

# **MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**



**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS AND CURRICULUM STUDIES**

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**THE CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN TEACHING LEARNERS WITH  
MILD MENTAL HANDICAP AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEVEL IN  
GWERU URBAN SCHOOLS.**

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN PARTIAL  
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DEGREE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**

**GWERU: ZIMBABWE**

**MAY, 2016**

# MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

## APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Midlands State University for acceptance; a dissertation entitled: An investigation into the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level: A case study of Gweru urban primary schools.

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## RELEASE FORM

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research project to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Tsikira, my brothers, my husband Tendai and my sons. From these people, I have learned to love, live and to get all the best things in life. May the Lord Almighty shower them with blessings.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First of all, I would like to thank God for giving me the passion of wanting to work with children and for guiding me throughout the period of this research. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my family for supporting and encouraging me at all times. I want to acknowledge with special gratitude to my supervisor who tirelessly guided me in conducting this project. Lastly, I also want to express my gratitude to the Midlands State University lecturers in the Education Department, the school, heads and educators in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster schools who spared their time to give their view on the questions presented to them.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level in Gweru urban primary schools. The teachers were experiencing challenges in teaching learners with mild mental handicap due to the fact that The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has adopted the principle of inclusion yet the majority of the teachers have not been exposed to any formal training. To add on to this challenge of lack of expertise, inadequate resources, high teacher people ratio and lack of learner support from parents has made it difficult for teachers to discharge their daily duties. These challenges provoked the researcher to carry out the study. The researcher used the descriptive research design. Questionnaires and interviews were used as data collection instruments. A sample size of 29 was used. The findings from the research revealed that lack of teacher expertise, high teacher pupil ratio and lack of resources has a negative impact on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. It also emerged that parents of learners with mild mental handicap did not give their children the necessary support. The researcher recommended that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should hold compulsory workshops and in-service training for teachers who have no expertise in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. School administrators should make a budget of resources needed for effective implementation of inclusive education. The Government together with School development Committees should build more classrooms in order to ease the problem of high teacher pupil ratio. Schools should involve parents in school programmes so as to make them actively involved in their children's learning.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Form.....	i
Release Form.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of contents.....	vi
List of tables.....	xi
List of figures.....	xii
List of appendices.....	xiii

### CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	4
1.3 Purpose of the study.....	5
1.4 Research questions.....	5
1.5 Research objectives.....	5
1.6 Assumptions of the study.....	6
1.7 Significance of the study.....	6
1.8 Delimitations.....	7
1.9 Limitations.....	7
1.9.1 Financial.....	7
1.9.2 Time.....	8
1.9.3 Logistical problems.....	8
1.9.4 Definition of terms.....	8
1.9.4.1 Mild mental handicap / retardation.....	8
1.9.4.2 Early Childhood Education.....	8
1.9.4.3 Inclusion.....	9
1.9.4.4 Curriculum adaptations.....	9

1.9.4.5 Challenges.....	9
1.10 Summary.....	9

**CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

2.0 Introduction.....	10
2.1 Theoretical framework.....	10
2.2 Characteristics of learners with mild mental handicap.....	13
2.2.1 Physical development.....	13
2.2.2 Communication development.....	14
2.2.3 Cognitive development.....	14
2.3 Challenges teachers encounter when teaching mildly retarded learners.....	15
2.3.1 Lack of expertise.....	15
2.3.2 Teacher-pupil ratio.....	19
2.3.3 Adequacy of instructional resources.....	21
2.4 Recommended curriculum adaptations.....	23
2.4.1 Co-operative learning.....	23
2.4.2 Materials adaptation.....	24
2.4.3 Multi-level curriculum.....	25
2.4.4 Substitute curriculum.....	26
2.5 Parental involvement.....	27
2.5.1 Behavioural involvement.....	27
2.5.2 Personal involvement.....	28
2.5.3 Cognitive intellectual involvement.....	28
2.6 Summary.....	29

**CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

3.0 Introduction.....	30
3.1 Descriptive research design.....	30
3.1.1 Justification.....	31
3.1.2 Disadvantage.....	31
3.2 Qualitative research.....	31



3.3 Population and sample.....	32
3.3.1 Population.....	32
3.3.2 Sample.....	33
3.3.2.1 Sample frame and sample procedure.....	33
3.3.2.2 Cluster sampling.....	33
3.3.2.3 Simple random sampling.....	34
3.3.3 Data sources.....	34
3.3.3.1 Primary data.....	34
3.3.3.2 Justification.....	34
3.3.3.3 Secondary data.....	35
3.3.3.4 Justification.....	35
3.4 Instrumentation.....	35
3.4.1 Questionnaires.....	36
3.4.1.1 Justification.....	37
3.4.1.2 Disadvantages.....	37
3.4.2 Interviews.....	38
3.4.2.1 Justification.....	38
3.4.2.2 Disadvantages.....	39
3.5 Data collection procedures.....	39
3.5.1 Pilot test.....	39
3.5.2 Validity and reliability of the findings.....	39
3.6 Data analysis and presentation plan.....	40
3.7 Ethical issues.....	41
3.7.1 Confidentiality.....	41
3.7.2 Informed consent.....	41
3.8 Summary.....	42

**CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

4.0 Introduction.....	43
4.1 Data collection response.....	43
4.2 Demographic data.....	44

4.3 Research questions.....	46
4.3.1 What challenges do teachers encounter in teaching Early Childhood Education learners with mild mental handicap?.....	46
4.3.2 Teacher pupil ratio.....	46
4.3.3 Response on teacher pupil ratio.....	47
4.3.4 Teacher expertise.....	48
4.3.5 Qualification of E.C.E teachers in Special Needs Education.....	48
4.3.6 Resources.....	49
4.4 Question 2.....	50
4.4.1 What curriculum adaptations can be implemented in teaching learners with mild mental handicap?.....	50
4.4.2 Suggested teaching method.....	50
4.4.3 Data of suggested teaching methods.....	50
4.4.4 Ways of assisting learners in coping with their school work.....	51
4.4.5 Improvement of learners when given assistance.....	51
4.5 Question 3.....	52
4.5.1 Support of curriculum adaptations.....	53
4.5.2 Provision of resources.....	53
4.6 Discussion of findings.....	53
4.6.1 Impact of teacher pupil ratio.....	53
4.6.2 Impact of teacher expertise.....	54
4.6.3 Impact of resources.....	55
4.6.4 Impact of suggested teaching methods and ways of assisting learners.....	56
4.6.5 Impact of parental involvement.....	57
4.7 Summary.....	59

**CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.0 Introduction.....	60
5.1 Summary.....	60
5.1.1 Summary of findings.....	62
5.1.1.1 Impact of teacher pupil ratio.....	62

5.1.1.2 Impact of teacher expertise.....	62
5.1.1.3 Impact of unavailability of resources.....	63
5.1.1.4 Impact of teaching methodology.....	63
5.1.1.6 How can teachers overcome these challenges?.....	63
5.2 Conclusions.....	64
5.3 Recommendations.....	65
References.....	67
Appendices	

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	Response rate for questionnaire.....	43
Table 4.2.1	Sex demographic data of respondents.....	44
Table 4.2.3	Age demographic data of respondents.....	45
Table 4.4.3	Data of suggested teaching methods.....	50

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.3.3	Response on teacher pupil ratio.....	47
Figure 4.3.5	Qualifications of Early Childhood Education teachers in teaching Special Needs Education.....	48
Figure 4.5.1	Support of curriculum adaptation.....	52

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

- Appendix A Questionnaire for school heads
- Appendix B Questionnaire for Early Childhood Education teachers
- Appendix C Interview Guide for Early Childhood Education teachers
- Appendix D Permission letter (Lundi Park Primary School)
- Appendix E Permission letter (Cecil John Rhodes Primary School)
- Appendix F Permission letter (Stanley Primary School)
- Appendix G Permission letter (Sarah Bata Primary School)
- Appendix H Permission letter (Midlands State University)
- Appendix I Permission letter (Ministry of Education)
- Appendix J Permission letter (Midlands Provincial Office)

# CHAPTER 1

## CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

### 1.0 Introduction

In all my years as an Early Childhood Education practitioner, there is no feeling that gives me greater joy than that of watching my pupils mastering basic skills like reading and writing. At the same time, there is no experience that breaks my heart more than that of not being able to assist learners with disabilities that hinder them from developing holistically in Early Childhood Education. It is therefore my wish that every Early Childhood Education practitioner should be equipped with the knowledge that will assist them to overcome all the challenges that hinder pupils from blossoming to their full potential. Among these challenges is that of being able to teach learners with mild mental handicap.

The main focus of this chapter is to give a background to the study, the statement of the problem, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, delimitations, limitations, definitions of key terms and the summary.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

In society, the issue of disability is a very sensitive and often topical and controversial issue, due to deep rooted misinformed cultural beliefs and attitudes on the origins of disability. It is often very difficult for many people not to stare when a person with a pronounced disability enters a room. At times the stares are accompanied with acts of pity which indeed make the individual with a disability feel that they are different. Even in the education sector, people with disabilities have to overcome the everyday milestone of fitting in.

The issue of education for people with disabilities has evolved through different eras, the first being the era of extinction and segregation. Hardman, Drew and Egan (1999) assert that during this era, people with disabilities were subjected to inhuman practices such as infanticide, slavery, abuse and abandonment. Fortunately, the rise of human rights awareness saw the evolution of this era into the era of institutionalization. According to Chakuchichi et al(2003) the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of institutions for educational and custodial purposes being put in place. In Zimbabwe, Kapota and Morgenster are good examples of such institutions.

These institutions operated on humanitarian bases. Their curriculum focused on crafts and self help skills. The learners often had to leave their homes, parents and siblings to be enrolled in these institutions. Learners in these institutions socialised with peers who also had disabilities. Thus the aspect of segregation was still prominent. According to Hardman et al. (1999), in spite of the growth of the segregated institutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the majority of people with disabilities remained at home. Hegarty (2001), asserts that parents of students with disabilities were dissatisfied with service provision for their children and initiated change through advocacy groups. According to Hardman et al. (1999), this led to a practice called mainstreaming which started in United States during the 1960s whereby pupils with disabilities could now learn at the local schools but in their own classes often referred to as 'special classes'. This was the beginning of the era of integration.

Chakuchichi et al, (2003) assert that during the integration era there was physical placement of learners with disabilities on regular school campuses. Intergration improved the access to education for students with disabilities but however, being in separate classrooms meant that the issue of segregation still needed to be addressed. Thus in 1994, according to Hallahan and Kauffman (1994), 92 government and 25 international organisations attended the Salamanca



Framework for action held in Spain. The main agenda of this conference was to make a follow up of recommendations made in the Jomitian World Declaration of Education for all of (1990). In the Salamanca Conference, governments were urged to come up with policies that would improve the welfare of people with disabilities. Governments were also urged to adopt inclusive education. Stubbs (2002) is of the view that inclusive education is an effort to make sure that learners with disabilities are taught using teaching methods that reach them as individual learners. Thus in inclusive education, learners with disabilities are provided with suitable curriculum adaptations in order for them to learn in regular main stream classes in schools which are near their homes.

The Zimbabwean Government according to Mpofu (2000) has adopted the idea of inclusive education and has also come up with the Disabled Persons' Act (1996) and the Zimbabwean Education Act (1996) which requires all students regardless of race, gender, creed and disability to have access to basic education which is from early childhood education up to grade 7. Currently, in support of this, the new constitution of 2013 also considers equity in education as a national objective. Therefore learners with disabilities will no longer be separated from their families to be enrolled in schools far away from them. The issue of learners with disabilities being enrolled near their homes is also in line with Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of (1990) and Article 4 of the African Charter on the rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). Among these learners with disabilities being included in main stream classrooms are those with mild mental handicap or mild mental retardation .Mpofu (2000) is of the view that regular schools with this inclusive orientation are an effective strategy of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

Stubbs (2002) is of the view that people who are mildly retarded are individuals whose adaptive and intellectual abilities are slightly different from the normal range. They may indicate difficulties in academic subjects and show some behavioural problems. Usually such learners are often noticed when they start going to school. Early Childhood Education practitioners are therefore the first to have contact with the learners and are usually the first to observe these behavioural problems or difficulty in coping with academic subjects.

However, according to Mpofu (2000) most mildly retarded individuals are able to live satisfying and productive lives. Also most mildly retarded individuals are “educable” meaning they can be taught and they can also learn if exposed to the correct teaching and learning strategies.

Thus it was important to unearth the challenges that teachers face in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. By unearthing these challenges, strategies and recommendations will be suggested so as to enable teaching and learning to effectively develop mild mentally handicapped learners to their full potential.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The principle of inclusion which Zimbabwe has adopted in dealing with learners with a variety of challenges calls for a paradigm shift amongst teachers who were educated to teach regular classes. Some of these teachers find themselves teaching learners with mild mental handicap. Acknowledging that teachers are products of education systems that they have gone through, it is not uncommon that teachers whose background is in teaching regular classes and indeed those trained to teach learners with special needs experience states of disequilibrium in discharging their daily mandate. This study investigates challenges faced by teachers in teaching early childhood education learners with mild mental handicap in Gweru Urban primary schools.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level in Gweru urban primary schools.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research was guided by the following research questions:

- What challenges do teachers encounter in teaching early childhood education learners with mild mental handicap?
- What curriculum adaptations does a teacher need to take into account when assisting a learner with mild mental handicap?
- What is the role of the parent or guardian of a learner with mild mental handicap?
- How can the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap be improved?

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

- To study the characteristics of mild mental handicap.
- To identify methodology that can be used in assisting mild mentally retarded learners
- To evaluate the impact of parental involvement.
- To determine possible solutions to challenges.

## **1.6 Assumptions of the Study**

The researcher assumed that she would be permitted to carry out the study in the primary schools which are in the Cecil John Rhodes B.S.P.Z cluster by the Education officers, school heads, and early childhood education teachers.

The researcher also assumed that the information obtained from these schools will be relevant to the study. The researcher also assumed that the learners in these schools come from more or less similar economic backgrounds.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The findings will inform policy makers, heads, deputy heads, teachers and parents on the plight of children with mild mental handicap. The study dealt with children with mild mental handicap.

The information will be helpful to the education officers especially those in the psychological services as they have the role of assisting schools in dealing with learners with special educational needs.

The research will serve as a literature resource for other researchers. The research will also benefit parents with children who have mild mental handicap so as to furnish them with information on the learning style of their children since parents are the first teachers of the child.

Teachers will benefit from this study as it will assist them in handling children with mild mental handicap. Teachers will conduct a child study of learners with this type of handicap and apply the recommended ways of assisting them. The recommended methods will be arrived at by the researcher after completing the research. By compiling data and interpreting it, the researcher will become an academic as she collects data skillfully and analyses it. Lastly, the research will

benefit other university students as it will be put in the university library and used by other students. The challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap have made this study imperative.

### **1.8 Delimitations**

The study focused on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level. The researcher focused on the Cecil John Rhodes B.S.P.Z cluster in Gweru urban which comprises of four primary schools. The area was accessible as the researcher stays there.

### **1.9 Limitations**

The research, like any other had its own limitations. These included financial constraints, time, logistic problems, and many others.

#### **1.9.1 Financial**

There was need to travel far and wide to gather information but the major constraint was that of financial resources. For collecting useful data the researcher needed to visit all the primary schools in the Cecil John Rhodes B.S.P.Z cluster to issue out questionnaires and to carry out interviews. However the researcher used her personal resources to ensure that the materials needed for the research were available.

## 1.9.2 Time

Being a full time classroom practitioner, moving around during the course of the term was a stumbling block as the researcher was fully engaged during the course of the term. At the same time it was the best time to visit schools. Asking for permission to be excused from work was rather difficult, making collection of data and consultation a bit uncomfortable.

## 1.9.3 Logistical problems

Another constraint encountered by the researcher was fear of the unknown. Respondents were afraid to talk to the researcher since the issue of disability is a sensitive one. Thus the researcher had to explain more about the study so that the respondents would know the benefits of the research and participate without fear.

## 1.9.4 Definition of Terms

### 1.9.4.1 Mild mental handicap / retardation

Ainsworth and Barker (2004) assert that people whose intelligence quotient range between 55 and 70 have mild mental handicap. Whereas, Raver (2009) asserts that, intelligence quotient of a person with mild mental handicap is two standard deviations from the norm. Mental handicap is classified in three groups which are: mild, moderate and profound.

### 1.9.4.2 Early Childhood Education

Hepburn (2007) defines Early Childhood Education as a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age with active participation of their parents and caregivers. Thus Early Childhood Education is imparting education to learners in the age range of zero to eight years of age.

#### 1.9.4.3 Inclusion

Inclusion is defined by Mpofu (2000) as provision of the least restrictive education to learners with disabilities in the schools where other learners without disabilities learn. Therefore inclusion is the placement of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms and providing them the necessary curriculum adaptations needed in their learning.

#### 1.9.4.4 Curriculum adaptations

Stubbs (2002) defines curriculum adaptations as adjustments that are done in the learning environment or learning content to suit a specific learner. Therefore curriculum adaptations may refer to all the adjustments a teacher makes in the classroom or teaching strategies in order to suit the needs of learners with disabilities.

#### 1.9.4.5 Challenges

According to Pang and Richey (2005), challenges these are the barriers that block the occurrence of something in an effective way. Therefore challenges may negatively affect the way something occurs.

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter mainly gave an overview of the entire study. It focused on the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations. Key terms related to the study were defined. The next chapter will focus on the review of literature.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Various researchers have come up with different contributions in a bid to help teachers understand how children learn, develop and behave. All the contributions and findings cannot be overlooked. Thus there is need to review literature related to the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners, with mild mental handicap.

Literature review is defined by Best and Khan (2005) as the process of assessing other people's work which is related to the subject under study. Saunders(2004) say literature review is important in that it gives an understanding of the area or topic being studied. The main focus of this chapter is to review literature on: the characteristics of mild mental handicap, challenges that teachers encounter when teaching mildly retarded learners, recommended curriculum adaptations for mildly retarded learners, an analysis of parental involvement and a brief summary of findings. Prior to the review of the above mentioned aspects, a brief outline of the theoretical framework of the research will be given.

#### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

Barth (1994) defines theoretical framework as a back bone of a research study. It is a structure which supports a theory of a research study. In other words, the theoretical framework describes and introduces a theory or theories which explain why a research problem under study exists.

This study is guided by two theories. These are: Lev Vygotsky's (1934) Social cultural theory and Reuven Feuerstein's (1940) theory of mediation. These two theories relate to the role played



by the teacher in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. According to Vygotsky (1978) all learning is through socialising and the origination of human intelligence is based on the, society or the culture. Therefore this implies that learners with mild mental handicap can learn different skills from their socialisation with other people who they interact with at school or in the community. In the Zimbabwean setup, inclusion therefore gives learners with mild mental handicap an opportunity to socialise and learn from their non disabled colleagues.

Fuestein, Ran,Hoffman and Miller (2004) assert that through mediation, intelligence can be modified and that the intelligence of a human being is not fixed. This implies that all learners should be given a chance to develop at their pace and also every mildly retarded learner's intelligence quotient is capable of being corrected and modified if exposed to the correct teaching strategies.

In both theories, the learner's progress depends on a knowledgeable other. This knowledgeable person is the one who identifies the learner's problem. Briner (1999) asserts that in Vygotsky's theory there is the idea that a student's potential for cognitive development is limited to what is referred to as a zone of proximal development. This zone according to Vygotsky (1978) is what the learner's mind is cognitively prepared to learn but requires help to master and fully develop. Therefore mildly retarded learners require screening and assessment by the teacher in order to be able to know which concept the learner has mastered and which concepts the learner still needs help with in order to master. Thus the teacher's knowledge on assessment and screening being a very important aspect in the learning progress of the mildly retarded learner.

In Rueven Fuestein's theory of mediation learning,Fuestein et at (2004) assert that the theory of mediation suggests that right from birth a child learns through significant adults and these are

the 'mediators'. These adults give the learner a learning experience through mediation. In the process of mediation, the mediator has a significant role which Adey and Shayer (1994) outline as that of selecting stimuli appropriate for the learner and frames them into simplified teachable units for the learner. Therefore after identifying the problem causing the mildly retarded learner to lag behind, the teacher selects activities and strategies on how to correct the problem. For example giving the learner some counters to use when adding because the learner has not yet developed cognitively to be able to do mental addition.

In Vygotsky's theory, the aspect of Reuven Fuestein's mediator is the same as that of the expert novice paradigm. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the expert socialises with the novice and gives support to the novice until the novice masters the concept. In the learning scenario the novice being the learner and the expert being the teacher. In Reuven Fuestein's theory of mediation, the content is broken down into teachable units by the mediator whereas in Vygotsky's theory the expert provides "scaffolding" to the novice. According to Briner's (1999) explanation, "scaffolding" is the temporary support that is given to a learner until he or she masters a concept. In the inclusion set up mild mentally handicapped learners can be given mediation or scaffolding by being paired with other capable pupils who can provide the necessary scaffolds or mediation.

In both theories, the role of the teacher is very crucial in that the teacher is the one who can modify the learner's intelligence. Adey and Shayer (1994) emphasise this in their assertion that the mediator's role is to modify the retarded performer by changing the learner's dependent way of grasping concepts into that of an independent thinker. Therefore it is vital that there should not be any challenges that hinder the teacher from teaching learners with mild mental handicap in that the learner's progress lies significantly in the input of the teacher.

Just as outlined in the two theories, in this study it is assumed that the teacher holds the key in the learning of learners with mild mental handicap. The effectiveness of the teacher is of paramount importance in the development of a child with mild mental handicap

## **2.2 Characteristics of learners with mild mental handicap**

Mavunduke and Thembani (2000) list different causes of mild mental handicap as: infections, intoxicants, trauma, physical agents and metabolism or nutrition. Though the causes may vary it is important to have an understanding of characteristics of learners with mild mental handicap. By being aware of these characteristics the teacher responsible for a learner with mild mental handicap may dictate mild mental handicap early. Also the teacher will have a clear understanding of how to handle learners with mild mental handicap. These characteristics have been grouped into categories which are: physical development, communication development and cognitive development.

### **2.2.1 Physical development**

Smith (2010) asserts that children with mild mental handicap cannot be identified by physical appearance. He maintains that most of them have good motor skills. In early childhood these children may be able to walk, run, balance and jump just like other learners. The only difference is that there may be delays in their development and might reach these development milestones (for example walking) up to 9 months later than other children who do not have mild mental handicap. Therefore when these learners are enrolled in Early Childhood Education it is difficult to tell the physical difference between a learner with mild mental handicap and those that do not have mild mental handicap.

### 2.2.2 Communication development

Winzer (1996) is of the idea that children with mild mental handicap may be slower than their non-disabled peers in acquiring language. According to Smith (1999) the learners may lack curiosity and may engage in less communication with other learners. Chiinze and Tambara (2000) assert that learners with mild mental handicap may have delays in mastering complexity and speech sound discrimination. Also the learners may have delays in sentence length and may not gain much information from verbal and non-verbal receptive language. Thus there is need to pay attention in order to notice these communication lag indicators. However at times it may be difficult to note these communication lags at Early Childhood Education level because some children tend to be shy when they are in a new environment around strange people. Also at Early Childhood Education level most of the learners will still be in the process of mastering language rules. Therefore it may take time for the teacher to note the children with genuine communication development lag.

### 2.2.3 Cognitive development

Smith (1999) alludes that learners with mild mental handicap may be able to memorise letters, numbers, shapes and colours because rote memorisation does not require abstract conceptualization and reasoning. Thus it is very important for the teacher to note that when the child masters concepts during Grade 1 first term when the pupils engage in pre-learning activities, it does not mean the child does not have mild mental handicap. It is therefore important when assessing the learner to base assessment on activities that require reasoning (like adding two numbers and getting a total) so as to get a true reflection of the learner's performance.

Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) are also of the view that learners with mental handicap have problems with memory, a key factor in the learning process. They easily forget what they have learnt. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) further state that retarded learners have very short attention spans therefore they need lots of practice in order to be able to generalize. In other words, they lack the ability to apply things learnt in a learning set up to a real life situation, for example after doing subtraction the learner may still fail to subtract and calculate change when buying. According to Winzer (1996) learners with mild mental handicap have slow mental processing. They may be stuck in earlier development patterns and even when they have acquired advanced skills they may need encouragement and prompting to use the skills. For example, even when the learner is able to write, when it is time for a written exercise, the learner might not start writing unless the teacher prompts the learner to do so. Therefore, this implies that mildly retarded learners need constant close supervision of the teacher in order to grasp concepts.

Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) are also of the view that due to persistent failure, the learners with mild mental handicap may lack motivation. Due to lack of motivation they may also end up having difficulties in self regulation therefore they may fail to devise strategies to regulate their behavior. Thus implying that, mildly retarded learners may end up displaying behavioural problems. Due to this problem of cognitive development, learners with mild mental handicap may end up performing badly and may end up lagging in academic subjects.

## **2.3 Challenges teachers encounter when teaching mildly retarded learners**

Due to the uniqueness of learners with mild mental handicap and the different delays in the different aspects of their development, different challenges may be encountered when teaching these learners. The following challenges that teachers may encounter will be discussed: lack of expertise, teacher pupil ratio and lack of resources.

### **2.3.1 Lack of expertise**

The Warnock Report (1978) asserts that it is vital that those teachers who teach learners with disabilities should have considerable expertise in special education. This implies that there is need for teachers to have training on how to handle learners with mild mental handicap. Mavunduke and Thembanani (2000) are of the same view and points out that there is need for every teachers' training institution to have knowledge and skills on how to teach learners with disabilities including those with mild mental handicap.

Wenglinsky (2000) is of the view that the professional capabilities of a teacher can be linked to the teacher's effectiveness in teaching. Thus if a teacher is capable of handling learners with disabilities it increases the chance of these learner's ability to develop to their full potential. However, the European Agencies for Development in Special Needs Education (2010) outlines one shortfall in the implementation of the inclusive education policy in many countries. That is, the main assumption in the implementation of inclusion was that, general practitioners have an idea of how to teach learners with disabilities.

Research done in some countries actually indicate that a number of teachers lack expertise on how to deal with learners with disabilities, including those with mild mental handicap. In Australia research done by Graham and Prock (2013) indicates that in Australia most teachers

lack expertise in dealing with learners with disabilities. Pre-service and in-service courses are available but according to the same research, due to negative attitudes, teachers do not want to enroll for these courses.

In Nigeria, a study by Ajuwan (2008) revealed that lack of expertise has affected the implementation of inclusive education in West Nigeria and the majority of the teachers there have never received any pre-service or in-service training on special needs education.

According to a report on Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (2005-2010) in 2009 after holding researches and workshops in 8 provinces, the Kenyan government came up with a National Special Needs Education Policy in a bid to give a directive and guideline for teachers colleges to hold pre-service and in-service training in order to empower the teachers on how handle learners with disabilities.

Mafa (2012) asserts that most teachers in Zimbabwe have the knowledge on how to teach the average learner. Most of these teachers do not possess the necessary skills needed to teach the gifted learners or those with learning disabilities and educational needs. Mafa (2012) is also of the view that this problem emanates from the fact that lecturers have problems in preparing teachers for mainstreaming inclusion because there are no clear pro-inclusion policies. The other problem is that the majority of the teachers never received any pre-service training and currently due to lack of resources no in-service training or workshops are being implemented.

The lack of expertise is a great challenge in that teachers without proper expertise will not be able to plan for a diverse class. Heward (2006) asserts that when a teacher is teaching a class with diverse learners there is need to include learning instruction that will benefit all learners.

Therefore, due to the current situation where teachers lack expertise, teachers might end up occupying the average learners at the expense of those with disabilities or vice-versa.

According to Mafa (2012) those teachers dealing with learners with mild mental handicap need to be taught skills on how to select correct content for effective remedial teaching. Thus due to the fact that teachers lack the proper training, the teachers might not be able to give the proper motivation to learners with mild mental handicap. Currently the problem of lack of expertise is prevalent so there is need for Governments to give attention to this problem in order to improve the quality of education.

Lack of expertise may also gives the teacher a lot of pressure and stress since the teacher might not have the expertise to deal with behavioural problems that may be displayed by some learners with mild mental handicap. This is supported by a research done by Ewing and Gibson (2011) in Australia where it was realized that three out of nine teachers who resign, do so because of the pressure of dealing with children who have emotional and behavioural disorders in their classroom. If one has the necessary expertise, they will be able to deal with these learners without giving themselves any stress or pressure.

According to Mafa (2012) teachers without expertise may lack the skill on how to provide guidance and counseling for learners with mild mental handicap. There is need for teachers to be able to provide this guidance and counseling since most of these learner's might have low self esteem and poor motivation. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) allude that learners with mild mental retardation may lack motivation due to poor performance and failure in performing. In order for learners to succeed they need proper motivation and encouragement. Lack of expertise



is indeed a challenge that needs intervention so as to improve the effectiveness of teachers in handling learners with mild mental handicap.

### 2.3.2 Teacher-pupil ratio

According to Stubbs (2002) in an inclusive set up, pupils with disabilities are enrolled in a regular class with other learners who do not have disabilities. In this regular class, the teacher has to deal with learners who have different needs. The teacher pupil ratio is a very important aspect which contributes to the way learner's needs are to be met in a classroom set up.

In Virginia, their government came up with a statutory instrument which serves as a guidance on the permitted teacher pupil ratio in public schools. According to Standard 2 of this Code of Virginia, 1 licenced practitioner is to teach 24 pupils for grades 1, 2 and 3. No class should have more than 30 students. In such a class, the teacher takes less time to identify the performance of his or her learners. If there is an anomaly, the teacher will notice it quickly. Since learners with mild mental handicap are first noted by their lag in academic subjects a learner with mild mental handicap in such a class will not take long to be identified.

According to a research done by UNESCO in 2009 on average, the following countries had the following teacher pupil ratios in their public schools: America 1:23, Russia 1:17, Mexico 1:20 and Finland 1:20 respectively. According to Fisher (1995) smaller classes give the teacher more time to focus on students on an individual level. This way the teacher will be quick to identify Vygostky's zone of proximal development in learners with mild mental handicap who will be lagging behind. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to provide the necessary 'scaffolding' in time.

However, research done by the Zimbabwean Education Policy and Data Centre (2014) indicates that the average teacher pupil ratio in the country's public school is 1:39. The Zimbabwean teacher pupil ratio according to that same research is said to be lower than the median teacher pupil ratio in public primary schools of low income counties which is 1:44 according to the 2014 report. In other words Zimbabwe and other low income countries have a high teacher pupil ratio.

In an article in the Herald dated 11 March 2015 with the title "Zim has 20 000 unqualified teachers." In this article it was reported that according to the Ministry's Annual Statistical Report for 2013 the teacher pupil ratio for Zimbabwean Public schools is 1:42. In the same article, Mr. Sifiso Ndlovu of Zimbabwe Teachers Association said there was need to relook and improve the aspect of high teacher pupil ratio in primary schools.

In an inclusive set up, this is a major challenge in that the teacher has problems in meeting the needs of all the learners. The statistics show the average teacher pupil ratio of the country being at 1:39 in 2014 but currently in the C.J.R - B.S.P.Z Cluster the number in most Grade 1 classes ranges from 45 to 50 pupils. With such big numbers, a teacher teaching a learner with mild mental handicap might end up failing to meet the individual follow up required when dealing with learners with mild mental handicap. Dealing with a work load of teaching marking, supervising and planning amongst other things, for around 50 learners and giving assistance to a learner with mild mental handicap may be a huge challenge to an educational practitioner.

As highlighted by Fuestein is the theory of mediation, the mediator should interact with the learner in order to be able to simplify the content to the level of the learner. However, high teacher pupil ratio may hinder the teacher from focusing on the learner with mild mental

handicap progress of other learners without compromising the learning progress of other learners without disabilities.

### 2.3.3 Adequacy of instructional resources

Due to the various lag in cognitive development of learners with mild mental handicap the use of instructional resources cannot be over emphasised. Instructional resources may be in the form of models of buildings, people or fruits. They could also be in the form of puppets, three dimensional shapes to mention a few. Mpofo (2000) states that learners with mild mental handicap have problems in grasping abstract concepts thus they need objects to handle in order to help them listen and understand. Smith (1999) is of the same view; he asserts that availability of a wide variety of resources stimulates mild mental handicapped learners' interest and active engagement of learners in the lessons. Therefore the instructional resources which can be in the form of real objects stimulate learners' interest.

Since learners with mild mental handicap may have problems in concentrating, the use of concrete instructional media according to Stubbs (2002) helps learners with mild mental handicap to concentrate since they will be awarded an opportunity to manipulate objects. Manipulation of objects arouses learners' interest in learning.

Reschly (1996) asserts that in America when a student is evaluated and it is found that the child needs any form of special education, the results of such an evaluation determines the funding assistance the school will receive to meet the students' special needs. These resources vary according to the needs of the learner. Therefore, teachers in such schools where resources are availed to schools will get access to the correct educational instructional media to use when teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

The case in America is however not the case in all countries. According to a study by Mwangi (2000) in Kenya Nairobi shows that lack of resources has hampered the effectiveness of teaching learners with mild mental handicap. In the same study, learners without disabilities get first preference in allocation of resources at the expense of learners, with mild mental handicap or other disabilities. It is often the parent who ends up supplying their child with the necessary additional requirements. In cases where the parent cannot afford the resources, the learner will not be able to access them thus affecting the pupils' learning progress.

According to a research carried out by Pang and Richey (2005) who carried out a comparative study of early childhood in Zimbabwe, Poland, China, India and the United States, it is alleged that Zimbabwe has adopted policies promoting the education of children with disabilities. However, due to lack of funds the government has failed to implement them.

From the same research it was discovered that even the government assistance: Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) is currently facing challenges in paying fees for disadvantaged children. In most cases those with disabilities usually fall under this category. When fees are not paid it means the school will be unable to afford resources like textbooks, manila, markers which are needed in order to provide pupils with instructional resources leaving the teacher with the challenge of looking for the necessary resources.

Fisher (1995) contributes that teachers of mild mentally handicapped learners should ensure that they have adequate and effective use of instructional resources. Currently in the CJR-BSPZ cluster teachers resort to using their own resources to procure real media for use in their classrooms. Often the learners end up using instructional resources which do not address their needs.

The importance of these resources is emphasized by Smith (1999) who asserts that opportunities to learning are enhanced if resources are organized and available for children to access. Thus there is need to find a way to address this challenge in order to ensure that learners with mild mental handicap develop to their full potential.

## **2.4 Recommended curriculum adaptations for learners with mild mental handicap**

Mpofu (2000) asserts that children with mild mental handicap go through the same stages of cognitive development as their non-disabled colleagues but only at a slower pace and therefore attain lower levels of achievement. Therefore, there is a need to take this aspect of their development into careful consideration so as to find ways of assisting them in an inclusive set up. Fisher (1995) is of the view that before adopting any curriculum adaptations teacher needs to have consultations with the parents in order to find out any information that could be of use in the learning of the mildly retarded learner. Four main strategies are going to be outlined and these are: cooperative learning, materials adaptation, multi-level curriculum and substitute curriculum.

### **2.4.1 Co-operative learning**

Mpofu (2000) asserts that co-operative learning is the use of small groups so that pupils can work together to maximising their own and each other's learning. In early childhood education at Grade One level children can be given words to read in pairs so that learners can assist each other in reading. However, according to Cartwright and Zander (1995) when using smaller groups or cooperative learning ensure that the instructions are clear. There is need to give step by step instructions on how to do the task. During co-operative learning there is need to group learners with different abilities so that they can benefit from each other. There is also need to supervise the group activities because according to Piaget (1973) children can be egocentric

because they find it difficult to value someone else's contributions. So by supervising group work the teacher will ensure that those learners with mild mental handicap are also given a chance to take part in the activity. During co-operative learning, pupils with mild mental handicap will also develop socially in that they get to interact socially with other learners and practice how to use language and also gain new vocabulary. Co-operative learning if incorporated into learner activities therefore benefits the mildly retarded learner.

#### 2.4.2 Materials adaptation

According to Bruner's theory of cognitive development there are 3 stages of development which are: enactive stage, iconic stage and the symbolic stage. Cartwright and Zander (1995) are of the view that due to the lag in cognitive development of learners with mild mental handicap, it may take them a long time to move from the iconic stage to the symbolic stage of cognitive development. Therefore this implies that such learners may still need objects to be represented in pictorial form or manipulation of real objects so as to be able to grasp the concept. Mpofu (2000) asserts that materials adaptation is whereby the teacher simplifies curriculum materials in order for learners to understand concepts. For example, in a lesson where the learners are calculating change, other learners may use number lines for the activity while a learner with mental handicap may be given play money to subtract the money spent.

The use of concrete media is advocated for by a great number of scholars for example, John Locke and Montessori. Therefore by adopting the materials adaptation strategy the teacher will be awarding pupils an opportunity to take part in hands on activities. Hands on activities are also encouraged by constructivists like Dewey, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky to mention a few who say hands on experiences give the learners an opportunity to actively participate in their learning.

The National Dissemination Centre for Children with Disabilities (2013) also encourages teachers of learners with mild mental handicap to provide instructions and as much one-on-one instruction as possible. In so doing, the learner will be able to follow the instruction and the teacher will be able to get feedback quickly.

#### 2.4.3 Multi-level curriculum

According to Mpofu (2000) multi-level curriculum is whereby learners have different learning goals but that are based on the same activity. For example, a learner with mild mental handicap doing addition of two numbers horizontally while others without mild mental handicap are doing addition of three numbers horizontally. According to Gesell (1880-1961) in his theory of maturation, you can only teach a learner what they are mature enough to do. Therefore since learners with mild mental handicap may lag in learning concepts, multi-level curriculum adaptation may award them the opportunity to master concepts before they move on to new ones. It is also in line with Dewey's principle of learning from the known to unknown and from simple to complex. Fisher (1995) contributes that learners with mild mental handicap take longer to generalise. Therefore by adopting a multi-level curriculum these learners may get an opportunity to be able to master and generalise learnt concepts to real life situations. The National Dissemination Centre for Children (2013) also encourages teachers who teach learners with mild mental handicap to find out what the students strength and interests are and emphasise them. For example, a learner who is interested in colours, the teacher may use coloured buttons to emphasise a concept in addition or colourful pictures to catch the attention of the learner in constructing ideas for a picture story. Fisher (1995) also encourages teachers to give rewards to students for success. These successes should not be compared to those without disabilities but to the individual learner's ability to reach a milestone. Therefore if the teacher plans correctly and

implements a multi-level curriculum adaptation strategy, learners with mild mental handicap may be able to benefit from the inclusive set up. Therefore the success of good implementation of this strategy relies on the ability of the teacher to plan effectively. If the teacher is unable to plan effectively then this method fails.

#### 2.4.4 Substitute curriculum

A substitute curriculum according to Mpofu (2000) is whereby the learner with mild mental handicap is involved in an activity that is different from the one the other class members are doing. For example, while other learners are doing a comprehension exercise, the learner with mild mental handicap will be doing sentence making or word building. According to Cartwright and Zander (1995) a substitute curriculum is mainly used for those learners who take very long to grasp concepts. These learners will be lagging behind seriously. Substitute curriculum adaptation just like the multilevel curriculum also awards the learner time to master concepts before moving on to other concepts.

However, though the child learns concepts at their pace, this method means if learners have a written examination which covers the whole syllabus, the learner might not be able to master all the concepts in time. Thus there is need for early dictation in terms of mild mental retardation so that the learner is assisted earlier before the learner is seriously lagging behind the other learners.

In all strategies to be used the teacher also has to ensure that there are no distractions and that lessons are planned in advance. In addition to that, the teacher can also make use of Gagne's nine steps of improving the learning experience.



## **2.5 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement is defined by Santos and Ostrosky (2009) as a variety of behaviours and investment of resources that parents, family members or guardians may provide to improve their child's schooling. Thus these behaviours and activities could be in the form of discussions about school, assisting with homework or even volunteering at the child's school.

Research by Bourdieu (2010) reflects a consistent positive relationship between parents' engagement in their children's education and outcomes. This research also indicates the association between parental involvement and outcomes such as lower drop out and truancy rates. Wendy (1997) conceptualized three dimensions of parental involvement that are important in the development of learners with mild mental handicap. These three dimensions are: behavioural involvement, personal involvement and cognitive intellectual involvement.

### **2.5.1 Behavioural involvement**

Wendy (1997) asserts that behavioural involvements are those public actions by parents representing their interest in their child's education such as attending consultation days. These consultations and volunteering activities or volunteering at the school are important. According to Mpofu (2000) parents of children with mild mental handicap know the resources that their children may need. They also know the resources that the school might need to assist their child. Therefore it is important to encourage the parents to take part in the activities of the school for the benefit of their child.

### 2.5.2 Personal involvement

Personal involvement according to Wendy (1997)'s view includes parent-child interactions that communicate positive attitudes about learning to the child. This involvement is important because it helps motivate the child. Chiinze and Tambara (2000) are of the view that parents are the rightful people to motivate their children because they have a history of successes and failures in helping their child to achieve various milestones. Also by communicating at a personal level with the parent may be able to understand the child's fears and their thoughts and emotions and deal with them before they became out of hand.

### 2.5.3 Cognitive intellectual involvement

This refers to all the behaviour that promotes children's skills and development and knowledge. These activities may include reading books or visiting the museum. According to Mpofu (2000) the success of developmental programmes at school requires input and cooperation of parents. It is also important to parents because parents are the ones who know their child's capabilities in naturalistic situation. Thus parents need to be encouraged to be involved in the development of their child.

By law, parents and guardians are the people responsible for the child, Mawere (2010). On the same note, Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that a child's development is determined by what he or she experiences in the setting he or she spends time in. Thus there is need to bridge the gap from home to school through the active involvement of parents in the learning of children with mental handicap. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further asserts that the most important setting for any young child is the family. This is because the family has the most emotional impact on the child. Therefore the more parents get involved in their child's development; the bigger are the

chances for the learner to develop faster. In support Beckly (2012) says, parents are the child's first teachers.

In the learning of a child with mild mental handicap, the input of other parents in the school or community is equally important. According to Chiinze and Tambara (2000) parents of children without disabilities are important since they contribute in making decisions in the community and important decisions about school programmes therefore their input cannot be overlooked. The same parents can also play an important role by fostering good attitudes in their children in regard to learners with mild mental handicap. For example, if an early childhood education learner is told by his or her parents not to play with a learner with mild mental handicap they will obey the order and in the end the learner with mild mental handicap will not have any friends. Therefore involving all parents in awareness programmes on issues of inclusive education is of paramount importance to the learner who has mild mental handicap.

## **2.6 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher highlighted the theoretical framework that guides the research study. The chapter also reviewed literature on the characteristics of learners with mild mental handicap. The main characteristics that have been looked at are: physical development, communication development and cognitive development. Literature on the three main challenges that teachers encounter when teaching learners with mild mental handicap was reviewed. The main challenges that were identified and reviewed are: teacher pupil ratio, lack of expertise and lack of resources. The review of literature on recommended adaptations for learners with mildly retarded learners and also an analysis of parental involvement were done. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

According to Saunders (2003), research requires a systematic approach to finding answers to the given research problems. Therefore, in order to be able to have credible research findings and a clear understanding of the challenges that teachers encounter in teaching learners with mild mental handicap the researcher had to come up with appropriate and reliable data collection procedures and a data analysis plan. This chapter aimed to clarify the research design and the methodology used by the researcher. The chapter gives a clear highlight of the research techniques, the population, the sample, research instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis plan. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the research methodology.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

A research design is defined by Bruce (2001), as a master plan which gives the sequence of research tasks and activities. Khan (1992), refers to a research design as a deliberate arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to give relevance to a research study. In this case the research design was the framework that helped the researcher in acquiring the necessary information on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. De Vaus (2001), gives the three main types of research designs as: descriptive research design, casual research design and exploratory research design.

### **3.1.1 Descriptive Research Design**

This research is based on the descriptive research design which Shuttleworth (2008), defines as a method that involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing the subject in any way. Chiromo (2009), asserts that a descriptive survey describes what one sees over and beyond the horizon. Therefore in a descriptive research design collection of data mainly relies on observations. The descriptive research design also examines whether the situation is normal and what is likely to happen again under the same conditions.

#### **3.1.1.1 Justification**

The study adopted the descriptive research design because it enables one to collect data for describing populations that are too large to observe directly [Leedy (1993)]. For an example in this study the target population focused on 21 Gweru Urban primary schools. There was need for the researcher to use the descriptive research design since the population was too large for the researcher to study individually. Another reason why the researcher opted for the descriptive research design is that, a descriptive design can be used for obtaining up to date and detailed information [James (2011)]. Since the design provides up to date information, the researcher opted for this design in order to get information that gives a clear picture of the current challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood level.

#### **3.1.1.2 Disadvantages of using the descriptive survey**

The major disadvantage of the descriptive survey was that it was time consuming since there was need for one on one interaction with the respondents. Another disadvantage of a descriptive survey according to McDaniel (2002) is that there is no way to statistically analyze the results

because there are no variables manipulated. Many scientists regard this type of study as very unreliable and ‘unscientific’ [MacDaniel (2002)].

### **3.2 Quantitative Research**

In the words of Khan (1992), quantitative research produces statistical results which are represented by numbers. Velder (2004), concurs that quantitative research focuses on establishing relationships and explaining the causes in measured social facts. The study gathered information on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level. Information gathered was analysed by means of quantification. The choice of method was influenced by the fact that quantitative method also gave the respondents freedom to express their feelings and opinions about the subject matter through questionnaires and interviews.

### **3.3 Population and Sample**

#### **3.3.1 Population**

Population according to Velder (2004), is a total number or group of individuals, items or objects from which a sample is drawn to collect relevant information for a given study. Joan (2009) simply defines research population as individuals or objects that make up the main focus of scientific query. The target population in this study focused on 21 primary schools in Gweru Urban, early childhood educators in these schools and the school heads of these primary schools. Due to the large size of the population, the researcher had to use a sample that would represent the whole population.

### 3.3.2 Sample

A sample according to Chiromo (2009) is the process of selecting a suitable representative part of the population. In support, Kumar (2005) acknowledges that a sample is a subset of the total population to be investigated. In this study the researcher also used a portion of the population for the purpose of determining the characteristics of the whole population.

#### 3.3.2.1 Sample frame and sample procedure

A sample frame according to Chiromo (2009), lists the elements that make up the target population, that is, the individuals or elements to be considered as the members of a population from which the researcher draws the sample. The researcher used two types of sampling procedures. In the first stage the researcher used cluster sampling to select the C.J.R cluster in the B.S.P.Z clusters for Gweru Urban schools. This cluster comprises of four primary schools.

In the second stage, stratified random sampling was used to divide the population into two homogeneous subgroups that is school heads and early childhood education teachers. The researcher used a random selection of 25 early childhood education teachers out of the 50 early childhood education teachers in the four primary schools.

#### 3.3.2.2 Cluster sampling

Shuttleworth (2008), asserts that cluster sampling involves sampling within specified areas for example in a selected university, towns, group of schools and any other place of interest. Marcouse et al (2006), says cluster sampling is not a common form of sampling but valuable for students' projects. The population in the cluster is then randomly sampled for

respondents. This is the method that the researcher selected since the researcher resides in the area near the C.J.R cluster thus the cluster was easily accessible to the researcher.

### 3.3.2.3 Simple random sampling

This technique according to Saunders (2003), entails that from a target population, each element has an equal chance or opportunity of being selected into the sample. The researcher used this method in selecting respondents for interviews and those responding to questionnaires. Therefore they all had an equal chance to be selected. This technique was adopted since it has an advantage of avoiding researcher bias.

### 3.3.3 Data Sources

Data refers to facts presented to the researcher from the study's environment (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). The researcher used two main sources of data to get useful information for this study. These two sources are: primary and secondary data sources. The sources are detailed below.

#### 3.3.3.1 Primary data

McDaniel (1996) defined it as the information that is gathered specifically for the subject under study. This data is gathered for the specific purpose and has not been manipulated by initial researches.

#### 3.3.3.2 Justification

- It gives information that is up to date
- It gives much more reliable information
- Information that is provided is free from bias



### 3.3.3.3 Secondary data

Leedy (1993), states that secondary data is the information that already existed or published for some previous reasons. Secondary data sources include library books, journals and the internet. The use of secondary data was very convenient to the researcher in that secondary data was easy and quick to collect since the data gathering process was not associated with travelling and booking for appointments all of which consume significant time and money.

### 3.3.3.4 Justification

- It is easy to use and relate to the research
- It saves a lot of time
- Data can be easily verified since it is collected from reputable resources

## **3.4 Instrumentation**

Pierce (2008) is of the view that a research instrument is a tool designed to measure variable characteristics, information of interest often of behavioral or psychological characteristics. In this research, data was collected through the use of research instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were used to collect data from school heads and early childhood education teachers. Interviews were used to collect data from early childhood education teachers as a way of finding out more information about the challenges they encounter in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. The researcher went on to discuss why such instruments were used and the advantages and disadvantages of the research instruments used. Measures were also taken to minimize the weaknesses identified in the research instruments in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments and the data collected. Details of each instrument used are as follows:

### 3.4.1 Questionnaires

According to Velder (2004), a questionnaire is a tool that gives respondents an opportunity to express their views on a given subject. Cherry (2014), also concurs with the above definition that a questionnaire is a research instrument which is made up of a series of questions and other points for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. The researcher used a questionnaire that included close ended questions and open ended questions. Open ended questions and close ended questions have been briefly outlined by the researcher.

#### i) Open ended questions

Frankson (2007) asserts that open ended questions do not provide the response choice. They give room for the respondents to express their views in their own words. The researcher included open ended questions because she did not want to limit the respondents hence she gave them open ended questions thereby allowing freedom of response. The use of open ended questions helped the researcher to acquire maximum information possible since respondents were not influenced.

#### ii) Close ended questions

Borg and Gall (1993), indicate that crafting closed questions ensures that all reference in responding. Closed questions also make it easy for data to be quantifiable and analyzed efficiently. The close ended questions also took less of the respondents' time to complete the questions. The researcher included these questions because they allowed the researcher to obtain much information from the questionnaires since the questions encouraged the respondents to spare less of their time.

Two types of questionnaires were used for the two 'stratas'. One questionnaire was distributed to 20 early childhood education practitioners and the other type of questionnaire was distributed to 4 school heads. By personally administering questionnaires, the researcher was able to verbally encourage the respondents to participate fearlessly through guaranteed total confidentiality. The researcher gave the respondents one day to complete the questionnaires after having carried out a pilot survey the researcher had discovered that if the respondents are given more time to complete the questionnaires they end up misplacing the documents or completely ignoring the documents.

#### 3.4.1.1 Justification

The researcher chose the questionnaire as a research instrument because according to Frankson (2007), questionnaires satisfy the requirements of validity and reliability. The information collected using questionnaires can be analyzed statistically and presented in factors, tables and charts. Questionnaires enabled respondents to freely express their views and complete in their own pace without any interruption. Questionnaires are cost effective and they can be administered to a large number of respondents simultaneously.

#### 3.4.1.2 Disadvantages of using a questionnaire

Frankson (2007), points out that questionnaires do not give room for one to understand some forms of information like changes in emotions, behavior and feelings. Since a respondent completes the questionnaire in their own time in the absence of the researcher, there is no room to probe the responded after noting changes in emotions which a researcher can do during an interview. The other disadvantage of the questionnaire was that the researcher was unable to ask the educators and school heads to give clarification on some of their answers. Therefore to

counter act the disadvantages the researcher made the questions so simple to follow and in definite order.

### **3.4.2 Interviews**

According to Kajorboon (2005), an interview is a way of collecting data in which a respondent is asked questions in order to find out what they do, think or feel. Therefore this instrument for primary data collection is based on conversation. Chiromo (2009), alludes that there are mainly two types of interviews: a structured interview and an unstructured interview. Chiromo (2009), asserts that a structured interview has a set of specific questions to guide the interview whereas an unstructured interview does not have a list of questions to guide it. The researcher used the structured interview to interview 10 early childhood education practitioners.

The interviews were used by the researcher to get in-depth information from the educational practitioners. The structured interviews gave the respondents room for clarification on vague statements and also room to further elaborate on brief comments. The researcher booked the interviews and scheduled them for the afternoon periods where the teachers had fewer disturbances since most of the learners will have been collected by 1 o'clock. The researcher ensured that interviews were made short enough to get the information from respondents while they were still interested.

#### **3.4.2.1 Justification**

Interviews provided instant feedback from respondents. Since there was direct interaction between the researcher and respondent, the response rate was very high and clarity on misunderstood questions was possible. The interviewer took cognizance of the body language such a facial expressions and could figure the emotions behind that.

### 3.4.2.2 Disadvantages of using interviews

The presence of the researcher might have resulted in the respondent being influenced to give untruthful answers as there was no element of anonymity. It was time consuming since the researcher had to travel to book interviews then make follow ups of the appointments.

## **3.5 Data collection procedures**

The researcher first obtained a clearance letter from the Ministry Head Office. Another clearance letter was obtained from the Midlands Provincial Office. Permission was sought from the different school heads and questionnaires were personally distributed to the school heads and early childhood education practitioners. Interviews were booked and conducted at the four primary schools in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster.

### 3.5.1 Pilot test

Prior to the collection of data, a pilot test was implored by the researcher. A pilot test of questionnaires was done in order to ensure that questions are not vague and are simple to understand. The interview guide was checked for errors. Pontin (2000), recommended that in any research it is wise to first pilot the interview schedule on several respondents prior to proper data collection. Therefore the pilot test was done to ensure validity and reliability of data collected.

### 3.5.2 Validity and reliability of the findings

Saunders (2003), says validity refers to the degree which a specific concept that a researcher is attempting to measure. Therefore validity refers to the measure of correctness of an instrument in measuring what it is intended. Reliability is the fitness and dependability of the data collection

instrument. Chiromo (2009) asserts that the instruments that a researcher uses should provide enough explanation of what is being researched.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher used short and precise questions in interviews and also in the questionnaire for the school heads and for early childhood education practitioners. After doing a pilot test, the necessary adjustments were made to improve the quality of instruments and reliability of findings.

### **3.6 Data analysis and presentation plan**

The researcher used various methods in coming up with various ways of presenting her findings so that the results could quickly be elicited. Cresswell (2003) says data analysis is a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts in order for a researcher to have an understanding of them and present what has been discovered. In this research data analysis refers to the process of simplifying data obtained from the school heads and early childhood education practitioners. The researcher planned to present the data in the following way:

i) Pie charts

Pie charts were used in presenting some of the data collected from respondents. Pie charts were used because pie charts present information in a way that is easy to interpret.

ii) Tables

The quantitative data were tabulated first before they were further refined through means of data presentation. These were used to present responses made in questionnaires and showed the respondents who answered positively, neutrally or negatively.

### iii) Graphs

Bar graphs were also used to present the data collected. The use of bar graphs also enhanced effective interpretation of data.

## **3.7 Ethical issues**

### 3.7.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality according to Leedy (1993) is taken to mean that information about individuals collected in the process of study will not be revealed without the respondents' permission. The researcher observed the code of ethics in gathering data for this study. The questionnaires indicated that the respondents are assured of greater anonymity and confidentiality. All respondents were assured that the findings were only to be used for the benefit of the study and not for any other purpose. Frankson (2007), points out that in research if anonymity and confidentiality are promised they should always be maintained.

### 3.7.2 Informed consent

Bhebhe (2013), asserts that it is the responsibility of the participants to agree to their participation in full understanding of its implications. The researcher explained to all respondents how they may be affected and to whom the researcher will be reporting to. The researcher also tried to uphold ethical standards in the conduct of the research by seeking permission from respondents and their school heads to conduct research without disturbing their normal activities.

### **3.8 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher described how she solicited for the data. The chapter also justified the research design used, which is the descriptive research design. In the chapter the researcher also explains the sampling technique used and the justification of instruments used in collecting data. It concludes as the researcher explains reliability and validity of findings and also the ethical considerations that were followed. A brief plan of data presentation was given. The next chapter will focus on presentation of data and an analysis of the results that were collected through the use of the various instruments discussed in this chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

After the researcher went on the ground and collected the primary data, there was need therefore to analyse the information. The main highlight of this chapter is to present and analyse the primary data which was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews from a sample of 4 Gweru urban primary schools. The writer used tables, graphs, pie charts and narrations to facilitate a clear understanding of challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at Early Childhood Education level.

#### 4.1 Data collection response

The response rate of the questionnaires administered by the researcher will be shown in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Response rate for questionnaires

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Administered</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Response Rate %</b>
E.C.E Educators	25	25	100
School Heads	4	4	100
Total	29	29	100

The table shows that out of the 25 questionnaires distributed to Early Childhood Educators, the entire 25 questionnaires giving an overall response rate of 100% were returned. Also, the 4

questionnaires distributed to the school heads were all returned giving an overall response of 100%. Therefore, information from the study is a representative of the whole population.

The interviews with Early Childhood Education teachers were successfully carried out with 10 teachers from the 4 schools giving a 100% success rate. Therefore, information from the study is a representative of the whole population.

#### **4.2 Demographic data**

Demographic details on heads and teachers are presented in a table. Heads provided this information by responding to questions 1, 2 and 3 in the questionnaire for school heads. The teachers provided this by responding to question 1, 2 and 3 on the questionnaire for E.C.E teachers. The demographic data helped to explain the composition of the factors contributing to the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

Table 4.2.1: Sex demographic data of respondents

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Heads</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
Female	2	25
Male	2	-
Total	4	25

Table 4.2.1 shows the sex demographic data of respondents. Two out of the four school heads were females. Two out of the four school heads were male. Therefore school head respondents were 50% females and 50% males. This implies that there is a balanced representation of males and female school heads in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster. All the early childhood education

teachers were females. Thus 100% of the teacher respondents were females. This is in harmony with Moyo et al (2012) who in their study said they found out that most Early Childhood Education teachers were females.

Table 4.2.2: Age demographic data of respondents

N = 29

<b>AGE RANGE</b>	<b>HEADS</b>	<b>TEACHERS</b>
21-24	-	-
25-28	-	-
29-32	-	2
33-35	-	3
36-40	-	6
41 and above	4	14

As shown in table 4.2.2, all the school heads the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster were above 40 years of age. Thus 100% of the school heads are above 40 years of age.

Table 4.2.2 indicates that none of the early childhood education teachers who were respondents were below 28 years of age. Table 4.2.2 also shows that 2 out of the 25 teacher respondents, making 8% of the respondents are in the age range of 29 to 32 years of age. Out of the 25 teachers, 3 respondents, forming 12% of the respondents were in the age range of 33 – 35 years of age. Out of the 25 teachers, 6 respondents (24%) were in the age range of 36 to 40 years of age. Most of the teachers, 14 out of the 25 respondents making 56% were above the age of 40

years. Therefore this implies that most of the teachers responsible for teaching early childhood education learners are above the age of 40, however, this had no effect on the study.

Table 4.2.3: Educational demographic data for respondents

N = 29

<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>HEADS</b>	<b>TEACHERS</b>
Masters of Education Degree	4	2
Bachelor of Education Degree	-	7
Diploma in Education	-	13
Certificate in Education	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25</b>

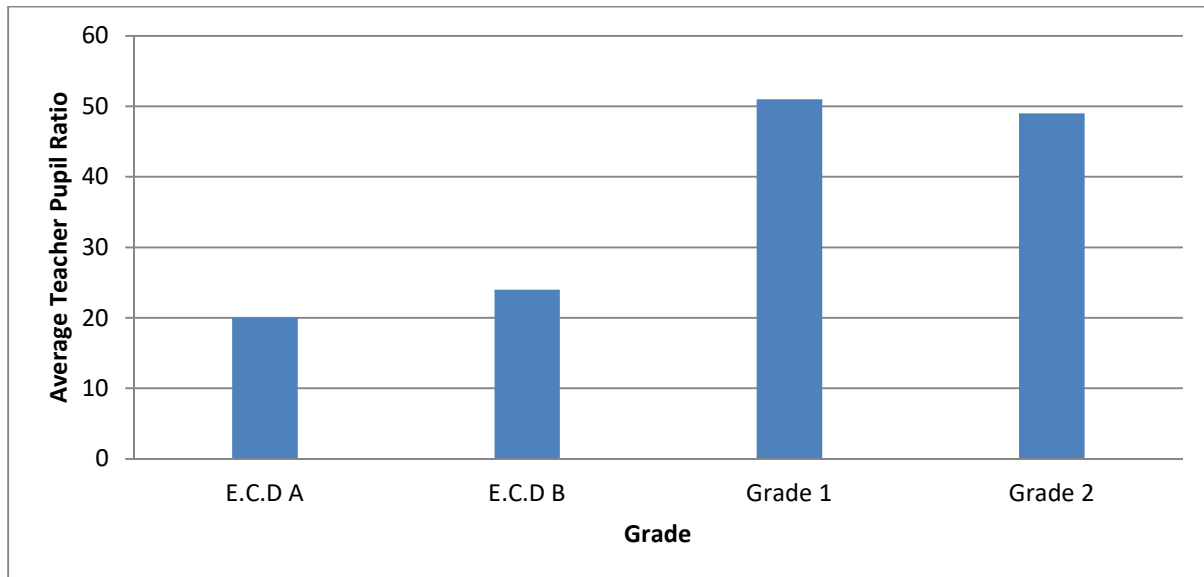
Information represented in Table 4.2.3 shows that 4 out of 4 the school heads had attained Masters of Education Degrees. Out of the 25 teachers, 2 teachers, that is 8% of the respondents also had Masters in Education degrees. Of the 25 respondents, 7 teachers, that is 28% had Bachelor of Education Degrees. Out of the 25 respondents, 13 teachers, that is 52% had Diplomas in Education and 3 out of 25, which is 12% had Certificates in Education.

### **4.3 Research Questions**

**4.3.1 Research question 1:** What challenges do teachers encounter in teaching early childhood education learners with mild mental handicap?

**4.3.2 Teacher-pupil ratio:** Responses from the Early Childhood educators and school heads revealed the following average teacher-pupil ratios.

Fig 4.3.3 Response on teacher-pupil ratio



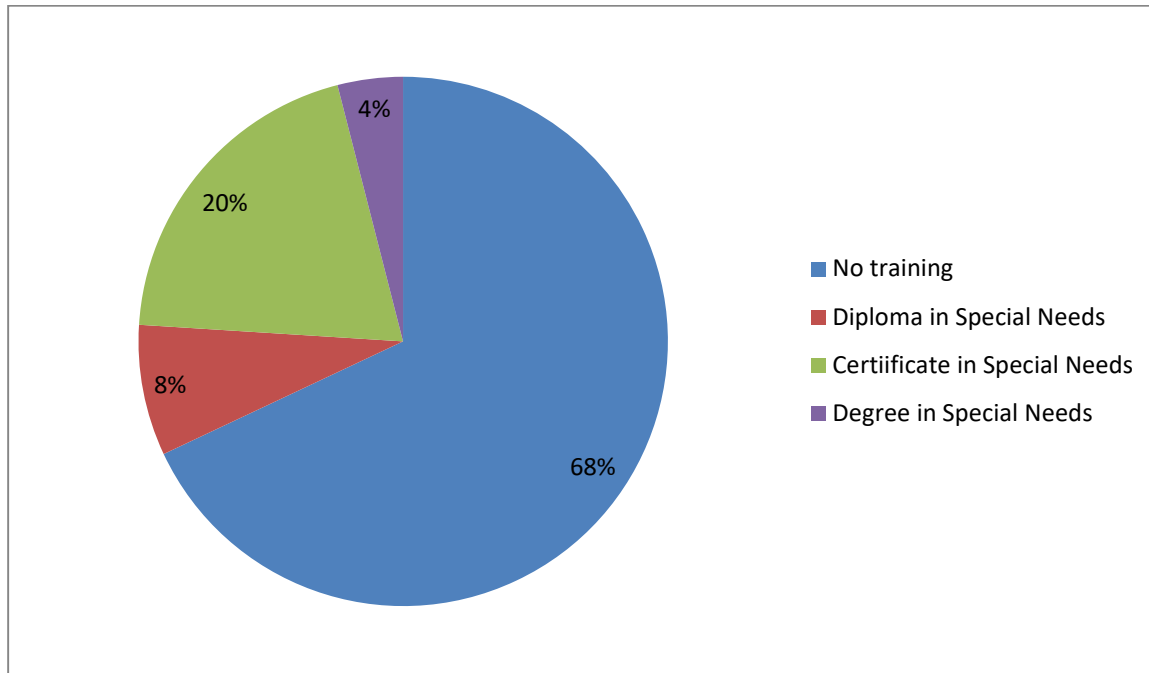
In response to Question 8 on the questionnaire for E.C.E educators and also in response to Question 5 on the questionnaire for school heads information on the average teacher pupil ratio was given. The teachers and school heads provided information on the number of pupils per grade. In E.C.D A the average teacher pupil ratio being 1:20, E.C.D B 1:24, Grade One the average teacher pupil ratio is 1:51 and the average teacher pupil ratio for Grade Two is 1:49.

In response to Question Number 4 on the questionnaire or school heads, four out of four school heads, said Inclusive Education is being implemented at their schools in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster. Therefore the data on teacher pupil ratio is of classes that have learners with various disabilities, including those with mild mental handicap. Basing on the responses supplied by teachers, in response to question 9 on the questionnaire for E.C.E educators, 18 out of the 25 teachers making 72% said they had taught a learner with mild mental handicap. 7 out of the 25 teachers making 28% of respondents said they had never taught a learner with mild mental handicap.

#### 4.3.4 Teacher expertise

Fig 4.3.5 represented the data on the qualifications of E.C.E teachers in teaching Special Needs Education.

Fig 4.3.5: Qualifications of Special Needs E.C.E teachers in teaching Education



The information in Fig 4.3.5 was arrived at through the information that E.C.E teachers provided by responding to Question 6 in the questionnaire for E.C.E educators.

Of the 25 teachers, 17 said they had never received any training in Special Needs Education making up 68% of the respondents. Out of the 25 teachers, 2 said they had received training at Diploma Of education level; these two constitute 8% of the respondents. Out of the 25 Teachers, 5 respondents, which make 20%, had received training at certificate level. Only 1 out of the 25 respondents who makes 4% of the respondents had received Special Needs Education training at

degree level. All 4 school heads, also confirmed that there were no in-service workshops on teaching learners with mild mental handicap held at their schools.

Still on the aspect of expertise, in response to Question 10 on the questionnaire for E.C.E educators, 16 out of 25 teachers, making 64% of the respondents said they had problems in selecting suitable content in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. Of the 25 teachers, 9 teachers, making 36% of the respondents said they had no problems in selecting content for teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

#### 4.3.6 Resources

In response to question 7 on the questionnaire for school heads, the following information was gathered. Of the 4 school heads, 1 Respondent said the school had a specific budget for learners with disabilities. Out of the 4 respondents, 3 respondents said they did not have a budget specifically for learners with disabilities, this implying that most of the schools do not have a specific budget to cater for the resources of learners with mild mental handicap.

On the issue of resources being adequate, 4 out of 4 school heads who were respondents said they give teachers adequate resources. However, in response to question 14 on the questionnaire for E.C.E teachers, 23 out of 25 teachers, making up 92% of the respondents cited the lack of adequate resources for teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

## 4.4 Question 2

4.4.1 What curriculum adaptations can be implemented in teaching learners with mild mental handicap?

4.4.2 Suggested teaching methods.

Table 4.4.3: Data of suggested teaching methods

N = 25

<b>Method</b>	<b>Number Of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cooperative learning	13	52%
Hands on approach	9	36%
Demonstration	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Table 4.4.3 represents data provided by early childhood education teachers to question 11 on the questionnaire for early childhood education practitioners. The following methods were suggested as being effective in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. Out of the 25 respondents, 13 teachers, making up 52% of the respondents suggest the use of cooperative learning as an effective method for teaching learners with mild mental handicap. Of the 25 respondents, 9 teachers, making up 36% of the respondents said the hands on approach was the most effective method to use in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. Out of the 25 respondents, 3 teachers, that is 12%, said demonstration method is the most effective method in teaching learners with mild mental handicap.



#### 4.4.4 Ways of assisting learners incoping with their school work.

In response to question 12 on the questionnaire for early childhood education practitioners, 8 out of the 25 E.C.E teachers making up 32% of the respondents said remedial work can help the mildly retarded learners to cope with their school work. Of the 25 E.C.E teachers, 7 teachers, making up 28% of the respondents said counselling can help learners with mild mental handicap to cope with their school work. Out of the 25 E.C.E teachers, 10 teachers, making up 40% of the respondents suggested parental involvement as a way of assisting learners with mild mental handicap to cope with their school work.

#### 4.4.5 Improvement of learners when given assistance.

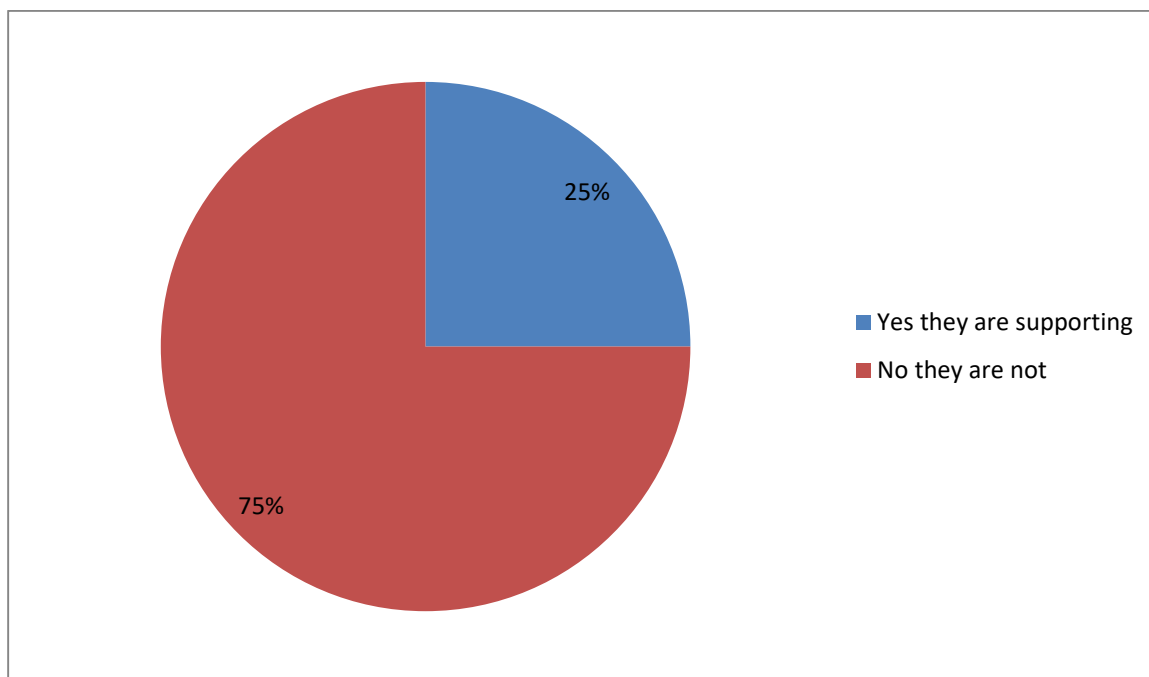
In response to question 13 on the questionnaire for E.C.E teachers, 19 out of the 25 teachers, making up 76% of the respondents agreed that learners with mild mental handicap show improvement after being given extra assistance. Of the 25 teachers, 6 teachers, making up 24% of the respondents said learners with mild mental handicap do not show any improvement after being given extra assistance.

### 4.5 Question 3

What is the role of parent or guardian of a learner with mild mental handicap?

#### 4.5.1: Support of curriculum adaptations

Fig 4.5.1 represented data on the parental support of curriculum adaptations for learners with mild mental handicap.



In response to Question 8 on the questionnaire for school heads, 1 out of the 4 school heads suggested that parents were supportive of curriculum adaptation made for their children who have mild mental handicap.

Out of the 10 teachers interviewed, 7 out of the 10 respondents said parents are not supportive of learners with mild mental handicap and 3 out of the 10 teachers interviewed, said parents were supportive of learners with mild mental handicap. Responses of the school heads and those of the teachers on this aspect agree.

#### 4.5.2 Provision of resources

Of the 10 teachers interviewed 6 out of the 10 teachers suggested that parents of learners with mild mental handicap do not provide their children with adequate resources. Out of the 10 teachers interviewed, 4 teachers interviewed suggested that parents provided adequate resources to their children.

### **4.6 Discussion of findings**

In this study, the researcher sought to find the challenges faced by teacher in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level. The researcher will now give the implications of the data collected.

#### 4.6.1 Impact of teacher pupil ratio

In this study, the participants provided information on the number of learners in their classes. It emerged that, in the Gweru C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster schools, Grade 1 and 2 classes had very high teacher pupil ratio. Research done by the Zimbabwean Education Policy and Data Centre (2014) indicates that the average teacher pupil as 1:39. Data collected shows an average teacher pupil as 1:51 for Grade 1 classes and 1:49 for Grade 2 classes.

The high teacher pupil ratio therefore gives teachers a great challenge in that it is difficult to give individual attention to learners with mild mental handicap. According to Stubbs (2002) smaller classes give the teacher more time to focus on student on an individual level.

School heads of these schools in the cluster all agree that the inclusion policy is being implemented in their schools. From the information provided, 80% of the teachers have once taught a learner with mild mental handicap in their profession. Therefore the high teacher pupil

ratio indeed makes it difficult for teachers to implement “scaffolding” in Vygotsky’s theory and “mediation” in Fuestein’s theory. From the information gathered by the researcher through interviews the teachers supplied that there are end of month examinations and end of term examinations held in the cluster. There is a lot of pressure put on the teachers since all the students are expected to pass despite the fact that some of these learners need one on one attention. Administrators tend to overlook the burden that the teachers have due to high teacher pupil ratio.

#### 4.6.2 Impact of teacher expertise

Table 4.2.3 on Educational Demographic Data for respondents shows that all the respondents are qualified to teach early childhood education learners. However, information on Fig 4.3.5 showing qualifications of the same E.C.E educators in teaching Special Needs Education revealed that 68% of the early childhood education practitioners never got any training in handling learners with mild mental handicap.

Information given by teachers on the aspect of selecting teaching material also suggests that 64% of the teachers had problems in selecting learning materials for teaching learners with mild mental handicap. This implies that most of the E.C.E teachers in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster lack expertise required in handling learners with mild mental handicap. This is in line with the research done by Ajuwan (2008) which revealed that most teachers have the ability to teach the average learner and lack expertise of teaching learners with disabilities.

This is also in harmony with research done by European Agencies for Development in Special Needs Education (2010) which says one shortfall in implementation of the inclusive policy is that of taking it for granted that general practitioners have an idea of how to teach learners with

disabilities. Due to lack of expertise, the researcher realized that some of the teachers have a negative attitude towards learners with mild mental handicap. This lack of expertise seems to give a lot of pressure and frustration to the teachers who are expected to know how to handle learners with mild mental handicap yet they were never equipped with the necessary skills to do so. Therefore lack of expertise is a great challenge that teachers encounter in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap.

#### 4.6.3 Impact of resources

From the information gathered, 75% of school heads said the resources provided to teachers by the schools are adequate in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. However, 92% of the E.C.E teachers said the resources provided by the schools were adequate in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. This therefore implies that the early childhood education teachers, who are the people on the ground, assert that the resources provided are not enough but the administrators say the resources are adequate. This conflict might be due to the fact that at times teachers are not consulted on the type of resources they require. It might also be due to the fact that resources are allocated without considering the fact that inclusive classes have other requirements that differ from the regular classes that were previously there.

The conflict might also be due to the heavy burden that school heads are facing in trying to run schools efficiently in the current harsh economic conditions. These harsh economic conditions have also affected other donors as cited by Pang and Richey (2005) in their research which revealed that Basic Education assistance Module (B.E.A.M) is currently facing challenges in paying fees for disadvantaged children. Therefore school heads try to provide the little resources

they can source but these resources are inadequate for effectively teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

Stubbs (2002) emphasizes the importance of instructional resources in the learning of children with mild mental handicap in his assertion that: opportunities to learn are enhanced if resources are organized and available for children to access. Thus lack of resources is a great challenge to teachers in that, the teachers end up using their own funds to procure resources for learners with mild mental handicap.

#### 4.6.4 Impact of suggested teaching methods and ways of assisting learners

Table 4.4.3 suggested that 52% of the participants viewed cooperative learning as the best teaching strategy to use when teaching learners with mild mental handicap. Use of cooperative learning is supported by Mpofu (2000) who asserts that by using cooperative learning method, pupils work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.

In Vygotsky's (1978) expert-novice-paradigm the expert socializes with the novice and gives support to the novice until the novice masters the concepts. Therefore, cooperative learning is most effective in a scenario where there is mixed ability grouping. In a bid to overcome challenges associated in teaching learners with mild mental handicap, it is therefore important to consider adopting the cooperative teaching method.

Data provided on 4.4.5 also suggested that 76% of the respondents said learners with mild mental handicap showed improvement after being given extra assistance. Therefore by being patient with these learners and having a positive attitude towards these learners, there is room for their improvement.

Of the suggested ways of helping learners which are: remedial work, counselling and parental involvement, 40% of the respondents suggested that parental involvement was the best way of assisting learners. Parental involvement may help all the other methods to succeed. This is in harmony with a research done by Bourdieu (2010) which revealed that a consistent positive relationship between parents engagement in their children's education produces good outcomes such as lower drop out and truancy rates. Therefore, in coping with behavioural problems such as bullying, labeling and truancy, involving parents will help improve the way a learner with mild mental handicap copes with his or her school work.

#### 4.6.5 Impact of parental involvement

Parental involvement is recommended by Bourdieu (2010) as a way of assisting learners with mild mental handicap in coping with their school work. However, according to Fig 4.5.1, 75% of school heads said parents do not accept the curriculum adaptations made for their children. 70% of the early childhood education teachers also said the parents are not supportive of their children. In some cases, according to the interviewed teachers, some parents face great denial in accepting the disability of their children and end up neglecting because of their bad performance in school work. They view their support as a waste of resources. According to information gathered from the interviewed teachers, some parents end up blaming the teachers for their children's failure, thus creating another challenge to the early childhood teacher who will be teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that the most important setting for a child's development is the family. This is because a child's family has the most emotional impact on the child. Beckly (2012) is of the view that parental involvement is of great importance to learners with mild mental handicap in that, parents are the child's first teachers.

Lack of parental support therefore creates a great challenge to teachers in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. According to a research carried out by Wendy (1997) there are three ways that a parent can be involved in the learning of the learner with mild mental handicap. These three ways being: behavioural involvement, personal involvement and cognitive intellectual involvement. Parental involvement has a great impact on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. Therefore, if there is no parental involvement, the teacher has greater challenges in teaching learners with mild mental handicap.

From the findings that the researcher got through interviews, teachers also have challenges in dealing with learners who have negative attitudes towards learners with mild mental handicap. Due to such negative attitudes, the learners end up labeling learners with mild mental handicap. According to Chiinze and Tambara (2000) parents of children without disabilities are also important since they help foster good attitudes in their children. Therefore, parental involvement impacts positively in the learning of pupils with mild mental handicap. Lack of this parental involvement in the C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster has therefore added more challenges encountered by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap.



## **4.7 Summary**

This chapter focused on the presentation of data collected from the Early Childhood Educators and school heads on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap in Gweru urban primary schools at early childhood education level. The data that had been collected through the use of questionnaires and interviews was presented and analysed. Finally, the chapter dealt with the discussion on the implications of the data collected in relation to the literature. The next chapter focuses on giving the summary, conclusions and recommendations for the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an executive summary of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level in Gweru urban schools. The conclusions are drawn from the findings and presented in this chapter and recommendations are provided at the end of the chapter.

#### 5.1 Summary

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in teaching early childhood education learners with mild mental handicap in Gweru urban C.J.R – B.S.P.Z cluster primary schools. The background to the study was given in Chapter 1. The background to the study revealed how the issue of education for people with disabilities evolved from the era of segregation to the present day era of inclusion. It also gave a brief highlight of the Zimbabwean legislation which is in line with the study. The background also revealed that in implementing the inclusive education policy, early childhood education teachers encounter various challenges in teaching learners with mild mental handicap. Among these challenges is the uniqueness of the disability, which makes it difficult for early dictation at enrolment. Another challenge is the lack of a clear cut policy to enable proper follow up and implementation of inclusive education.

These challenges provoked the researcher to investigate the impact of these and other challenges in the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap. The purpose of the study, significance of

the study, assumptions of the study, delimitation and limitations of the study were highlighted in the first chapter. Key terms were also defined in order to clarify their contextual meaning. A summary of the chapter was also given.

Chapter two focused on reviewing literature related to the study. The literature review was done on literature which focused on the characteristics of mild mental handicap, challenges encountered when teaching mildly retarded learners, proposed curriculum adaptations and the impact of parental involvement. A theoretical framework based on Reuven Freustein and Lev Vygotsky's theories was used.

Chapter three focused on research methodology and outlined the descriptive design as the main type of research design used. In the descriptive design, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments. Cluster sampling and simple random sampling was also used. A sample size of 29 respondents was used. The sample consisted of 25 E.C.E. educators and 4 school heads. Primary data was collected by using questionnaires and interviews. The research instruments had been tested for reliability and validity before being used to collect information from respondents.

The data collected was then analysed and presented on tables and pie charts in Chapter 4. This study was not easy to carry out since the respondents were generally defensive and were not willing to divulge information since the issue of learners with disabilities is a sensitive topic. Time constraint and financial constraints to cater for the study were other challenges encountered by the researcher. However, despite these constraints, interesting findings were made and conclusions were given.

### **5.1.1 Summary of findings**

From the study, the researcher came up with the following findings:

#### **5.1.1.1 Impact of teacher pupil ratio**

There is a high teacher pupil ratio in the schools Grade 1 and 2 classes. This high teacher pupil ratio has a negative impact on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. To add to the disequilibrium of not knowing how to handle learners with disabilities, high teacher pupil ratio gives a burden for the teacher in that the teacher will have a heavy work load and therefore will not be able to perform his or her duties effectively. High teacher pupil ratio therefore impacts negatively on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap.

#### **5.1.1.2 Impact of teacher expertise**

Poor teacher expertise gives the teacher problems in handling learners and in selecting the correct teaching methods for learners with mild mental handicap. Lack of expertise fosters negative attitudes due to unresolved misconceptions towards learners with mild mental handicap. Thus poor expertise impacts negatively on the learning progress of learners with mild mental expertise. However those learners enrolled in classrooms with teachers who are equipped with skills needed in teaching learners with mild mental handicap will be exposed to the correct teaching practices which have a positive impact on the learning progress of learners.

#### **5.1.1.3 Impact of unavailability of resources**

Unavailability of resources impacts negatively on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. Learners with mild mental handicap have difficulties in grasping concepts

through abstract learning. Therefore lack of resources has a negative impact on the teaching of learners with mild mental handicap.

#### **5.1.1.4 Impact of teaching methodology**

There is need for the teacher to select teaching methods that involve active participation of learners. Cooperative learning and giving the learner extra assistance in the form of remediation improves the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. Use of correct teaching methodology has a positive impact on the learning progress of mildly retarded learners.

#### **5.1.1.5 Impact of parental involvement**

Parental involvement impacts positively in the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap. Involving parents can enable the learner to have the correct assistance at home. Lack of parental involvement may impact negatively on the learner's progress since the learner may lack the different types of support from their parents or guardians.

#### **5.1.1.6 Ways in which teachers can overcome challenges**

Teachers can only overcome these challenges by being equipped with the necessary skills that will enable them to make effective child studies, meaningful consultations with parents and effective remediation programmes. The use of resource teachers and having staff developments are also ways of overcoming these challenges. Assigning homework and having regular consultations with the learners parents also assists the learning progress of the learners. Involving parents in supplying their children with the required extra learning materials needed in their learning activities also curbs the shortage of learning resources. Having a positive attitude, dedication and the will to assist all learners is also a way of overcoming these challenges.

## 5.2 Conclusions

The major findings of the study were summarized according to the research questions that guided the study. From the study, it emerged that most teachers in the C.J.R. – B.S.P.Z cluster primary schools do not have the expertise needed to teach learners with mild mental handicap. Mildly retarded learners write the same examination as other learners therefore they need a teacher with expertise in order to acquire all the skills needed to pass examinations and reach their full potential. From the study it emerged that the expertise of the teacher has a great impact on the ability of the teacher to be able to handle a class with mildly retarded learners.

From the findings, the researcher concluded that most teachers do not have the adequate resources that one would need to effectively teach learners with mild mental handicap. The findings also revealed that lack of resources gives an extra strain to teachers.

It also emerged that high teacher pupil ratio makes it difficult for the teacher to give a retarded learner individual attention and monitoring. It has been also established that most parents do not give enough parental support to their children who have mild mental handicap due to the uniqueness of the disability which makes it difficult for parents to accept. This denial puts a strain on the relationship between the teacher and the parent. Parental support is important and impacts positively on the learning progress of learners with mild mental handicap.

From the findings the researcher concluded that the use of cooperative learning can assist the progress of learners with mild mental handicap. It also emerged that learners with mild mental handicap are capable of grasping concept if they are exposed to the correct teaching strategy.

### 5.3 Recommendations

As this study concluded and in the light of the above summary and conclusions, the researcher came up with the recommendations that could help teachers in overcoming the challenges they encounter when teaching early childhood education learners. The recommendations are as follows:

- The Government of Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and all stakeholders involved should come up with a clear cut policy and follow up circulars that give guidelines for the effective implementation of the inclusion policy.
- The Government of Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should educate all stakeholders and ensure readiness before implementing policies.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should hold compulsory in service workshops for all teachers who never had any training in Special Needs Education.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education through the Curriculum Development Unit and other stakeholders should come up with supplementary syllabi that provide a guideline of activities and strategies that can be done to cater for learners with various disabilities including those who are mildly retarded.
- The Ministry of Education together with School Development Associations\ Committees, to come up with programmes that enable schools to ease high teacher pupil ratio in schools.
- Personnel at the School Psychological Services to provide counselling sessions for both learners and parents of learners with disabilities.
- Schools to have a specific budget for resources needed for creating effective inclusive set ups in schools.

- Schools to have effective orientation programmes, and screening for disabilities during enrolment of learners for formal learning.
- Schools and all stakeholders to have community awareness campaigns to educate the community on disabilities.
- Implementation of the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) from Grade 1 in order to ensure that no learner is left behind.
- Schools to come up with effective remedial programmes
- Schools should involve parents in programmes like; open days, sport days, variety shows, etcetera that encourages parents to be actively involved in the learning of their children.
- Teachers should be exemplary and encourage all learners though motivating them and treating them equally.
- Teachers can do further studies of the subject under study through action research.



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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL HEADS**

My name is Mangoro Josephine, a final year student at Midlands State University studying towards a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. In partial fulfillment of my degree program, I am undertaking a research on “The challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level.” – A case study of Gweru urban primary schools. Your responses will provide much needed and valuable input to this research. If you may please take some of your important time to respond to this questionnaire, I would be very grateful.

Please respond by ticking in the boxes provided for the possible answers to the given questions or by writing in the spaces provided.

**SECTION A**

**1. Sex**

Male  Female

**2. Age**

30-40  41-50  51 and above

**3. Education**

Ordinary Level

Certificate in Education

Diploma in Education

B.E.D

Other – Specify .....

**SECTION B**

4. Is the inclusive education policy being implemented at your school?

Yes  No

If **No**, say the reason why.....  
.....  
.....

5. On average, what is the teacher-pupil ratio for the following grades at your school?

ECD A & B classes: 1:(1-20)  1:(21-30)  1:(31 and above)

Grade 1 & 2 classes: 1:(30-39)  1:(40-49)  1:(50 and above)

6. Have teachers at your school received any in-service workshops on teaching learners with mild mental handicap?

Yes  No

7. Is there a budget in your school that is specifically for learners with disabilities?

Yes  No

(b) Are the resources provided to the teachers by the school adequate for effectively teaching learners with mild mental handicap?

Yes  No

8. Are the parents of learners with mild mental handicap supportive of curriculum adaptations given to their children?

Yes  No



9. What are the challenges that you have experienced in implementing inclusive education at your school?

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. What are the possible solutions to these challenges?

.....

.....

.....

.....

## APPENDIX B

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR E.C.E EDUCATORS

My name is Mangoro Josephine, a final year student at Midlands State University studying towards a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. In partial fulfillment of my degree program, I am undertaking a research on “The challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at early childhood education level.” – A case study of Gweru urban primary schools. Your responses will provide much needed and valuable input to this research. If you may please take some of your important time to respond to this questionnaire, I would be very grateful.

Please respond by ticking in the boxes provided for the possible answers to the given questions or by writing in the spaces provided.

#### SECTION A

##### 1. Sex

Male  Female

##### 2. Age

21-24  25-28  29-32   
33-35  36-40  41 and above

##### 3. Education

Ordinary Level   
Certificate in Education   
Diploma in Education   
B.E.C.E

Other – Specify .....

## SECTION B

4. For how long have you been employed as an Early Childhood Education teacher?

Less than 5 years

5-10 years

More than 10 years

5. Which grade are you currently teaching?

E.C.D. A

E.C.D. B

Grade 1

Grade 2

6. Did you undergo any training in Special Needs Education?

No training done

Diploma

Certificate

Degree

7. Have you attended any staff development workshop on how to teach learners with mild mental handicap?

Yes

No

8. How many pupils are in your current class?

10-20

21-30

31-40

41-50

above 50

## SECTION C

9. Have you ever taught a learner who has mild mental handicap?

Yes

No

10. Do you have any problems in selecting learning content suitable for learners with different capabilities in your class?

Yes

No

Sometimes

11. List the methods that can be used in teaching learners who have mild mental handicap?

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

12. How else can learners with mild mental handicap be assisted to cope with their school work?

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

13. Do learners with mild mental handicap show any improvement after being given extra assistance?

Yes

No

14. What challenges have you encountered in teaching learners with mild mental handicap?

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

15. What solutions do you suggest for these problems?

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

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION EDUCATORS

1. For how many years have you taught Early Childhood Education learners?
2. Is inclusive education being implemented at your school?
3. Have you ever received any training in Special Needs Education?
4. Have you ever taught a learner with mild mental handicap?
5. What learning problems did the learner have?
6. What challenges have you encountered in teaching learners with mild mental handicap?
7. What solutions would you suggest for these challenges?
8. What teaching strategies would you implement in teaching learners with mild mental handicap?
9. What challenges may one anticipate when implementing these teaching strategies?
10. What input should stakeholders (parents, government, community, etc) give in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching learners with mild mental handicap?

**APPENDIX D**

A13 Zimre Flats  
Kopje  
Gweru

21 March 2016

The School Head  
Lundi Park Primary School  
Post Office Box 1146  
Gweru

Dear Sir or Madam

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

I hereby ask for permission to carry out a research on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at your school.

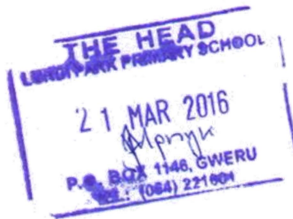
I am a final year student at the Midlands State University doing Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

I hope you will consider my request.

Yours faithfully

Mangoro Josephine F

R136544C



## APPENDIX E

A13 Zimre Flats  
Kopje  
Gweru

21 March 2016

The School Head  
Cecil John Rhodes Primary School  
Post Office Box 204  
Gweru

Dear Sir or Madam

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

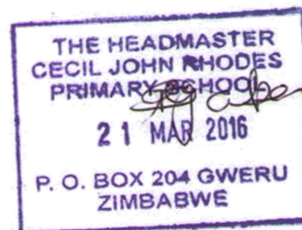
I hereby ask for permission to carry out a research on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at your school.

I am a final year student at the Midlands State University doing Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

I hope you will consider my request.

Yours faithfully

Mangoro Josephine F  
R136544C



## APPENDIX F

A13 Zimre Flats  
Kopje  
Gweru

21 March 2016

The School Head  
Stanley Primary School  
Post Office Box 104  
Gweru

Dear Sir or Madam

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

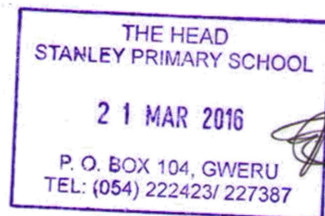
I hereby ask for permission to carry out a research on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at your school.

I am a final year student at the Midlands State University doing Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

I hope you will consider my request.

Yours faithfully

Mangoro Josephine F  
R136544C





APPENDIX G

A13 Zimre Flats  
Kopje  
Gweru

21 March 2016

The School Head  
Sarah Bata Primary School  
Post Office Box 279  
Gweru

Dear Sir or Madam

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

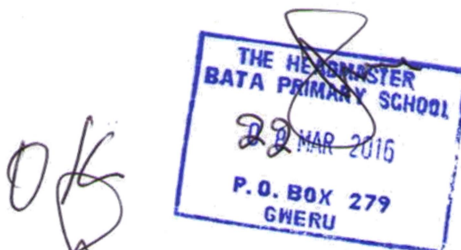
I hereby ask for permission to carry out a research on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with mild mental handicap at your school.

I am a final year student at the Midlands State University doing Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

I hope you will consider my request.

Yours faithfully

Mangoro Josephine F  
R136544C



*Please assist*

APPENDIX H



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

P. BAG 9055  
Gweru  
Zimbabwe

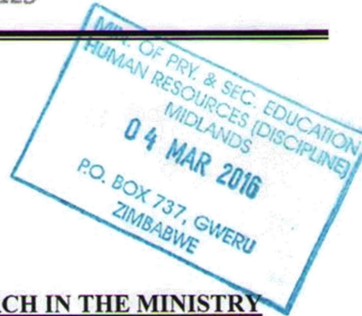
Telephone: (263) 54 260404/260337/260667/260450  
Fax: (263) 54 260233/260311

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, MANAGEMENT & CURRICULUM STUDIES

06 January 2016

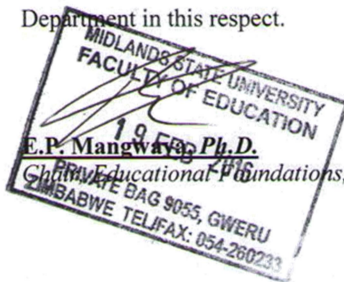
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education  
P. O. Box 8022  
CAUSEWAY



RE: SPECIAL PERMIT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE MINISTRY

The Faculty of Education's Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies at Midlands State University is seeking your permission to allow Mr/Ms JOSEPHINE MANCIKA a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education student in the department, to conduct his/her research in your ministry. The research will be conducted in MIDLANDS District/Province.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for the cooperation you have always given this Department in this respect.



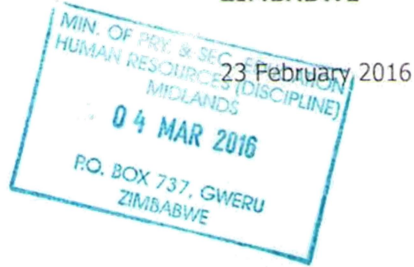
## APPENDIX I

All communications should be addressed to  
"The Secretary for Primary and Secondary  
Education"  
Telephone: 799914 and 705153  
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"  
Fax: 791923



**Reference:** C/426/3  
Ministry of Primary and  
Secondary Education  
P.O Box CY 121  
Causeway  
**ZIMBABWE**

Josephine Mangoro  
Cecil John Rhodes Primary School  
P.O Box 204  
Gweru



**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN MIDLANDS PROVINCE:  
GWERU DISTRICT: CECIL JOHN RHODES; STANLEY; LUNDI PARK AND  
SARAH BATA PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Reference is made to your application to carry out a research in the above mentioned schools in Midlands Province on the research title:

**"CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN TEACHING LEARNERS WITH MILD  
MENTAL HANDICAP AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEVEL"**

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Director Midlands, who is responsible for the schools which you want to involve in your research.

You are required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Muzawazi'.

P.Muzawazi

**Director:** Policy Planning, Research and Development

For: **SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

cc: PED – Midlands Province

## APPENDIX J

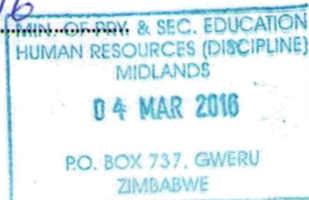
All communications should be addressed to "The Provincial Education Director"  
Telephone: 054- 222460

Fax: 054- 226482



Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education  
P.O Box 737  
GWERU

14/03/16



Mr/Mrs/Miss: MANGORO JOSEPHINE  
CECIL JOHN RHODES PRIMARY  
POST OFFICE BOX 204  
GWERU

Dear Sir/Madam

### APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT AN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN MIDLANDS PROVINCE

Permission to carry out a Research on:-

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN TEACHING  
LEARNERS WITH MILD MENTAL HANDICAP AT  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEVEL

In the Midlands Province has been granted on these conditions.

1. That in carrying out this you do not disturb the learning and teaching programmes in schools.
2. That you avail the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with a copy of your research findings.
3. That this permission can be withdrawn at anytime by the Provincial Education Director or by any higher officer.

The Education Director wishes you success in your research work and in your University College studies.

Education Officer (Professional Administration And Legal Services)  
FOR PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR: MIDLANDS