children, hence they should be active participants in stimulation of their cognitive development despite lack of resources. Teachers are encouraged to improvise in schools. Other factors that affect cognitive development can be tackled by other researchers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	xi
ABBREVIATIONS	xii

CHAPTER ONE:INTRODUCTION

<i>1.0 Introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.1 Background to the study.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.2 Statement of the problem</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>1.3 Research questions.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.3.1 Major research question.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.3.2 Sub-research questions</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.4 Research Objectives.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.4.1 Main objective.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.4.2 Sub-objectives</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.5 Significance of the study</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.6 Limitations of the study.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.7 Delimitations.....</i>	<i>7</i>

<i>1.8 Definition of terms</i>	7
<i>1.9 Summary</i>	8

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

<i>2.0 Introduction</i>	9
<i>2.1 Influence of socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education Learners</i>	9
<i>2.2 The influence of parents’ level of education interests and attitude towards the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education Learners</i>	12
<i>2.3 Impact of family size on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners</i>	17
<i>2.4 Summary</i>	19

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

<i>3.0 Introduction</i>	20
<i>3.1 Research design</i>	20
<i>3.2 Population</i>	21
<i>3.3 Sample and sampling procedure</i>	21
<i>3.4 Research instruments</i>	23
<i>3.4.1 The questionnaire</i>	23
<i>3.4.2 The interview</i>	24
<i>3.4.3 Observation guide</i>	25
<i>3.5 Data collection procedure</i>	25
<i>3.6 Data analysis and presentation plan</i>	26

3.7 Summary	26
-------------------	----

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction.....	27
4.1 Demographic data	27
4.1.1 Gender.....	27
4.1.2 Age	299
4.1.3 Qualifications.....	29
4.2 How does the family's socio economic status impact on children's cognitive development? 30	
4.2.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaires	30
4.2.2 Discussion and findings (Interviews and Observations)	32
4.3 How does the level of education, interest and attitude of parents' impact on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners?.....	36
4.3.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaires	36
4.3.2 Discussion and findings (Interviews and Observations)	37
4.4 The impact of the size of the family on the cognitive development of early childhood learners?	41
4.4.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaire	41
4.4.2 Findings and discussion (Interviews and Observations)	41
4.5 Summary	44

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction.....	46
5.1 Summary of chapters.....	46

<i>5.2 Findings and conclusions</i>	47
<i>5.3 Recommendations</i>	49
<i>5.4 Suggestions for further research</i>	49
REFERENCES	50

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Showing age range of teachers (N=10).....	29
Table 4.2 Showing qualification range of teachers (N = 10).....	29

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Gender of respondents	28
Figure 4.2 Differences between parents of low socio economic status in assisting their children with homework	30
Figure 4.3 Provision of supplementary readers by parents.....	31
Figure 4.4 Effects of low socio economic status on cognitive development.....	32
Figure 4.5 Does parents' level of education impact cognitive development of a child.....	36
Figure 4.6 Effects of family size on cognitive development	41

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

Appendix 2: Interview

Appendix 4 Observation guide

Appendix 3: Permission letter

Abbreviations

ECE – Early Childhood Education

NLSY – National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to introduce the research study by looking at, among other things, the background information relating to the influence of a family's socio-economic status on Early Childhood Education learners' cognitive development, the statement of problem, research questions guiding the study, the research objectives, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, delimitations of the study, justification and definition of terms. The chapter ends with a summary.

1.1 Background to the study

The cognitive development of pupils is greatly influenced by the family's socio-economic status. Wade (2004) postulates that researchers have focused on the relationship between family context and children's cognitive development, measuring the effect of diverse variables such as family socio-economic status, the social support, the quality of physical family environment and the materials provided by parents to stimulate cognitive development.

Grigorenko and Sternberg (2001) point out that researchers have found a strong relationship between quality of family context and children's cognitive development. There is a close relationship between high quality of family context and high socio-economic status, as well as a relationship between low quality family context and low socio-economic status (Bradley et al, 2003). This implies that chances are that the higher the family's income is, the higher the chances of quicker cognitive growth. Children from well to do families are provided with play

materials which stimulate growth, whilst children from low income families cannot afford to have such play materials.

Aldredge et al (1999) proposed that parents of low socio-economic status fail to create a conducive environment for cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners, whereas parents of high socio-economic status are able to create a conducive environment for their children. However, true as it may be, that children from well to do families develop cognitive abilities earlier than children from low income families, Horning, Rouse and Gordon (2005) assert that there is some evidence that suggests that children from poor families can become resilient and even perform well in school.

The researcher who is an early childhood educator investigated whether the socio-economic status has an influence on early childhood education learners. The researcher noted that even though children are of the same age, some children prove to have better cognitive abilities than other children. For example some children can count objects correctly, name colours, recite a rhyme correctly just to mention a few, whilst other children of the same age struggle. At first the researcher brushed her observations aside assuming that the differences were due to the fact that children reached developmental milestones at different times as alluded to by Feeney et al (1991). However, the researcher set out to observe whether there were other factors influencing the children's development besides relating the developmental milestones to the variance in children's cognitive abilities. The researcher investigated whether children who perform better in the above mentioned activities are mostly from well to do families.

Mcloyd (1998) in his study of the impact of poverty on the children in America found out that poverty has a negative impact on the child's cognitive development as well as behavioral

characteristics. In the same voice Levin and Spates (1990) assert that poor neighborhoods often lack positive role model and adult supervision. This implies that the kind of environment often prevents pupils from creating healthy social networks and leads to lack of motivation which negatively affects cognitive development of children.

Zom and Noga (2004) propound that the higher the family success, the more children would do well on physical and intellectual tasks because they will be supported by their parents. This implies that a successful family is able to ensure success for its children through providing all the necessary learning materials. On the other hand, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) point out that there are many factors that interplay to encourage a child's success academically or contribute to a child's poor performance. This implies that a child might be brought up in a rich family but fails to develop cognitive abilities earlier due to lack of support from the parents. Bradley and Corwyn (2002) point out that parental employment is positive because it increases the amount spent on stimulating activities with the child. This implies that parents need to be there for their children to develop in a positive manner.

Mayer (1997) postulates that economic deprivation may be negatively linked with parents' psychological health, parenting skills, the amount of time spent with the child, the home environment as well as parent-child interactions. This implies that parents of low income status might exhibit poor parenting skills due to the limited time and resources available for the upkeep of the family. The lack of child-parent interaction results in the child failing to develop cognitive abilities such as the use of elaborate codes in language usage.

A study by Juru (2003) in Zimbabwe established that homelessness and overcrowding negatively impact on a child's physical, mental, social development and the general wellbeing of the

children. In similar studies conducted by Bartlett a member of Human settlements group in Mombasa and Nairobi (2010), found out that overcrowding of families resulted in delays in development of children due to lack of space to explore and play freely. In some cases it was found that there was space for the children to play but there were safety risks.

From what has been put across so far, one would note that various scholars agree that a family's socio-economic status plays an important role in the cognitive development of early childhood education learners. It is upon this background that the researcher embarked on a study on how socio-economic status influences the cognitive development of early childhood education children in Zvishavane urban and rural schools. The study is justified in the sense that it seeks to establish the root causes of the variance in early childhood education learners' cognitive abilities so as to try and bridge the gap in performance between children from well to do families and those from poor families.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The researcher noted that there is a variance in early childhood education learners' cognitive abilities in terms of comprehending concepts. Even though early childhood learners are usually of the same age group, some always portray better cognitive abilities than their peers. Some studies have revealed that the variance could be based on the fact that some children are exposed to a rich learning environment at home whilst others are not. The study therefore aimed to investigate the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners.

1.3 Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1.3.1 Major research question

- How does a family's socio-economic status influence an early childhood education learner's cognitive development in Zvishavane primary schools?

1.3.2 Sub-research questions

- How does the family's socio-economic status impact on children's cognitive development?
- How does the level of education, interest and attitude of parents influence the cognitive development of early childhood learners?
- How does the size of the family impact on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Main objective

- To establish how a family's socio-economic status influences an early childhood education learners' cognitive development?

1.4.2 Sub-objectives

- To establish how the socio economic status impacts children's cognitive development
- To assess how the level of education, interest and attitude of parents influence the cognitive development of early childhood learners
- To establish how the size of the family impact on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study was important in that, the school administrators would be enlightened on the need to bridge the gap on the different attitudes that result from the different socio-economic backgrounds, through creating stimulating classroom environments. Teachers would also be enlightened with regards to how they can provide a classroom climate which is conducive to all children. Parents would also benefit from the study, because they would be enlightened on the importance of a positive attitude and interest towards their children's learning. The researcher of this study would also benefit in that first-hand information about the problem under investigation can be obtained, and this would help the researcher to make informed decisions on the issues pertaining to the differences in performance among children from families of different socio-economic statuses. Other aspiring researchers would benefit as the ground work would have been laid for further research of the same nature. The research also contributes to the body of knowledge on issues affecting early childhood education learners' cognitive development.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The substantial constraints that placed restrictions on the conclusion of the study were that the results of the study were generalized from a sample to represent the entire population under study. The researcher therefore selected a sample size that could be representative of the entire population. The collection of data was also hindered by inadequate data collection resources due to financial constraints. The study also demanded that the researcher used the language understood by all the participants, especially in interviews with parents, hence there was need to ask the respondents which language they were comfortable with. Respondents may also have contributed to the limitation in cases where they exaggerated or responded falsely, hence the use of triangulation.

1.7 Delimitations

The study was carried out in two schools in Zvishavane district, one from rural and another from urban schools. The researcher's assumption was that the socio-economic status has an impact on cognitive development. In the two schools, the researcher mainly focused on ascertaining the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners.

1.8 Definition of terms

The following terms were used in the research and their meaning shall be taken as such:

Family: consists of two or more people who consider themselves to be related by blood, marriage or adoption and sharing common residence (Henslin, 2003). Another definition by Horton and Hunt (1984) states that family is a kinship grouping which provides for the rearing and for certain other needs. In this research a family is considered to be the unit of parents and children, whether through blood ties, adoption or guardianship.

Socioeconomic status: is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income and education, and occupation (Marmot, 2004). Lareau and Annette (2003) also observe that socio-economic status is typically broken into three categories, high, middle, and low to describe the three areas a family or an individual may fall into when placing a family or individual into one of these categories any or all of the three variables income, education, and occupation can be assessed. In this study it mainly focuses on the household income and level of education.

Early Childhood Education: Chaube and Chaube (2002) view Early Childhood Education as an attempt to educate infants before the age of seven, whilst Thomas (2004) assess that it is about

studying the holistic development of a young child. In this context it encompasses the child's growth in all domains, be it cognitive, social, psychomotor or emotional.

Cognitive development: Thornton & Stephanie (2003) define cognitive development as the construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving and decision making. It can also be defined as how a person perceives, thinks and gains understanding of his or her world through the interaction of genetic and learned factors.

1.9 Summary

Chapter one focused on the general background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study as well as the research questions. The chapter also outlined the limitations, delimitations and defined the key terms in the context of the study.

The following chapter will go through the literature of present and past events to give a clear understanding of the views of other researchers on the impact of family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners. The chapter also serves the purpose of identifying gaps to be filled in by the researcher.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents literature from different sources related to the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of the Early Childhood Education learners. It also puts across what different authorities say about the parents' level of education, interest and attitude towards the child's cognitive development. It also reveals what different sources say about the impact of the family size on the child's cognitive development. Sidhu (2004) points out that the purpose of reviewing related literature is to help the researcher attack and have a better understanding of the research problem.

2.1 Influence of socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education Learners.

Jeynes (2002) points out that, parents of low socio-economic status provide a poor environment for their children which lack stimulation for cognitive development. This implies that the child need to be afforded a rich and stimulating environment in which he or she is able to explore, discover as well as come up with solutions to encountered problems.

Bradley andCorwyn (2002) propound that there is a close relationship between high levels of socio-economic status and high levels of cognitive development. This depends largely on how the parents as well as those around promote the child's growth. On the other hand, Alexander et al (1993) assert that, for over 70 years findings on the relationship between socio-economic status and intellectual or academic competence has accumulated. Numerous studies have

documented that poverty and low parental education are associated with low levels of achievement and low IQ later in life.

Dearing et al (2001), point out that poverty in early childhood appears to be more harmful than poverty at other ages, particularly in terms of cognitive development. Bradley et al (2001) are of the view that limited income can influence the amount of cognitive stimulating materials found in a child's environment as well as the learning opportunities a child experiences. Bradley et al (2001) maintain that children from economically impoverished families have limited access to variety of learning materials and experiences such as going to the museum, performing arts or participate in lessons aimed at enhancing their skills.

McLoyd (1998) propounds that poverty has a negative impact on a child's cognitive development, physical health status, academic achievement, behavioral characteristics as well as psychological status. This implies that children from poor families are not only affected in one domain, but in almost all the child's development domains because they are interdependent. For example, for the child's cognitive abilities to improve he or she needs to be emotionally stable and healthy. If the child is emotionally unstable, this means that the child cannot engage in any play activities with children of his or her own age or communicate meaningfully with older children or adults and as a result delays in cognitive abilities set in.

Allhusen et al (2005) carried out a study of three groups of children, that is; those who were chronically poor from birth to three years, those who were poor from birth to three years, children who were never poor. It was found out that chronically poor families had lower cognitive abilities due to the fact that their families provided lower quality child rearing

environments. This implies that low income families struggle with limited material resources and related hardships to the extent that they fail to prioritize their children's positive development.

Jeynes (2002) postulates that, economic hardships that are caused by low economic conditions lead to disruptions and family conflicts. The conflicts may be caused by unfavorable income to needs ratio, whereby income is disproportional and insufficient to satisfy the basic needs. This implies that, the child is caught in the middle of the parents' conflict and this will affect him or her to the extent that he or she will develop a sense of mistrust of those around him or her. Once a young child develops a sense of mistrust, there is a possibility that he or she will also lose his or her confidence. This also denotes that deficiencies in the child parent relationship are detrimental to the child's positive development.

However, Barnett (1995) postulates that the gap between poor and non-poor children can be closed before they enter school by providing a safe and enriching environment where children can play with learning materials, be read to, and go on field trips. Parents can also improve their parenting skills by sharing information with center teachers and caregivers. This implies that early childhood practitioners should try their level best to make sure that all the young children in their classrooms are afforded equal opportunities in leaning activities so as to help them to develop in a positive manner. Parents can also be advised on how they can improvise play materials. For example, empty boxes of matches can be used for building blocks , tins and pieces of wires can make a scale just to mention a few.

The physical environments of children in poverty play an important role in both cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Bradley et al (2001) postulates that a study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) found that the physical environments of families in

poverty are generally less safe, less clean, darker and more cluttered than those of non-poor families. The same study found that poverty proved to have greatest influence on child outcomes during early childhood years. Alderman (2004) in the same voice point out that children in poverty live in substandard, overcrowded, busy and noisy informal settlements that are not conducive for child development or learning. This implies that children from poor families are exposed to an environment in which they are not free to explore because their parents will not allow them to venture too far from them as they will be trying to protect them from harm. As a result the children's chances of developing cognitive skills are limited.

However, some children raised in poor families have been found to portray excellent cognitive skills despite their predicament. Children in poor families at one point or another can become resilient such that they regard the situation they will be in as normal. Ungar (2008) points out that resilience can assist children to cope with trauma in life. This implies that resilience can make the child adjust easily to any situation he or she will be exposed to.

2.2 The influence of parents' level of education interests and attitude towards the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education Learners.

According to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), literature from a recent and remarkable synthesis on development of children brings out that the earliest relationships between young children and those who are closer to them have an especially potent influence on their early development. They go on to say paediatricians, childcare providers and children's advocates are all in a position to help parents to understand how important they are to their children. Research suggests that quality early care and learning experiences can help all low income children succeed in school.

However, Giddens (1998) points out that studies conducted indicate that parents of low income talk less and read less with their children than parents of high income, therefore the differences between families in literacy depending on the parents' education strongly influence children's language and literacy development. Bernstein in Giddens (1998) asserts that children from low income families use a restricted code of speech which is understood by them and their peer groups. Restricted codes contain many unstated assumptions which speakers expect others to know. In other words, one can deduce what is being referred to here as restricted code as the language called slang used by youngsters and even adults.

Bernstein in Giddens (1992) also point out that children from well up families use a codes of speech, and it is easy for them to deal with demands of formal academic education than those confined to restricted codes. Bernstein goes on to say lower income children have less experience of having their questions answered or being offered explanations about the reasoning of others. This implies that parents of low income hinder their children's cognitive development by denying them opportunities to probe so as to find answers.

Marjoribanks (1997) postulates that poverty and low parental education may result in lower levels of school achievement and IQ in the development of a child. McLoyd (1998) also points out that a study by DeGarmo et al (1999) found that socio-economic status indicators such as income, education and occupation were associated with better parenting which in turn affected school achievement. This implies that parents of low income's attitude and interest towards the child's learning might be influenced by the level of education they attained. Smith et al (2001) assert that levels of parent supportiveness towards children may also be lower because poor parents often do not receive much social support themselves. This implies that the parents could

have experienced poverty in their childhood which impinged on their chances of getting better education and as a result the persistence of poverty overlaps to their own children.

Ballantine (1997) asserts that the Marxist theory maintains that the rich remain and continue to be rich, and the poor remain poor. This implies that parents of low income may be found to be illiterate due to generational poverty which is passed on to their children. Failure to provide for the family with basic needs frustrates the parents resulting in them losing interest in the child's learning needs. Kamper and Mampuru (2007) propounded that poor homes have no place for the child to do homework in peace because of the cramped living conditions. This implies that the child's concentration on cognitive development activities is always disrupted by the noise made by the people around him or her. In poor neighborhoods, people's houses are so close such that if one plays his radio or television it will be heard by people in the next six or so houses because of the high volume. The noise made by the radio or television attracts the child's attention resulting in the child abandoning his or her learning activities.

Clay in Haralambos and Holborn (2010) asserts that parents with low level education offer their children few opportunities to converse with adults. This implies that children are denied opportunities to listen and imitate what adults say or do. Bandura cited in Tassoni (2004) postulates that children learn by simply observing others. He believed that cognition could be explained through imitation. He carried out an experiment with four year old children, in which the children were shown a film in which a person was aggressively playing with a doll but was rewarded, and the second film showed that the aggressor was punished, whilst the third showed that nothing was done to the aggressor. After the film the children were given dolls to play with. Those who observed the aggressor being rewarded played aggressively with the dolls, those who saw the aggressor being punished were reluctant to play with the dolls as they feared punishment

whereas the third group played anyway they liked. This shows that children learn from adults but they also have the ability to choose what they want to do when given the chance to do so.

Parke (2003) propounds that children growing up in single parents families appear to be affected by their family structure. Frequently single parents are poor, have less education and less likely to be employed. Manning (2002) in the same voice points out that children raised in a single parent home have emotional and behavioral problems due to lack of financial resources and parenting skills. This implies that the parent's interest and attitude may be negative due to pressure as well as stress caused by failure to make ends meet. However, Parke (2003) on a different note points out that caution needs to be taken not to generalize the total population of single parent families.

What Parke (2003) implies is that, not all single mothers have difficulties in raising their children. Some single mothers have good paying jobs such that their children are well provided for. Battle (1998) however is of the opinion that, single parents are the sole sources of financial support for the family. They have less time to help children with homework, are less likely to use consistent discipline and have less parental control, and all these conditions may lead to lower academic achievements. This implies that the parent might be found lacking in terms of interest and attitude towards the child's learning due to stress resulting from lack failure to avail himself or herself to the children physically as well as emotionally. Paquette and Ryan (2001) point out that the instability of family life gives children little interactions with parents and other important adults in their lives and this, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), is the most destructive force to a child's development.

Flouri and Buchanan (2004) propound that parents are the child's first educator. A child's family and home environment has a strong impact on his or her language and literacy development and educational achievement. The impact is stronger during the child's early year but continues throughout their school years. Harris and Goodall (2007) postulates that longitudinal studies provide research evidence confirming that parental involvement in learning activities in the home is strongly associated with children's better cognitive achievement in the early years.

Hannan (1995) propounds that there is a link between parents and children's literacy levels. Several studies have found that parents with low literacy levels are less likely to help children with school work, feel less confident in doing so and are more likely to have children with lower cognitive and language development levels. George et al (2007) assert that data obtained from a study of sixteen thousand three year old children who were assessed within the framework of the British Millennium Cohort study indicated that children with the most educated parents, who had a degree or above qualification were on average about 12-13 months ahead of those with less educated parents. This implies that the parents' level of education can also be viewed as an indicator of the parents' socio-economic status. In other words, this implies that the higher the level of education, the higher the family income is.

However, there are some people with low educational qualifications who are rich such that they are able to send their children to the most expensive schools, for example, in Zimbabwe there are individuals who are involved in gold mining and other businesses. Their children's performance is just as good as that of children from families with parents who are highly qualified in terms of education. Hannan (1995) points out that parental aspirations and expectations on their children's achievements have a strong impact on children's school results. This implies that even though

the parents' level of education might be low, he or she might compensate for his or her own deficiencies by making sure that the children are well educated.

On a different note, Clarke (2007) asserts that the effective provision of preschool education study found that what parents and caregivers do with young children is more important than the parents' socio-economic status or education level. Clarke (2007) goes on to say that there are a number of activities which are associated with higher intellectual and social scores such as teaching the child songs, nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, taking children on visits as well as creating opportunities for them to play with their friends. This implies that children can develop cognitive abilities in a positive manner if their parents are involved in their learning despite the fact that they might be poor or rich.

2.3 Impact of family size on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education

Learners.

Thomas, Hanson and McLanahan (1994) postulate that, researchers regard family size as a risk factor when there are four or more children close in age within the same household. They go on to say children who have a combination of risk factors such as poverty, many siblings close in age are at a greater risk of poor academic performance and other negative child development outcomes. Downey (1995) is also of the opinion that, both the interactive and economic resources decrease as the number of siblings increase. This explains why children belonging to large families have access to less resources than those belong to smaller families.

Bradley and Corwyn (2002) propound that, it should be noted that families with a higher socio-economic status have a better chance of converting economic resources into quality parenting and interactive resources. They go on to say that, data collected or rather obtained confirmed a

close relationship between high economic status and a high level of cognitive development. This implies that, parents of high socio-economic status can compensate for the time they are not able to interact with their children by making sure that he or she goes to a good school with all necessary resources that stimulate cognitive development.

Evans and Hygge (2007) say on the impact of family size on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners propound that, parents in crowded homes are less responsive to young children. They go on to say that research demonstrate that crowding has an effect on the mental health, motivation as well as the cognitive development of a child. Family size has not been found to be a critical factor, but the density and the number of people per room has been found to have a negative effect on children's development. This implies that, young children who share a room with four or more people may be distressed by distractions by other family members during constructive play.

Paquette and Ryan (2001) postulates that, the influence of family size extend to all aspects of the child's development namely; language, nutrition, security, health and beliefs. This implies that the child's cognitive development depends on how the parents foster it. For example a malnourished child or a child who feels insecure is not able to explore his environment freely a child who is well fed and secure. Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that those working with young children and families cannot solve the problem of poverty, but they are in a position to ensure that, both care giving and non-care giving parents have access to all benefits that they are entitled to. This implies that all the ecological system that is the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem as well as the macrosystem should interact positively so as to foster the child's cognitive development. Gregson (2001) points out that positive relationship among the micro settings promote positive development while unsound relationships lead to negative

development. This means that, any disharmony in the home, neighborhood or with peers' impacts negatively on the child's development.

2.4 Summary

The above presentation, reviewed literature and indicated knowledge gaps on the impact of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners.

Chapter three focuses on the methodology. This includes the research design and the research instruments used in gathering data, population, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis procedures. Suitable methods of investigation are to be discussed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The research methodology considers and explains the logic behind research methods and techniques. This chapter starts by describing and justifying the use of survey research design as a procedure that is descriptive. This chapter also outlines the population sampling as well as the research instruments used to collect data. The quantitative research paradigm was employed in this research.

3.1 Research design

Makore and Rukuni (2003) define research design as the structure, form or plan that the researcher has chosen to use to follow in the process of study. The study was carried out using a survey method of research which includes coverage of a large population. The survey method is a research technique in which data are gathered by asking questions to be responded to by members of a specific sample. The survey research design in this study can be viewed as a research design that is suitable for the study which seeks to ascertain the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of 0-8 year old early childhood education learners. Trochim (2006) propounds that survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents and the answer given to the question constitutes the data of the study. The survey research design however has disadvantages. They lack depth as they only focus on a general coverage of a population. It also tends to focus on quantitative data and the aspect of research that cannot be reduced to numbers is overlooked. The researcher used the quantitative research paradigm. Maree (2012) says quantitative research is a

systematic process that describes relationships and examines cause and effect among variables, hence the paradigm was found suitable for this study. It has weaknesses as it only allows the collection of generalized data. Participants can also provide answers that are biased. The researcher may also structure questions that reflect their view not the views of the respondents. The researcher therefore used triangulation to counter for these weaknesses.

3.2 Population

Population is defined by Earl and Rubin (2008) as any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. It is made up of individuals who are directly linked to the research problem under study. In this study, the target population was urban and rural schools in Zvishavane focusing on the Early Childhood learners. The study area was the Urban 2 cluster in the district which comprises of 4 urban schools and 3 rural schools, giving a total population of 7 primary schools in the ward, from which two schools were targeted. The total enrolment of early childhood education learners in the two targeted schools was 640 with a total of 16 Early Childhood Education teachers.

3.3 Sample and Sampling procedure

In social research, it is generally impractical and undesirable to collect data from the whole population. Haralambos and Holborn (2002), defined a sample as a part of a large population which has been selected to be representative group from the population that serves as respondents. A sample should be large enough so that the researcher can be reasonably sure that if he had drawn a different sample using the same procedure he should have obtained the same results in his research in order to generalize for the entire population.

Earl and Rubin (2008) noted that each member should be given an equal chance of being selected or chosen hence the researcher adopted the stratified random sampling technique. Cohen (2007) stated that stratified random sampling is a useful blend of randomization and categorization thereby enabling qualitative research to target those groups in institutions or clusters. The researcher used a sample of two schools by selecting one urban school and one rural school using stratified random sampling. This was achieved by classifying the schools into rural and urban schools. One school was randomly selected from the urban class and another school from the rural class. The participants were sampled in stages. In the first stage the researcher used the expert sampling method to select the teachers. Frankel and Wallen (2002) point out that expert sampling involves the assembling of people with known or demonstrable experience or expertise in some area. The researcher obtained a list of teachers with four or more years of teaching experience. In the second stage the researcher used the simple random selection which is, according to Earl and Rubin (2008) a selection of the sample by employing a procedure where sheer chance determines which number from the list drawn for the sample. The names of the selected experienced teachers were placed in a container. They were then mixed thoroughly and a name slip was picked out and slips were mixed again. The process was repeated until the researcher obtained respondents from each school. The sampling size that was used was 10 teachers. The two schools were selected from a population of 7 schools in the Ward using the same procedure of simple random selection.

In selecting the 6 pupils from each of the schools whose parents or guardians were requested to gather for the interviews, the researcher used the stratified random sampling technique where the elements, which in this case were students were selected. They were first divided into classes using the register for early childhood education learners and from these classes, the required

elements, that is, pupils, were then randomly selected using the simple random selection method from within that strata (Wallen and Frankel, 2002). The researcher used a sample size of 12 school pupils whose parents or guardians were requested to participate in the interviews, by selecting 6 per each school.

3.4 Research instruments

According to Uwe (2005), research instruments are specific techniques of gathering the data. The three major research instruments of collecting data which were utilized were open and close ended questionnaires, structured interviews and structured observations. It is assumed that with triangulation, the weakness of one instrument was overridden by the strengths of the others (Uwe 2005).

3.4.1 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to gather information from twenty Early Childhood Education teachers. A questionnaire consists simply of pre-set questions. Frankel and Wallen (2002) define it as a document designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis. The researcher used both close ended and open ended questions. Open ended questions provided room for respondents to say anything within the scope of the question. The advantage of open ended questions is that, the respondents' answers were not influenced by the questionnaire. Participants were assured of confidentiality. Haralambos and Horlborn (2000) cite that, if respondents are assured of anonymity and confidentiality, they tend to release unbiased information and are not afraid to answer questions. Uwe (2005) observes that questionnaires allow collection of data from a large number of people in a short time. The use of questionnaires also allows greater uniformity as the teachers answer the same questions, allowing for greater comparability of responses. The

questionnaire were established and tried before final administration so as to adjust vocabulary and to avoid ambiguity where questions may not be clear. However, a questionnaire also has some disadvantages in that it can only be administered to those who are literate. This implies that, questionnaires are biased towards a certain group. Again questionnaires could have a low rate of return, that is, respondents may fail to cooperate when completing them. Questionnaires could also have a high volunteer bias, meaning only those interested in the topic might answer them. To counter these weaknesses, the researcher self-administered the questionnaires so that respondents could ask for clarity if they could not understand the language as well as ensure that all questionnaires were answered and returned. The questionnaire sought to gather information pertaining to the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners.

3.4.2 The Interview

The researcher conducted group interviews with the selected parents or guardians at a venue that was central to them. Haralambos and Holborn (2010) propound that interviews are flexible such that they can be used to extract simple factual information from people. This implies that, interviews can explore each question or issue in as much depth as possible due to the fact that respondents can be interviewed in settings in which they feel free and comfortable. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher first established the language the interviewees were comfortable with and it was agreed that they all understood that language. The researcher utilized semi structured questions which sought to look at the problem under investigation from different angles but aiming to find the answer pertaining to how family's socio-economic status impact on the cognitive development of Early Child Education learners. However, Haralambos and Holborn (2010) also point out that, interviews may also be influenced by the presence of the

researcher. The respondents may respond in the manner that they believe the interviewer wants to hear, and as a result false information will be given and interviewees may also fail to attend the session. The researcher therefore assured the respondents of anonymity of their responses and explained that the research was only for educational purposes.

3.4.3 Observation guide

Participant observation was used in this research. The researcher intended to use this because it provided the researcher room to be fully involved in the activities that needed to be observed. Haralambos and Horlborn (2010) point out that, in participant observation, the researcher is on the spot and witnesses actual behavior rather than relying upon other people's accounts of events. Neuman (2000) also defines participant observation as a method of data collection that involves first hand visual inspection of the parameters under study. It does not involve engaging the said practice or activity, but rather watching as it is being done. However, the validity of data is bound to be affected by the presence of the researcher, due to the fact that the group under study might not act naturally. The researcher therefore needs to interact with the participants to ensure that they are comfortable with the observation.

3.5 Data collection procedure

Before embarking on the data collection process, the researcher visited the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with an application letter from Midlands States University showing the researcher's intentions. The researcher was then referred to the provincial education director in Gweru with an approval letter and the researcher was given authorization to conduct the research. The researcher visited the two schools in Zvishavane District where the research was conducted on the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of

early childhood education learners. The researcher gave the selected teachers questionnaires and explained to them what was required of the respondents as well as assuring them of confidentiality. Interviews were conducted and data was captured through the use of a note pad. The researcher upon completion compiled a detailed narrative description soon after the interview.

3.6 Data analysis and presentation plan

Data analysis and presentation is the examining, categorizing and tabulating of data to produce information found in results (Neuman, 2000). The data were analyzed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel and presented as graphs, tables and pie charts. Descriptive analysis was also used to present the data.

3.7 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology that was adopted in the research study. The chapter highlighted how the research was conducted as well as the selection of the participants. It also looked at the justification of sampling procedures and research instruments used in the study. The next chapter will focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results obtained during the research.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the influence of a family's socio economic status on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners. The collected data were linked to the guiding research questions as well as the literature that informed the study. Results from interviews, observations and questionnaires were linked to show the responses obtained on the same questions using different data collection instruments. The use of triangulation was employed in this research to ensure that the weaknesses of one instrument were compensated for with another instrument seeking the same information.

The researcher chose to use the survey research design as it is a suitable method for obtaining data pertaining to the influence of socio economic status on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners. The data that were obtained in the study were presented in this chapter in the form of pie charts, graphs, tables as well as descriptive narratives. The data in pie charts will be in percentages.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

4.1.1 Gender

The researcher noted that the respondents' gender would be relevant to the study. The responses for gender were recorded and displayed in a pie chart

Gender (N = 10)

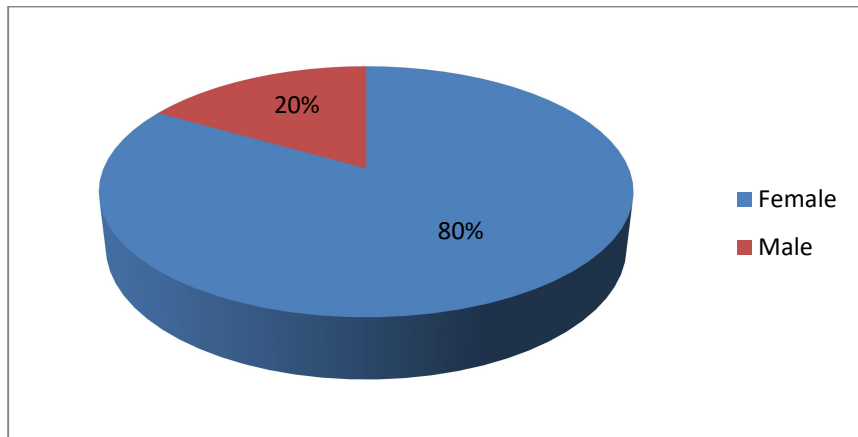


Figure 4.1 Gender of respondents

The 10 questionnaires that were administered had a 100% response rate. Figure 4.1 indicates that 8 out of 10 (80%) of the respondents were female whereas 2 out of 10(20%) were male. The researcher found out that there were a few male ECE teachers because male teachers prefer teaching upper grades. The researcher is also of the view that a few male teachers opt to train as ECE teachers, they prefer the upper grades. The other reason why females outnumbered the male teachers could be attributed to the fact that it has been the norm that females look after the young children while the males do real men's work. To date, if one visits primary schools he/she will find that early childhood education classes are taught by female teachers and the male teachers are here and there, meaning that you can find an approximate of one male teacher to six female teachers.

4.1.2 Age

The age of the respondents was also taken into account as indicated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Showing age range of teachers (N=10)

Age range	Number	Percentage (%)
20 – 30	1	10
31 – 40	7	70
41+	2	20

The results indicate that the majority of respondents were in the 31-40 age group. Only 1 out of 10 (10%) respondents were aged between 20-30, 7 out of 10 (70%) respondents were aged between 31-40 and 2 out of 10 (20%) respondents were 41 and above. The researcher is of the view that the ECE teachers were represented in terms of their qualifications in order to represent the sample.

4.1.3 Qualifications

The qualifications of the teachers were recorded as indicated in Table 4.2

Table 4.2 Showing qualification range of teachers (N = 10)

Qualification	Number	Percentage (%)
Certificate in Education	2	20
Diploma in Education	6	60
Any other	2	20

Among the teachers, 6 out of 10 (60%) were diploma holders in education whilst 2 out of 10 (20%) were those with a Certificate in Education whilst 2 out of 10 (20%) were among other qualifications.

4.2 How does the family's socio economic status impact on children's cognitive development?

4.2.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaires

Figure 4.2 indicates whether or not parents assist their children with their homework.

N = 10

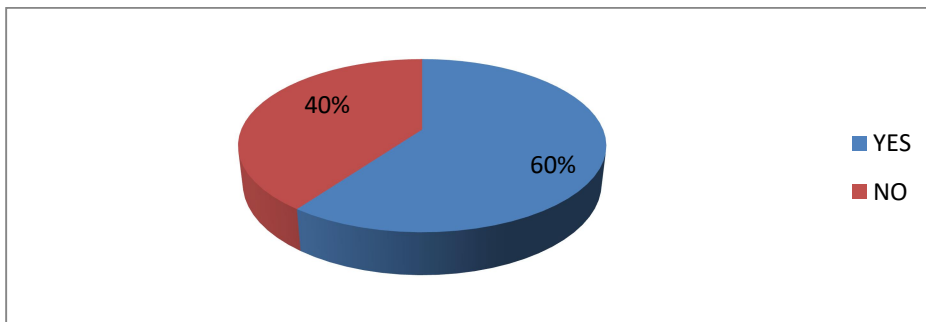


Figure 4.2 Differences between parents of low socio economic status in assisting their children with homework

The respondents were asked whether there were any differences in children's assistance in their homework from those parents from low socio economic status. A majority of the respondents as shown in Figure 4.2 indicated that there was a notable difference.

The respondents were also asked whether parents bought their children supplementary readers.

N = 10

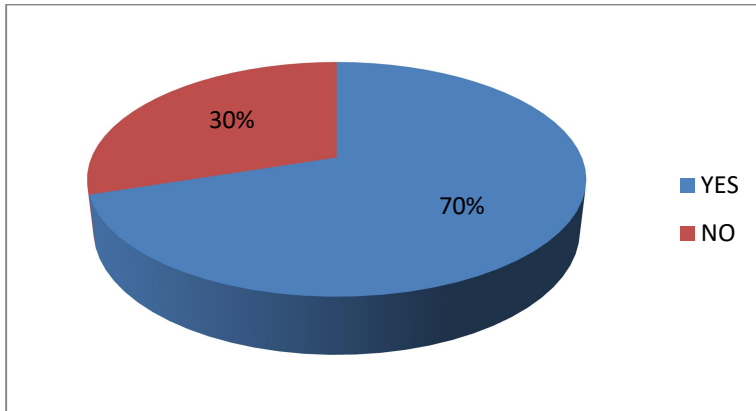


Figure 4.3 Provision of supplementary readers by parents

Figure 4.3 indicates that 7 out of 10 (70%) of the respondents were of the view that children are not provided with supplementary readers whilst 3 out of 10 (30%) responded that children are provided with supplementary readers.

The questionnaire required respondents to state the effects that low socio economic status have on the cognitive development of early childhood learners. Figure 4.4 shows the four most common effects that were stated by respondents.

N = 10

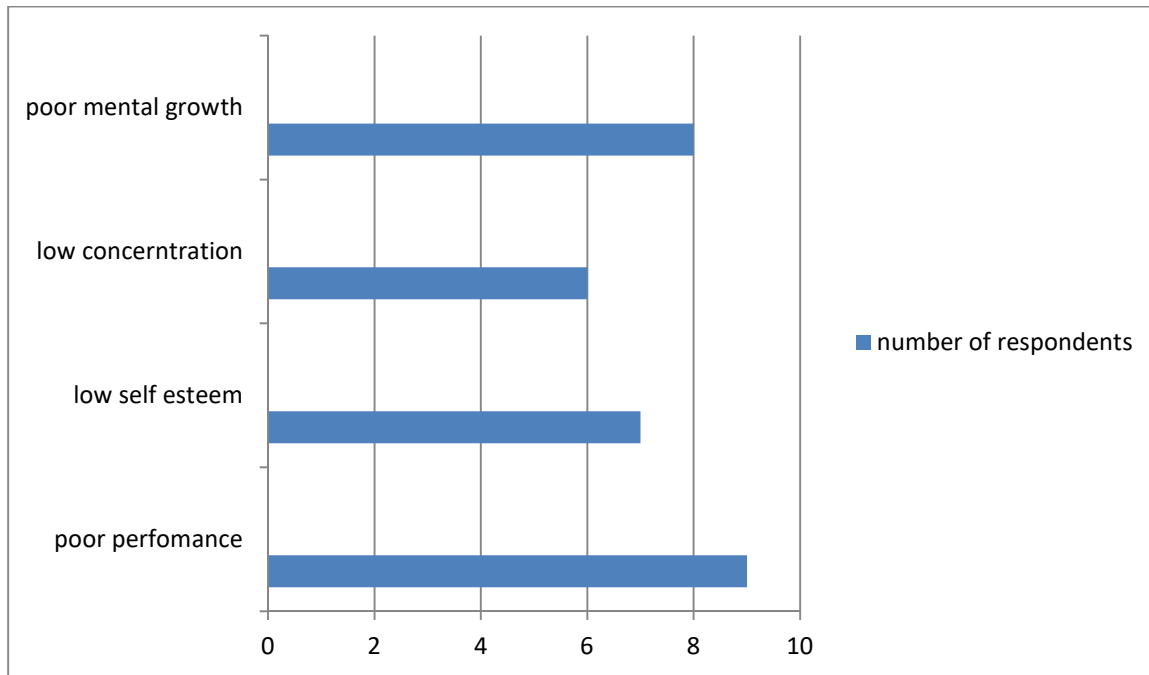


Figure 4.4 Effects of low socio economic status on cognitive development

It can therefore be noted that low socio economic status has a significant impact which can be seen in the behavior of children and differences can be seen between those from poor families and those from well to do families, resulting in factors such as poor mental health, low concentration, low self-esteem and poor performance of children.

4.2.2 Discussion and findings (Interviews and Observations)

From the interviews and observations, the researcher noted that low socio economic status matters most in the cognitive development of an early childhood education learner. During interviews, the researcher noted that most of the respondents who seemed to be against the idea of allowing children to explore and manipulate objects were from low income families. This can be due to the fact that they do not want to strain themselves by looking for extra money for

buying their children things which will stimulate their children's cognitive development. The responses given by some of the respondents gave the researcher the impression that parents block or hinder their children's positive cognitive development by refusing the child to use his or her own thinking skills to find out about things around the child. Brook-Gunn et al (2001) pointed out that stress caused by economic circumstances can influence a variety of parenting behaviors. They go on to say that poverty has been linked to parenting and physical disciplining practices.

Ungar (2004) postulates that parents who nurture their children's natural talents and skills tend to produce children with higher self-esteem. During observations, the researcher observed that children from well to do families were confident when telling stories or answering questions as they seemed to have a lot to tell as compared to children from low income families. However, the researcher observed that there were some children who would not let the children from well to do families dominate in the class when questions were asked. One child raised her hand whenever the teacher asked a question and if the teacher did not notice her she would come to the front of the class for the teacher to see her. Ray (2004) asserts that resilience can make an individual adjust to all the change and misfortune he or she would be experiencing. Resilience can assist children to cope with trauma in life. This implies that a child who develops resilience is able to adapt to any given situation.

Another respondent pointed out that;

“There is no significant difference in the performance of children from poor families and those from well to do families.”

The respondent was of the view that;

“The child's performance is determined by the child's eagerness to learn.”

In other words, the respondent attributed the child's performance to intrinsic motivation. The respondent was of the view that children who are intrinsically motivated do not need adults to push them to do things. It was also put across by one respondent that;

“If children are provided with the same learning opportunities in the classroom, no differences will be found in the cognitive abilities of children.”

Bradley et al (2001) propounded that researchers have found that if children are exposed to cognitive stimulating toys, books and games then the negative effects of poverty and behavioral and cognitive child outcomes diminish.

During observation the researcher noticed that children from well to do families dominated in most activities. However, there were times when children from poor families surprised those from well to do families. For example, all the children had been asked to count from 0-10, in an ECE class, one child surprised the other children by counting up to 20. The researcher realized that what the child had done was not expected by the other children. However, all the children followed suit imitating the able child.

During the interview it came to light that some of the parents were employed and earning adequate salaries, but the majority seemed to claim that their income was not adequate. One parent pointed out that;

“The spouse's salary only lasts them a week such that they have to scrounge to make ends meet for the rest of the month.”

Jeynes (2002) propounded that those economic hardships that are caused by low socio economic conditions lead to disruption and family conflicts.

The researcher noted that respondents from the rural school were of the view that children from well to do families were at an advantage because their parents can afford to buy supplementary materials which act as cognitive stimulating materials. The researcher also observed that parents of low income were of the view that ECE teachers were biased towards children from well to do families because of the little or small presents that parents give them when their children excel. One respondent stated that.

“My child always complains that the teacher does not give him a chance to participate in drama plays but always favours two other children who are from well up families and he is always punished for making noise while the real culprits are not touched.”

Some parents from the urban school were of the view that children portrayed almost the same cognitive abilities. The researcher is of the view that the response given by the parents from the urban school could be attributed to the availability of learning resources which is not normally the case in rural schools. Smith et al (2001) postulates that the gap between the poor and the non-poor children can be closed before they enter school by providing a safe and enriching environment where children can play with learning materials. This means that early childhood teachers should try to bridge the gap between children of low income families by providing them with equal opportunities to develop cognitive skills.

4.3 How does the level of education, interest and attitude of parents' impact on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners?

4.3.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaires

The researcher sought to establish whether or not the level of education of parents has an impact on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners as shown in the pie chart.

N = 10

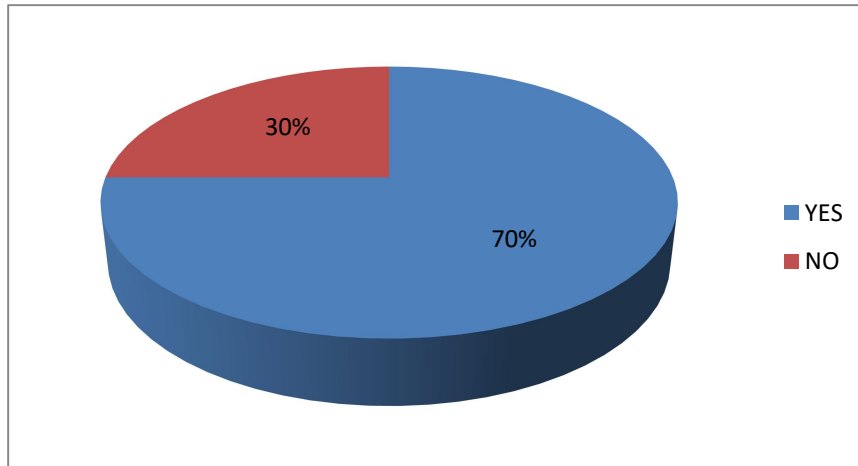


Figure 4.5 Does parents' level of education impact cognitive development of a child?

To find out how the level of education, interest and attitude of low income families impact on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners, the respondents were asked to state whether the level of education impacted on the child's cognitive development. 70% of the respondents answered 'yes' whilst another 30% answered 'no'. It therefore reflects that there is need for parents to be involved with their children through positive attitude and interests to enable cognitive development.

4.3.2 Discussion and findings (Interviews and Observations)

During interviews, the parents were asked if they were involved in their children's learning in terms of helping them with school tasks, reading them stories as well as providing educational toys. It came to light that most of the respondents were of the view that parents of low income were not able to help their children with their school tasks. One respondent pointed out that;

“Low income parents do not have patience to assist their children with school tasks because of pressure from family demands.”

Another respondent pointed out that;

“Low income parents believe that it is the teacher's duty to help children to develop cognitive skills.”

One respondent also pointed out that;

“Parents have the tendency to assign their maids or older children to assist the early childhood learner.”

Brooks-Gunn et al (2001) propounds that levels of parent supportiveness towards children may be lower because poor parents do not often receive social support themselves. This implies that parents may be found doing the same mistakes of not interacting with the child if the same was done by their parents. One of the parents concurred with the respondent who pointed out that it was the teacher's duty to see that children's performance improves because the parents pay for their services. Another respondent pointed out that it was difficult to teach one's own child, because children do not take their parents seriously like they do with teachers. The respondent went on to say that;

“If you want your child to hate you, force him or her to do activities which do not interest the child especially school work.”

However, another respondent in contrast pointed out that if a child is introduced to a routine of colouring in pictures, counting as well as story time, one would find that the child will demand to be assisted with his or her tasks. Harris and Goodall (2007) propound that longitudinal studies provide research evidence confirming that parental involvement in learning activities in the home is strongly associated with children’s better cognitive achievement in the early years. In the same voice, Flourind Buchanan (2004) postulate that parents are the first educator. A child’s family and home environment has a strong impact on the child’s language and literacy development and educational achievement.

In order to ascertain the interest and attitudes of parents, the parents were asked whether or not they provided their children with educational toys which stimulate cognitive growth. It came to light that most parents did not view toys as something of importance. During the interview, some parents were of the view that toys were luxuries which could be afforded by those with money. One parent stated that;

“Why should one waste their money on toys which will be found lying around being eaten by termites or torn apart by dogs when children can find their own play things.”

The researcher noted that parents who were against the idea of providing children with toys were not informed about the importance of play materials to the child. It is therefore of great importance to educate parents on the importance of play materials as well as how they can be improvised with scrap materials at no cost.

However, some of the parents looked at the toy issue from a different angle. They were of the view that toys are important to the developing child. One respondent said;

“If you give your child a doll, you will hear the child talking to the doll imitating you. If you are in the habit of scolding the child you will be embarrassed to hear yourself through the child’s talk.”

Another respondent said that she used to be very disappointed by her son because every time she provided her son with a new toy, it would only last at most two days before being dismantled. It was pointed out that the child had a box of toys which were incomplete. The respondent went on to say that she at first scolded and bear up the child for dismantling the toys, but realized that the child would sit quietly for long periods trying to put together the dismantled toys. The researcher is of the view that children should be allowed to create and solve their own problems as this helps to develop cognitive skills.

Looking at the responses that were given, the researcher is of the view that some of the responses were influenced by the parents’ level of education to teaching experience. It came to light that more experienced teachers gave answers which reflected their understanding of children in terms of their developmental needs. On the parents’ side, there was evidence that better educated parents seemed to have a positive attitude and a better understanding of their children’s learning needs. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) asserts that studies conducted indicate that parents of low income talk less and read less with their children than parents of high income. This implies that children from low income families fail to develop cognitive skills at a faster pace because of lack of exposure to cognitive stimulating activities.

Zajonc (2001) propounds that poverty and low parental education are associated with lower levels of school achievement later in childhood. This implies that parents who are denied the chance to study further usually do not expect much from their own children in terms of excelling in school. However, there are some parents who value education even though they probably only went as far as grade seven so that their children can have a better future. Green (2002) points out that cognitive development is a development process that is concerned with mental processes such as thinking, problem solving and memory. This implies that the child needs to be placed in a rich cognitive stimulating environment.

The researcher observed that children from the rural school had very few toys to play with and the outdoor playing area had play equipment that was not adequate such that children were found pushing each other and fighting to get a chance to play on the equipment. The teacher pointed out that parents in the rural area were not forthcoming when it came to issues pertaining to buying play equipment.

It also came to light that a few parents were willing to part with their money to get the broken play equipment repaired. Paquette and Ryan (2001) assert that the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner attempts to explain the differences in individual knowledge, development and competencies through the support, guidance and structure of the society in which they live. This implies that the model indicates that children need to be surrounded by supportive adults so as to develop in a positive manner.

4.4 What is the impact of the size of the family on the cognitive development of early childhood learners?

4.4.1 Findings and discussion from questionnaire responses

N = 10

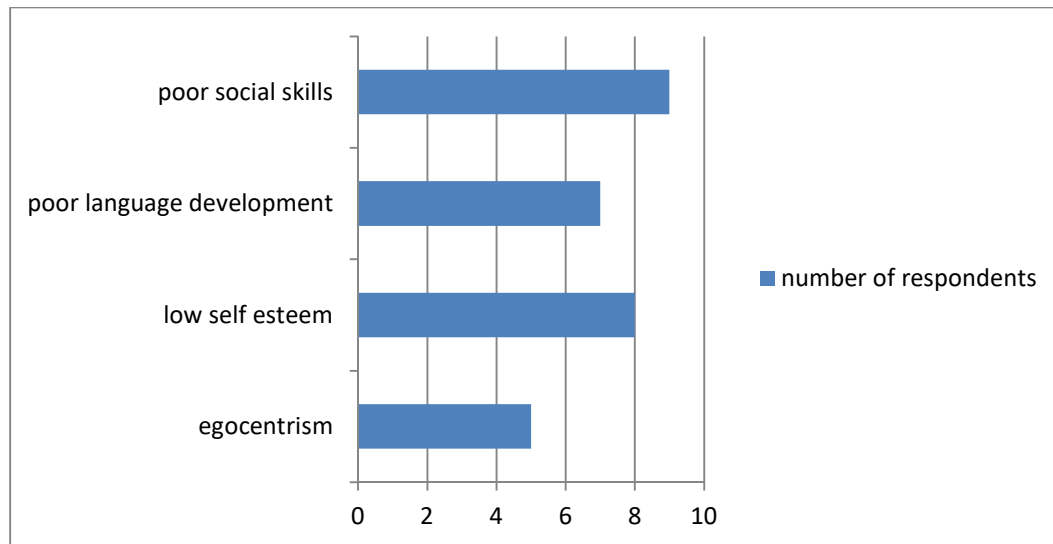


Figure 4.6 Effects of family size on cognitive development

During the research, the researcher found out that the responses from the questionnaire indicated that the size of a family does have a significant impact on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners. Most of the respondents stated factors such as egocentrism, poor performance, low self-esteem and poor language development as resulting from the size of a family.

4.4.2 Findings and discussion (Interviews and Observations)

During the interviews, one of the respondents was open enough to state that she was in a polygamous marriage. She pointed out that she had three closely spaced children because she

was trying to have a baby boy that the husband wanted so much to the extent that he married another wife hoping that she would bear him a son. In her own words she said;

“Things are bad, my husband is a backyard motor mechanic and what he brings home is not enough for me and my children as well as the new wife. We are always fighting and this is not good for the children.”

Bradley et al (2001) propounded that researchers regard family size as a risk factor when there are four or more children close in age within the same household. They go on to say that children who have a combination of risk factors such as poverty, many siblings close in age are at a greater risk of poor academic performance, and also points out that both the interactive and economic resources decrease as the number of siblings increases.

In contrast, Paquette and Ryan (2001) is of the opinion that effects of the decrease of resources due to an increase in the number of siblings are mostly felt in families of low socio economic status. This implies that high income parents can afford to provide adequately for their families even if they have four or more children, whilst the case will be different for low income families.

It also emerged that one of the respondents was a single parent with two children. She pointed out that she was employed as a shop assistant, and was failing to provide adequately for her children because of the low salary she was earning. She also put across that she had no time to interact with her children because she was always out trying to make ends meet. She said;

“My young sister is like a mother to my children, they do not even notice that I am in or out and they only come to me when they notice that I have brought something they like.”

Parke (2003) asserts that children growing up in single parent families appear to be affected by their family structure. Frequently single parents are usually poor, have less education and less likely to be employed. Children raised in a single parent's home have emotional and behavioral problems due to lack of financial resources and parenting skills.

However, Parke (2003) again points out that caution needs to be taken not to generalize the total population of single parent families. This implies that not all single parents have difficulties in raising their children. Some single mothers have good paying jobs such that their children are well provided for. However, since single parents are the sole source of financial support for the family, they have less time to help children with homework, are less likely to use consistent discipline and have less parental control. These conditions may lead to lower academic achievement.

The researcher is of the view that even though the single mother was trying her level best to provide for her children, she was not emotionally available for her children and this impacts negatively on the cognitive development of a child. Children need support in acquiring language and thinking skills as well as how to control their own behavior. Bandura in Tassoni (2004) postulated that children learn by simply observing what other people do. He believed that cognition could be explained through imitation.

The responses from the interview revealed that absenteeism was rampant among children from poor families; this was also noted during observation. The ECE teachers attributed the absenteeism to problems faced by the parents such as failing to pay fees, lack of food and at times illness. Bandura in Tassoni (2004) asserts that low socio economic status appears to affect school attendance and remains one of the consistent predictors of early school dropout while

evidence suggested that it is connected to low parental expectations. This implies that low income parents fail to make their observed children's learning a priority due to financial constraints, and as a result the child's chances of developing cognitive skills are impinged upon.

The researcher also observed some children to ascertain whether the young children were being provided with healthy food to speed up their development in all the child development domains. It also came to light that children from well to do families had nicely prepared food and those from low income families had a bottle of jolly juice and maputi or even jolly juice only. Paquette and Ryan (2001) postulate that the influences of the family extend to all aspects of the child's development namely language, nutrition, security, health and beliefs. This implies that the child's cognitive development is largely dependent on the parents to foster it.

4.5 Summary

Research findings revealed that children from low socio economic status families' lag behind children from well to do families of the same age in terms of cognitive abilities. Responses from the questionnaires, interviews as well as observations all indicated that the performance of children from high income families was better than that of children from low income families. It came to light that the variance in the children's performance resulted from their home environments. It was put across that children from well to do families are exposed to materials and experiences which stimulated cognitive development whilst children from low income families are not.

Brooks-Gunn et al (2001) pointed out that being raised in poverty has been linked with favorable early cognitive, verbal and behavioral outcomes for children. However, it was revealed that if children from low income families are provided with stimulating environments, they can also

perform well. Bradley et al (2001) pointed out that the negative effects of poverty on cognitive and behavioral outcomes decrease when children are exposed to cognitive stimulating toys and experience.

The findings also revealed that some parents were of the view that toys were not important to the child, pointing out the toys were just luxuries which could be afforded by the rich. However, some of the parents were of the view that it was very important that a child should be provided with play materials, citing incidences whereby children were found talking to their toys as if they were real people. Talking to play things helps to improve the child's language mastery.

It was also revealed that the size of the family impacts negatively on the cognitive development of the child especially if it is a low income family with many children. Zajonc (2001) asserts that the richness of the stimuli for cognitive development decreases as the number of children in the family increases. Parents' interactive and material resources become depleted as the number of children increases. This implies that usually it is the youngest child who is deprived of the resources which promote cognitive growth because the parents will be focusing on the needs of the older children.

The next chapter will focus on the summary of the research that was conducted. It will also focus on the conclusions that were drawn up by the researcher and recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary, conclusion and recommendations from the findings of the study on the influence of a family's socio economic status on the cognitive development of early childhood education learners. The summary covers all the chapters, stating the major issues related to the study and conclusions drawn from the findings, followed by recommendations.

5.1 Summary of chapters

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of a family's socio economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners. The researcher looked into the background of the study focusing on factors related to the research from a global perspective narrowing down to a local perspective. The statement of the problem was also established whereby children show variance in their cognitive abilities. Research questions for the study were established and the study justified. The researcher also established that there were limitations and delimitations which influenced the carrying out of the study.

Literature related to the study was reviewed and knowledge gaps identified. From the various literature it was established that low levels of education from parents is directly associated with low achievements in their children. Children from poor families are not exposed to cognitive stimulating materials, they are also unstable emotionally and physically. The relationship between children and their parents also has an effect on how children perform in school as they need to be more involved to enhance their cognitive abilities.

The descriptive survey research design was used as a method off carrying out the research. Questionnaires were designed for early childhood education teachers, interviews and observations were used for parents and children respectively. The study was carried out in Zvishavane District in the Midlands Province. The population was made up of ten teachers from the rural and urban schools. Twelve parents from the selected schools were interviewed and the early childhood education learners were observed during lessons.

The information obtained from questionnaires, interviews as well as observations was recorded and presented in the form of pie charts, graphs, tables and narrative form. The general conclusions were that low income parents in Zvishavane rural setting are failing to provide a cognitive stimulating environment for their children due to financial constraints. The responses given from questionnaires and interviews and what was observed clearly indicated that children from well to do families outperformed those from low income families in many learning activities because they are exposed to materials and cognitive stimulating experiences at home, which is not usually the case with children from low income families.

5.2 Findings and Conclusions

The major findings of the study show that there is a variance in the performance of children from well to do families when compared to those from low income families. The majority of responses indicated that children from well to do families are better equipped due to exposure to materials and experience that stimulate cognitive development. It can therefore be concluded that a family's socio-economic status impacts a child's cognitive development. This can be deduced from the fact that children from low income families are not exposed to cognitive stimulating materials as the parents cannot affect them.

The study also revealed that low income parents were not involved in their children's learning because most of the time, their focus was on how to make ends meet. It was also brought out that the parenting practices of low income families were not flexible such that the child's freedom to explore and manipulate objects was restricted and as a result the child's cognitive development was impinged upon. The conclusion that can be drawn is that children's cognitive development can be influenced by the way the parents assist their children with their schoolwork as well as how educated the parents are. Parents who lack interest and those who are not well educated tend to become ignorant to the cognitive development of their children.

It also came to light that some parents were of the view that it is the teacher's duty to teach the child because they pay money for the child to be educated. The researcher noted that most of those who were of the view that it was the teacher's duty were those parents who were not educated enough, they found helping their child with school tasks as a challenge, leading to the conclusion that lack of education negatively affects the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners.

Some of the low income parents were of the view that toys were not very important to the child. They were of the opinion that toys were for children from rich families and to them a luxury they could not afford. The responses given by the parents here shed some light to the researcher about the reason why there were few play materials in rural schools. The researcher concluded that there was need to educate parents on the importance of cognitive stimulating materials and activities for their children.

The size of the family impacts on Early Childhood Education learners in that most of the children from small families have single parents hence they cannot afford the luxuries that can be

afforded by other families which can act as cognitive stimulating materials. This draws the conclusion that the family size affects how children are raised thereby impacting their cognitive development.

5.3 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that;

- ✓ The government should assist schools in the rural regions by providing them with play materials and equipment so as to bridge the gap in cognitive abilities amongst children in early childhood learning.
- ✓ Funds should also be availed by the government to enable ECE teachers to be in-service so as to refresh their teaching skills as they are people who deal with the youngest group of learners.
- ✓ School heads are recommended to slot in ECE teachers every now and then when there is a meeting with parents so that they can enlighten the parents on the needs of early childhood education children such as homemade toys, a balanced diet and cleanliness.
- ✓ Teachers are encouraged to improvise in schools where there for no enough materials

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The study only focused on the influence of a family's socio-economic status on the cognitive development of Early Childhood Education learners. The researcher recommends that other researchers conducting an investigation related to this study can focus on other factors such as social background matters, home learning and Early Childhood Education learners' language as well as literacy and social outcomes.

REFERENCES

Alderman, H., Babita, M., Demombynes & Makhata, N. (2004). How can you go? Combining census on survey data for mapping poverty in South Africa. *Journal of African Economics*. 11(2) 169-200

Aldredge, J. M., Huang, T & Fraser, B.J. (1999). Investigating classroom environments in Taiwan and Australia with multiple research methods. *Journal of Educational Research* 93(1) 48-60

Alexander, K.L. Entwisle, D.R. & Dauber, S.L. (1993). First-grade behaviour: Its short and long term consequences for school performance. *Child Development*. 64:801-14

Allhusen, V. Belsky, J. & Booth-LaForce, C. (2005). duration and developmental timing of poverty and children's cognitive and social development from birth through third grade. *Children Development*. 76(4) 795-810

Ballantine, J. H. (1997). *The Sociology of Education. A Systematic Analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NV: Prentice Hall.

Barnett, W.S, (1995). Long term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes. *Future of Children* 5, 25-50

Bradley, R. H. & Corwyn, R. F. (2002). Socio-economic status and child development. *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 371-199

Bradley, R. H., Corwyn, R. F., McAdoo, H. P. & Coll, C. G (2001). The home environments of children in the United States. Part 1: Variations by age, ethnicity and poverty status. *Child Development in Press*.

Chaube M & Chaube C (2002). *Comparative Education*. Nairobi: Macmillan

Clarke, J (2007). *Income and child wellbeing: A new perspective on poverty debate*. Ottawa, Canadian Council on Social Development.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (2003). *Research Methods in Education* 6th edition London: Routeledge.

Dearing, E., McCartney, K. & Taylor, B.A. (2001). Change in family income to needs matters more for children with less. *Child Development* 72, 1779-1793

Downey, D. B. (1995). When bigger is not better: Family size, parental resources and child's educational performance. *American Sociological Review* 60, 746-761

Earl, R. B., & Rubin, A. (2008). *Research methods for social work (6th edition)*. New York: Thomas Books.

Feeney, S., Christensen, P. & Mavarick, E. (1991). *Who am I in the lives of children An introduction into teaching young children*. New York: Merrill.

Flouri, E. & Buchanan, A. (2004). Early fathers' and mothers' involvement and child's later educational outcomes. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74, 141-153

Frankel, J.R & Wallen, N.E (2002). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education* (5th edition). Boston: MacGraw Hill.

- George, A., Hansen, K. & Schoon, I. (2007). *Child behavior and cognitive development. Millennium Cohort Study, Second Survey: A User's Guide to initial findings*. London: University of London.
- Giddens, A. (1998). *Sociology a brier but critical introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hannan, P. (1995). *Literacy home and school; Research and practice in teaching literacy with parents*. London: Falmer Press
- Haralambos, M. & Holborn, M. (2002). *Sociology Themes and Perspectives*. Sydney; London Collins.
- Henslin, J. M. (2003). *Essentials of Sociology: A down-to-earth approach (2nd Edition)*. London: Allyn and Bacon
- Horton, P. B. & Hunt, C. L (1984). *Sociology (6th Edition)*, Lisbon: Macmillian
- Jeynes, W. H (2002). Examining the effects of parental absence on the academic achievement. *The Challenge of Controlling for Family Economic Issues 23(2)*
- Kamper, D. G., & Mampuru, M. E (2007). School success against high poverty. Some key considerations. *Journal for new generation science 5(1) 44-58*
- Lareau, P. & Annette, T. (2003). *Unequal Childhoods: Race, Class, and Family Life*. University of California Press Government Printer.
- Makore-Rukuni, N.M. (2003). *Introduction to research methods*. Harare: Zimbabwe Open University

- Manning, M. (2002). *The implications of co-habitation for children's wellbeing*. Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Maree, A.M. (2012). *First steps in research*. London: Macmillan Publishers.
- Marjoribanks, K (1997). Ordinal position, family environment and status among Australian young adults. *Journal on Social Psychology* 137, 398-399
- Marmot, M. (2004). *The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity*. New York: Owl Books.
- McLoyd, V. (1998). *Socio-economic disadvantage and child development*. 53(2) 185-204
- Neuman, W. L. (2000). *Social Research Methods, Qualitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Beacon
- Paquette, P., & Ryan, J. (2001). *Bronfrenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1 of 4)*.
- Shonkoff, E., & Phillips, R. (2000). *Family environment and intellectual functioning*.
- Sidhu, D. (2004). *Interpreting qualitative data. Methods of analysis talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage Publishers.
- Tasson, P. (2004). *Diploma in preschool practice*. London: Heiniman.
- Thornton, T., & Stephanie, P. (2003). *Growing minds: An introduction to children's cognitive development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wade, S.M. (2004). Parenting influence on intellectual development and educational achievement. *Handbook of parenting*. London: Readers' Digest.

Zajonc, R. B., & Markus, G. B. (2001). Birth order and intellectual development, *Psychological review*, 82, 74-88

Zom, D., & Noga, J. (2004). *Family poverty and its implications for school success, issues facing Cincinnati's families; Executive summary*. Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Centre.

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

I am a student at Midlands State University. I am conducting a research on the influence of socio-economic status on early childhood education learners’ cognitive development. The study is being carried out as a partial fulfilment for the degree programme. Any information provided will be treated with confidentiality and will be used for the sole purpose of this study. Do not write your name or the name of your school.

SECTION A

Sex: Male Female

Age: 20-30 31-40 41 and above

Qualification: CE DE Other

SECTION B

1. List four effects of the family’s low socio-economic status on the cognitive development of the child;
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (c)
 - (d)
2. Give four effects of family size on a child’s cognitive development
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (c)
 - (d)

3 (a) Does the parents' level of education impact on their children's cognitive development?

YES NO

(b) If the answer is yes, how?

.....
.....
.....

(c) If the answer is no, what are the teachers doing to improvise?.....

.....
.....

4. How do interests and attitudes of a parent influence on a child's cognitive development

.....
.....
.....

5. Are there any difference between parents of low economic status in assisting their children in

homework? YES NO

6. Do parents of low socio economic status buy their children supplementary readers? YES

NO

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does the socio-economic status influence a child's cognitive development?
2. Are parents of low levels of education able to help their children with some challenging questions?
3. How does the size of a family impact the cognitive development of a child?

APPENDIX 3

OBSERVATION GUIDE

1. Identify if cognitive stimulating materials are adequate within the learning environment.
2. Identify variance in performance of children from different backgrounds.
3. Identify if children from different backgrounds have supplementary material.
4. Identify levels of absenteeism of children from different backgrounds.