



**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE  
OF GROUP WORK IN THE TEACHING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION LEARNERS IN ST PATRICK'S CLUSTER, GWERU  
DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE**

**BY**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, MANAGEMENT AND CURRICULUM  
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EDUCATION DEGREE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**GWERU, ZIMBABWE**

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## Approval Form

The undersigned certify that they have supervised, read and recommend to the Midlands State University for acceptance of the research project entitled: Teachers' Perceptions on the role of group work in the teaching of Early Childhood Education learners in St. Patrick's Cluster in Chiwundura, Midlands Province. The research project was submitted by Moyo Sindiso R15021A in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Education Degree in Early Childhood Education.

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Degree Programme: Bachelor of Education Degree in Early Childhood Education

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this study is my original work and that it has not been submitted in part to any other University for any programme and that all the sources used have been duly acknowledged in the references section.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to my late mother Fiona Moyo, father Kenwell Moyo, husband Elliott Shumba and also to my brothers Lynott and Leslie, my sisters Simangele and Florance and two daughters Albertina and Salome.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to give glory, honour, praises and thanks to the LORD ALMIGHTY for seeing me through the process of completing this research.

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Many thanks go to my family and friends for helping me through an exciting challenge which this research is a project of.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigated teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in the teaching of Early Childhood Education (ECE) learners in St. Patrick's Cluster. An introduction to the study which presented the background to the study highlighted some researches that were carried out on group work. These included studies carried out in the United States, Toronto, Australia, Sweden, Asia, Ghana, South Africa, Somalia and even in Zimbabwe. The research questions were: How do teachers perceive the use of group work with ECE learners? What prompts ECE teachers to use group work in their classrooms? Do ECE teachers enjoy using group work with their learners? The research went on to review literature that is pertinent to teachers' perceptions on the role of group work and it was linked to the research questions. Some teachers of children aged between six and nine agreed to having experienced positive outcomes on the part of the teachers as well as their learners with group work in their classrooms. These included learners getting to know each other better, having the opportunities to learn to interact with each other and managing their time effectively.

Five schools that were involved in this project were randomly selected from a total of seven schools in the cluster. Forty ECE teachers in these five schools made the sample. The Descriptive survey research design was adopted and data was collected using the questionnaire that was self-administered to the participants. A quantitative method of data analysis was used to analyse data collected through the questionnaire while statistical data were qualitatively described. The number/percentage statistical analysis was used. The presentation of the data was done using tables, pie charts and bar graphs. These helped to illustrate data as well as for easier comprehension. The data were analysed in a bid to answer the research questions that were posed for this study.

The findings of the research revealed a variety of factors and some of these are that all the teachers who participated in the research, utilised group work with ECE learners in their classrooms during teaching and learning, not all teachers enjoy using this teaching method. The ECE teachers in this study perceived that group work cannot be used in all curriculum subjects. The respondents also indicated that they assist their learners during group work.

Having gathered the perceptions of ECE teachers on using group work with ECE learners, some recommendations were drawn and these included ECE teachers to enjoy teaching using group work, to be flexible when allocating learners into groups so as to provide them with the opportunities to self-select their groups as well as encourage learners who are not working cooperatively during group work to try so that they collaborate with other group members in their learning.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This research was investigating the perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers on the role of group work in the teaching of ECE learners. This chapter focused on the background to the study, statement of the problem as well as the research questions. The significance of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study were also presented. In addition, the assumptions of the study were highlighted. Finally, key terms related to this study were defined and a summary closed the chapter.

#### **1.1 Background to the study**

Kwek (2011) points out that child centred approaches to learning place emphasis on actively involving children in their learning. It is because of this, that these approaches to learning have demonstrated best results for ECE learners. Dewey, in Kwek (2011) postulates that, the experiences which learners go through in cooperative enquiry which can be in the form of teaching methods like group work, leads to these learners being educated because useful knowledge would have been developed in a participative manner. In this regard, the notion that learning involves learners as co-creators and collaborators of their learning is indeed an important one. Kwek (2011) further explains that teaching methods like group work provide opportunities for the active involvement of learners as they will collaborate and rely on other group members which in turn prepare learners for future learning.

Lotan, in Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) indicates that a research that was conducted in Sweden, on teachers' perceptions on group work provided findings that involving learners in group work meant that teachers ceased to control learners as they handed over the learning

responsibility to the learners. Likewise, learners would take charge of their learning processes. In this study, through working in groups, learners proved to be serving as resources for each other. In the process, it was found out that an improvement in educational success was noted. Sharing the same notion, Webb 2006, in Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) points out that it is only when the teachers cease to take charge of the learners through controlling their learning but instead hand over responsibility to learners through involving these learners in group work that learners will take charge of their own learning processes. Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) found out that when teachers involve learners in group work, they constantly underline the fact that group work is the keystone for it. These teachers explained that they wanted their children to develop personal abilities and collaboration abilities through group work. In this study, it was further found out that another purpose for placing children in groups was to ensure that they learn to support each other and getting inspiration from the other group members when they are collaborating on a common task.

Gillies and Boyle (2010) conducted a research in Australia and found out that teachers had experienced positive experiences for them and their children through implementing group work in their classrooms. These included comments about their children getting to know each other better and learning to interact with their group members. In this study, the benefits the teachers perceived that they derived from using cooperative learning included that it helped them to better manage and structure their lessons and make them more challenging. A number of teachers in this study indicated that they are reluctant to use group work as a pedagogical tool in their classrooms. The findings of this research were that these teachers lack knowledge of how to manage group work and how to organise it in the classroom in a beneficial way. An example was presented which showed that teachers are unable to delegate authority in their classrooms and allow learners to attempt tasks and solve problems on their own without them offering proper supervision resulting in learners not benefiting.

Lee (2014) conducted a research in Toronto with teachers of early language learners and found out that group work allowed all the children to have the opportunities to collaborate and develop a diverse set of skills. The teachers involved in the research indicated that group work gave their children a chance to share their own ideas and their prior knowledge so that they capitalise on what they already know. Group work was also said to be a positive social experience that reinforced ideas that were presented in the class. This teaching method was also applauded for enabling children to listen, observe and practising English through social interactions with their peers who would have had more positive experiences learning the language. The teachers in this study perceived that there are skills like social skills, which the teacher is unable to teach in the classroom but these skills can best be acquired by their learners during group work.

It was also noted from the research conducted by Lee (2014) that group work provided early language learners the chance to practise and develop oral language skills. The teachers believed that developing oral language skills for these learners was extremely important in learning language because when children are to learn to read and write, they need to first learn to express themselves. To add on, these teachers perceived that if early language learners are able to express themselves, they are in turn able to take a much more active role in their learning.

A study that was carried out in the United States of America by Stevens and Slavin (1995) highlighted the teachers' notion that positive effects of successful management of group work resulted in an improvement in learners' academic performance. The evidence showed that group work actually supports academic progress and higher conceptual learning. Teachers in this study also noted that group work closed the gap in performance between boys and girls as well as of learners with special needs. This was achieved because the learners were assisting their group members to master the skills and concepts. Group work, in this study

also proved to promote the development of important life and social skills. The development of learners being able to realise themselves, mutual respect, organisation abilities, co-operation, negotiation skills, flexibility, compromise, delegation and accountability were all skills that were developed through involving learners in group work.

Martine (2005) conducted a research with classes of young children in Asia and found out that teachers believed that involving ECE learners in group work, increased learners' talking time which in turn aids in their development of language. Conversation skills were also said to be enhanced through involving learners in group work. In addition, the research also found out that group work makes the classroom an entertaining and lively environment to be. This teaching method was described to be providing learners with more speaking time and group work also motivated young children to learn because it was fun and learners enjoyed talking to their classmates and at the same time sharing ideas to complete given tasks than completing them individually. The study also revealed that group work stimulates curiosity and learners find that they did not just come to the classroom to be inactive but to enthusiastically contribute to their learning.

Martine (2005) further explains that ECE teachers in Asian classes said that involving learners in group work created a more secure and positive classroom atmosphere. The teachers indicated that learners would be afraid to answer questions in front of their peers but would willingly participate in group work. As a group they shared the responsibility of coming up with solutions to the assigned tasks. Through group work, learners demonstrated the freedom to come up with answers that reflected their thinking.

In the context of developing countries, Westbrook and Durrani (2013) carried out a research in Kenya. This research brought out the findings that teachers' assumptions on group work influenced their willingness to use it as a teaching methodology. Hence teachers with a

negative assumption towards group work failed to utilise it effectively with their learners. However, this research also brought forth the fact that if this teaching method is used effectively in the classrooms, it supports all learners to learn as they will be actively participating as colleagues who are all aiming at achieving one objective which is completing the group tasks assigned to their group.

Another research aimed at seeking the perceptions of ECE teachers on group work was conducted by Arkorful (2012) in Ghana. This study found out that teachers and their learners of infant classes improved their learning when they engaged learners in group work. The teachers in this study, re-arranged tables and chairs from rows into groups so that learners would make the learning environment their own as it would be easy for them to interact and share ideas in groups compared to being involved in groups while tables and chairs are in rows. In agreement, Gillies (2003) in a study that was conducted in the United Kingdom, explains that group work became effective in classrooms when the layout and seating arrangements allowed learners to share ideas and discuss while seating comfortably. Likewise, Arkorful (2012) points out that the results of the research conducted in Ghana indicated an improvement in classrooms that re-arranged the seating arrangement for learners to engage in group work. This improvement was noted in the learners' vocabulary and this increased their participation levels in all other subjects.

Furthermore, Bojuweyo and Moletsane (2014) conducted a research in South Africa in the Western Cape with ECE teachers. The study revealed that assisting learners to work in groups enhanced learners' development of self esteem and promoted acceptable social behaviours of turn taking, sharing, tolerance and appreciation. These skills maximised children's learning and removed barriers to learning. These barriers were indicated as lack of confidence and a low self esteem.



In Somalia, Kamis (2011) conducted a research in Somalia with teachers of ECE learners. The research found out that those teachers of ECE learners perceiving group work as a teaching method that had positive attributes. The teachers revealed that ECE learners who were involved in group work, proved to have increased good relations among themselves. The learners could assist one another as a group and were able to socialise even outside the classroom which was not observed before. These learners also had an increased sense of belonging to the classroom as they were actively involved in their learning.

In Zimbabwe, Mafa (2013) carried out a research in Bulawayo with secondary school teachers of learners with special needs. The findings were that involving learners in group work provided the opportunity for the bright learners to explain points to their group members while their teacher is assisting other learners who are finding it difficult to master concepts. The teachers involved in this research pointed out that through involving learners in group work, the shy members of the class felt confident to contribute. It was also revealed that those learners who are sometimes regarded as academically challenged can contribute positively in group work towards the accomplishment of tasks assigned to their group.

Robyn, Gillies and Adrian (2005) state that very little research on co-operative learning has involved children of preschool or early elementary age. Johnson and Johnson, 1989 in Robyn et al (2005) found only four studies of co-operative learning involving pre-school children. Therefore, this research is aiming at reducing the gap stated above by adding to the studies of teachers' perceptions on the role of group work while involving teachers of learners as early as Early Childhood Development level.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

According to Santrock (2010) children from birth to eleven years are individuals who have just embarked the long journey of discovering and acquiring knowledge and they enjoy initiating their activities and only find satisfaction when they get them done. Piaget in Santrock (2010) views these learners as lone scientists. However, ECE teachers involve these learners in group work. Thus, this research seeks to find out why ECE teachers utilise group work in their classrooms with learners who sometimes prefer working individually.

### **1.3 Research questions**

- ❖ How do teachers perceive the role of group work with ECE learners?
- ❖ What prompts ECE teachers to use group work in their classrooms?
- ❖ Do ECE teachers enjoy using group work with their learners?

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Teachers of ECE learners should benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study in that they should be well informed about their choice of teaching methods. ECE teachers should know their perceptions on group work so that they can structure their teaching to prepare ECE learners for lifelong skills. The study under investigation should benefit teachers in charge (TICs) of ECE centres so that they can better manage these centres through carrying out effective supervision programmes that will improve the teaching and learning in ECE classes. The findings of this research should also form a basis for future researches on teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in the teaching of ECE learners.

### **1.5 Delimitations**

The study was conducted in Zimbabwe in the Midlands Province in Gweru District rural schools in Chiundura Circuit in St Patrick's Cluster. The study involved teachers of ECE learners from five schools.

## **1.6 Limitations**

The researcher took time to be able to understand how to go about the research. She therefore had to continuously travel from her school to research in the Midlands State University Library. Furthermore, the researcher needed money for travelling to the schools in the Cluster in order for the research to be a success. She resorted to selling freezits, sweets, potato crisps, chocolates and airtime at her school so as to meet the financial demands of the research. These included consulting the supervisor, collecting data, typing, printing and binding the dissertation. Lastly, the researcher conducted the research with five schools, therefore, the findings of the research may not be generalised to other ECE centres and clusters.

## **1.7 Assumptions of the study**

- ECE teachers use a variety of teaching methods in their classrooms when they teach.
- ECE learners are free to express their feelings during teaching and learning.

## **1.8 Definition of key terms**

Early Childhood Education

These are learning experiences designed for learners from birth to eight years of age with the aim of developing them physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially.

#### Teachers

These are individuals who assist learners to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. They apply theories of child development to the learners under their care, which they gained from a reputable teachers' college in Zimbabwe during the period of at least three years as they were being trained.

#### ECE learners

These are the individuals who are aged between zero and eight years who are under the guidance of trained personnel at a school.

#### Perceptions

These are views or ideas that can be held worthy by an individual on a particular issue.

#### Group work

It is a method of teaching which teachers may adopt in their classrooms with ECE learners. It allows learners to interact, share ideas and work together on given tasks so that the weaknesses of others are improved by the strengths of other members.

### **1.9 Summary**

This chapter presented an introduction to the study by highlighting the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions and the significance of the study.

Furthermore, the delimitations, limitations and assumptions of the study were presented. Definitions of key terms that were used in the research were elaborated too. The next chapter focused on Literature Review.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviewed literature that is pertinent to teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in the teaching of ECE learners. Reviewed literature was linked to the research questions. A summary of issues presented in the chapter closed the chapter.

### **How do teachers perceive the use of group work with ECE learners?**

Bojuweyo et al (2014) postulates that the perceptions of teachers of a particular teaching method lead to the teachers' way of classroom practice. This was clarified that the actions of teachers especially in their classrooms are key institutional efforts for enhancing learner success.

With regards to how teachers perceive the use of group work with ECE learners, a study that was conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) in Australia with middle year teachers of children aged between six and nine revealed that teachers agreed to having experienced positive outcomes on the part of the teachers as well as their learners with group work in their classrooms. They expressed that their learners got to know each other better during group work. The learners then shifted from fighting during break time and resorted to playing harmoniously and accepting their fellow classmates. These learners got to accept their roles like being the secretary of the group or spokesperson of the group and the roles were agreed upon by all the members in the group. The teachers in this study reiterated that group work gave their learners the opportunities to learn to interact with each other and made them practise taking risks as they interacted with other group members. The learners were also able to manage their time more effectively. This was measured by the short time they allocated learners to complete tasks and in turn, the learners would finish their tasks within the allocated time frame.

The above assertion was also echoed by Kamis (2011) who carried out a research in Somalia with teachers of early childhood education learners. These teachers explained that when they involved their learners in group work, they tended to have good relations among the learners. The teachers made it clear that their learners even made friends for themselves after various sessions of involvement in group work.

Lee (2014) conducted a research in Toronto with teachers of first language learners who were also ECE learners. The interviewed teachers perceived group work as a teaching method that allows all learners the opportunity to collaborate through sharing knowledge with the aim of attaining the same objectives. The learners who have a clear understanding of the tasks that must be completed are able to share what they know with their group members which lead to the entire group having a clear understanding of the tasks that were assigned to them.

Locally, Rhudhumbu (2014) carried out a research in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province with primary school teachers. The researcher found out that group work was only used by fifty percent of the teachers who were involved in the study, in their classrooms. These teachers explained that they use group work because they have observed that learners at some time want to be involved in small groups so that they share their experiences. The teachers made it clear that group work gave their learners the chance to share ideas and prior knowledge on various tasks assigned to them which made them to reveal what they already know. Despite this perception of group work being given by primary school teachers who also include the teachers of junior learners who are nine years and above, the perception can also refer to ECE learners. This is typical of some ECE learners because some of these learners have the zeal to share with others the experiences they would have gone through.

In Sweden, teachers of eight to nine year old learners were involved in a research by Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) and they brought out the view that they pay particular attention on group

composition when they involve learners in group work. These teachers explained that they consider creating homogeneous groups when they involve their learners in group work. These teachers explained that they always take learners' ability and sex into consideration as they select their groups because group composition predicts the performance of the groups. However, these Swedish teachers made clear indications that their learners often criticise their selection of groups. Such learners preferred to self select their groups so that they carry out tasks with their friends.

Gillies and Boyle (2010) agree with the above sentiments and the findings of the research which they carried out in Australia revealed that the teachers used a variety of strategies to constitute group members. These teachers composed their learners' groups using mixed gender. Sometimes they would select their learners' groups on the basis of their abilities. The teachers perceived that mixed ability grouping enabled learners who are less capable to benefit from the guidance they received from their more capable peers. This notion may also represent ECE learners in Zimbabwean classrooms because ECE learners in these classrooms have different abilities hence master concepts differently, (Rhudhumbu; 2014). Friendship was also said to be sometimes taken into consideration when allocating learners into groups. The teachers in this study also indicated that they stuck rigidly to groups of four learners wherever possible and it worked brilliantly for them.

In another study, on group work, Phong and Nguyen (2017) carried out a research in Vietnam with teachers of five to six year old learners it was found out that group games do not usually provide the teacher with the freedom to choose the number of learners that will constitute a group. However, the choice to select the number of learners who will form a group was determined by the nature of the game and the children who can the game. The teachers also



expressed that the size of the group should enable each learner to represent the team as the game suggests. The respondents in this research explained that when game requirements are maintained, learners will develop team spirit and exchange ideas among themselves.

Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) carried out a research in Sweden. The research revealed that teachers perceived group work as a teaching method that is time consuming because the time allocated in their schools' schedules was too short while group work required more time for their learners to be able to get the tasks completed hence these teachers resorted to not using group work in their classrooms.

The teachers interviewed by Lee (2014) praised the use of group work in their classrooms. The teachers expressed that group work was a teaching method that they could utilise in a variety of curriculum areas. Language Arts, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies were the subjects that were cited in the research where group work was used. The teachers in this study also indicated that when their learners are in small groups, they have the chance to share ideas, answer questions, work together and develop problem solving skills.

Westbrook, Durrani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Baddy and Salvi (2013) in their research which they conducted in Kenya with teachers of primary schools revealed that teachers agreed that careful monitoring of group work was important because learners sometimes ignore the tasks that would have been assigned to them and resort to playing.

In a research conducted by Talis (2009) in Spain with teachers of eleven year olds, it was found out that the teachers praised collaborative learning. The teachers indicated that collaborative learning had the ability to improve their learners' grades from being below average and some even rising to an extent of being above average to excellent academic performance. In support, Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) revealed that teachers who participated

mentioned that their learners were finding the tasks less challenging and it motivated the learners to work out all the assignments given to their groups. The motivation which the learners had was due to their realising that they assist each other as a group in coming up with solutions to the tasks assigned.

Teachers of young children in Australia who participated in a research that was conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) indicated that they are prompted to use group work as a method of teaching in their classrooms because it enables the teachers to consider various aspects in selecting learners for group work. The teachers presented various matters like considering mixing gender, allowing learners to self select their groups and placing learners of same gender to make a group as they allocate learners in their various groups. These teachers elaborated that they tried to balance boys and girls in mixed gender groups because they perceived that group composition predicts the performance of the groups and that mixing gender meant learners would work to complete assigned tasks rather than spending time playing in their groups.

### **What prompts ECE teachers to use group work in their classrooms?**

In regards to what prompts teachers to use group work, Martine (2008) carried out a research in Asian classes of young children, the teachers involved in this study, revealed that using group work in their classrooms created a more secure and positive classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, teachers in Asia indicated that learners were afraid to respond to questions in

front of the whole class but this changed upon their introduction to group work. It turned out that learners became willing to actively participate in group work. These teachers expressed that learners became able to confidently talk and express themselves as there was less pressure on them during group work.

A research conducted by Gorgon-Matea (2008) in Poland with teachers of young children, brought forth the assertion that these teachers were prompted to use group work in their classrooms by the large numbers of learners that they were having. The informants in this study expressed that dividing learners into groups made the large classes manageable as all the learners have to concentrate on completing the different tasks that the teacher would have assigned them. The teachers in this study further explained that dividing the class into groups gave their children more opportunities to talk than in full class organisation.

Robyn et al (2005) in a study conducted with teachers of Kindergarten learners found out that teachers tend to underestimate children's ability to engage in cooperative interactions. The teachers in this research revealed that they were taught that infants and young children could not share or engage in reciprocal interactions. The teachers indicated that they were prompted by this notion and resorted to using group work in their classrooms because they wanted to find out on their own. It was further revealed by this study that infants and young children can be involved in group work and produce best results academically and in their development.

The findings from a research carried out by Arkorful (2012) in Ghana supports the above view. Teachers in this study explained that they encouraged the large numbers of learners in their classrooms to re-arrange tables and chairs to form groups. While in those groups tasks were assigned and in the process, learning that yielded results was achieved. As learners were in groups, they owned their environment and sharing of ideas was achieved. The teachers

further emphasised that learners enjoyed their freedom more if they were left to work on their own in groups.

Harrar (2007) found out that Kindergarten teachers at Park Forest Elementary were prompted to use group work by the diverse positive attributes that this teaching method presented. Kindergarten teachers at this school said that group work provides rich and necessary opportunities for their students to reflect upon reactions and perspectives of other peers. This reflection was said that it may lead to the revision of students' cognitive systems and such revisions can in turn lead to the establishment of new meanings. The teachers further reiterated that Kindergarten students who are aged between five and six are capable of working together in partners and small groups of three to five students. These students were said they are able to understand and their peers and as a result they were prompted to involve these learners in group work. The teachers further explained that despite being able to work in groups, some students may require the teacher's support in order to make group work successful.

Furthermore, Bojuweyo and Moletsane (2014) conducted a research in South Africa in the Western Cape with ECE teachers. The study revealed that assisting learners to work in groups enhanced learners' development of self esteem and promoted acceptable social behaviours of turn taking, sharing, tolerance and appreciation. These skills maximised children's learning and removed barriers to learning. These barriers were indicated as lack of confidence and a low self esteem

The teachers in a study conducted by Chiriak and Frykedal (2011) in Sweden demonstrated that they are prompted to use group work by two factors. These teachers explained that they opted for group work because they needed to develop learners' personal skills and their collaboration abilities hence they employed group work in their classrooms. Another reason

was that they wanted their learners to support each other and get inspiration from other group members as they collaborated on a common task. The teachers believed that it was essential for the learners to learn to communicate with other group members and analyse their contributions. As a result the teachers were motivated to use group work as learners would be active participants in their learning.

Robyn et al (2005) carried out a research with teachers of Kindergarten learners. The teachers involved in this study explained that when young children first come to a structured educational setting, their fledging social, emotional and understanding skills are challenged in new and more complex ways. The teachers further explained that the young children will need to interact and negotiate with a large number of other learners who possess different levels of social and emotional competencies, interests, cognitive abilities and interaction styles. Some learners will need the teachers' support to successfully manage these challenges. The teachers in this study reiterated that involving young children who have just been enrolled at school better prepares them for the ability to interact competently and positively with others. The teachers involved in this study made it clear that it is because of these attributes of group work that drives them to use this teaching method with their Kindergarten learners.

Oblak, Vehovar and Maribor (2005) conducted a research in Slovenia with teachers of young children aged between five and six. The findings in this research revealed that such teachers employ group work in their classrooms in an effort not to miss opportunities to promote young children's development and learning. The teachers pointed out that they use group work because it fosters their children's enthusiasm and develops their social skills as well as that it promotes interdisciplinary learning. These attributes of group work aid in their young children's total development.

A research carried out by Gorgon-Matea (2008) further explains that the teachers involved indicated that through involving learners in group work, in the long run this teaching method developed learners' independence. At first, preparing a group or a pair presentation was in a way, time consuming and required more effort from the teacher. However, through using this teaching method regularly, students became more efficient and skilled at practising language. They become more confident, their motivation also increased and they were able to manage completing assigned tasks, without regular teacher's supervision. Students learn how to learn and gradually take responsibility for their own learning if the teacher involves them in group work.

In a study that was carried out in Zimbabwe in Bulawayo with secondary school teachers, Mafa (2013) found out that the Government's movement towards inclusive education has prompted teachers to use group work in their classrooms. The teachers suggested that having students with special educational needs in the regular classrooms rather than in special schools has made it imperative to find workable teaching methods that in turn benefits all learners. The teachers involved in this study also indicated that involving learners in group work, made it possible for these learners to contribute confidently with regular learners in group settings. Those learners who would have mastered concepts faster were indicated that they explained them to other learners who would be facing difficulties to conceptualise. The informants expressed that group work enabled those learners considered as academically challenged to contribute positively to the accomplishment of tasks. The teachers further acknowledged that group work performed wonders in fighting stigma and discrimination as learners would accept those learners with special needs in their groups. This assertion is applicable in ECE classrooms as the Government's policy of inclusive education is being implemented in all schools and classrooms in Zimbabwe.

A research conducted by Robinson (1991) in Robyn et (2005) found out that teachers of heterogeneous groups of learners in their classrooms perceived group work as a teaching method that worked wonders for them. These teachers explained that the gifted or talented learners had special roles in their classrooms. The teachers in this study, described the role of the 'gifted' or 'talented' learners as the 'explainer' or the teacher's 'helper'. The teachers in this research indicated that they found the gifted learners very helpful in their classrooms because these learners will assist their peers to gain skills and concept. According to teachers involved in this study, having a gifted 'learners' meant ability to manage classroom control as all learners will be busy working on assigned tasks while other groups will be assisted by these 'gifted' and 'talented' learners. In addition the teachers of fourth and fifth grade learners involved in a study by Robyn et al (2005) explained that the interactions and experiences that the gifted and talented learners go through in mixed ability classrooms as they assist those learners who acquire concepts at a later stage are rather beneficial for them. The teachers involved in this study indicated that these learners gained in self esteem. The teachers reiterated that as the learners will be explaining concepts to their group members, confidence will be gained in the process.

**Do ECE teachers enjoy using group work with learners?**

Teachers of young children interviewed by Lee (2014) in Toronto enjoy using group work in their classrooms. These teachers explained that group work can be implemented in a variety of curriculum areas. The teachers used group work in all the subjects as long as all the learners in their classrooms were engaged. The teachers in this study mentioned subjects that gave them excellent results when they employ group work. The subjects were Social Sciences, Language Arts, Mathematics and Environmental Science. The teachers expressed excitement in using group work to present Maths concepts to learners. In groups, learners were said to have the chance to share ideas, answer questions, work together to develop mathematical vocabulary as well as solve mathematical problems like classification, one to one correspondence.

In agreement, a research conducted by Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) in Sweden with teachers of eight to nine year old learners indicated that teachers also enjoyed using group work. These teachers explained that when their learners were supposed to work out problems such as in Environmental Science, group work came top over individual work. The same was valid for the development of communication and languages, which according to the informants is best achieved in collaboration with others in teaching methods like group work. However, Rhundumbu (2014) carried out a research in Zimbabwe in Masvingo Province with primary school teachers and the findings of this research were that very few teachers involved learners in group work during the teaching of Mathematics in their classrooms. According to the results revealed by the study, these teachers are unfamiliar with this method of teaching in Mathematics. As a result, they do not involve group work in teaching Mathematics.

Nair and Alwee carried out a research in Asian classrooms with secondary school students and this research revealed that group work enables learners to develop imaginative and



creative thinking. The teachers in this research explained that as students are involved in group work, they are bound to think critically of the answers that they will contribute because failure to contribute valuably will mean that other learners will laugh. As students are thinking of the right answers, they will be developing imaginative and creativity. This in turn, was referred by the teachers as aiding the development of a critical and informed mind. Martin (2005) concurs and cites that group work encourages the development of critical thinking skills in members involved.

Bennet and Danne (1992) cited in Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) found out that involving learners in collaboration work which can also be referred to as group work fosters the development of lifelong learning skills and optimism for the future, in learners. This was claimed to be so because the teachers involved in this research explained that many economic decisions in life and cooperate businesses in the commercial world are made within a team or group framework with two or more economic agents consulting each other and offering the best option for their investments thereby deciding the course of action to take. These teachers indicated that just as group work enables learners to collaborate and work as a team, this teaching method prepares the learners involved in group work for the future.

In a study carried out by Magidi (2006) in a study conducted in Zimbabwe in Harare with teachers of secondary school learners, the study found out that the teachers enjoyed and accepted group work. This was so because the teachers indicated that this method of teaching enables some learners to be occupied meaningfully while the teacher is assisting some groups who would have asked clarification from the teacher because they may have failed to interpret the group assignment given to their group or they may have been stuck and are failing to continue working productively. In turn, the teachers involved in this study,

mentioned that noise in the classroom would be minimised while learning would be taking place.

Some teachers involved in a research conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) mention that they are reluctant to embrace cooperative learning with their learners in their classrooms. The teachers involved in this research reiterated that their reluctance is partly due to the challenges that this teaching method poses to the teachers' control of the channels of communication in their classrooms. The teachers in this study indicated that they lack the knowledge of how best they can control their learners' way of communicating with them when they have involved them in cooperative work. Some teachers gave an example of what they once experienced. These teachers indicated that they had not explained how the learners must relate to the teacher during cooperative work and as a result all the groups who had faced challenges in their group just stood up and came towards the teacher and each group narrated their challenge without giving each other turns to talk to the teacher. The teachers mentioned that the experience was embarrassing on their part because it took them too long to be able to maintain order in the classroom. It was because of situations of that nature that the teachers chose not to choose to involve their learners in group work.

The teachers in a study conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) further indicated that they do not enjoy involving their learners in cooperative work because this teaching method was too demanding to the teachers in terms of organising and preparing group tasks that would ensure learners benefit. The teachers in this study explained that they were supposed to establish before involving their learners in cooperative work that the key elements for successful cooperative work are in place. The teachers added by explaining that it is not only tasks for the learners that require preparation but also the resources that would be used during

cooperative work. The teachers in this study explained that the resources needed to be sufficient for every learner and also appropriate for the tasks that they would have designed for the learners. It was because of the tiresome input required that these teachers did not enjoy involving their learners in group work.

Baines et al (2014) also revealed in their study that teachers they involved in their study often experienced disappointments with involving their learners in group work because their learners were sometimes reluctant to be actively participating in group activities. The teachers in this study revealed that these learners would be protesting to the teachers on the way they would have been allocated in groups. It was found out in this study that learners sometimes have poor relations with other members in their classrooms and if coincidentally the teacher allocates such learners in one group, learners become reluctant to work assigned tasks in their groups. The teachers made it clear that their learners prefer to self select their groups so that they work with their friends and if they allow them to choose their own groups, the teachers indicated that the learners would actively participate in group work.

In a research that Mafa (2013) conducted in Zimbabwe, teachers involved in this research, further explained that they enjoy involving their learners in group work because it is a platform for them to be able to motivate their learners to perform well in their assigned tasks. This was said to be possible by the teachers because they indicated that group work provided them with the opportunity to explain areas of weakness of a particular group of learners and the teacher gets to address only the affected parties without the entire class listening and the group members will be motivated to learn in the process.

In Somalia, Kamis (2011) conducted a research in Somalia with teachers of ECE learners. The research found out those teachers of ECE learners perceiving group work as a teaching method that had positive attributes. The teachers revealed that ECE learners who were involved in group work, proved to have increased good relations among themselves. The learners could assist one another as a group and were able to socialise even outside the classroom which was not observed before. These learners also had an increased sense of belonging to the classroom as they were actively involved in their learning.

In a research carried out by Robyn et al (2005) with teachers of second grade learners in a very prestigious school serving a high socio-economic-level population and the school makes an effort to compose heterogeneous classrooms with identical numbers of students from the various levels of academic achievement. Some of the teachers in this study explained that some learners complained that they no longer wanted to continue working in groups but rather prefer to work individually. It was found out that learners who did not want to be involved in group work were high achieving learners with impressive abilities. The teachers indicated that these learners did not want to work in groups because they believed group work would lower their grades due to the lower achieving students in their groups. The teachers in this study further explained that the high achieving learners were unwilling to do the work for the other members of the group whose grades were lower than theirs. The teachers indicated that they had to explain to the high achieving learners that group work does not affect their individual marks.

Gilies and Boyle (2010) in a research that they conducted with teachers of middle year learners in Australia found out that group work required careful preparation and implementation. The teachers involved in this study indicated that group work required them

to ensure that the key elements for successful group work are established. These elements included ensuring that tasks are designed to make learners understand that they are not only required to complete their part of the work but to ensure that others in the group do likewise. The teachers also expressed that they needed to prepare learners so as to promote acceptance of responsibility for contributing to the group tasks and demonstrating the skills needed to prepare learners so as to promote acceptance of responsibility for contributing to the group tasks and demonstrating the skills needed to resolve small conflicts as they carry out group tasks. The teachers involved in this study indicated that if groups are structured with these elements in place, then learners are more likely to work cooperatively to help and promote group member's learning. These tasks enable the teacher to prepare and plan for the next lesson with learners.

In another study conducted by Lee (2014), teachers who were the participants, contributed that although group work is led by the learners and it is created for learners' learning opportunities, it is the responsibility of the teacher to organise learners and provide tasks for group work. The teachers in this study expressed gratitude for the benefits of the teaching method of group work to them and to their learners. In agreement, Nair Alwee (2012) pinpoints that the teachers involved in the study they carried out revealed that it is the teachers always who have the utmost responsibility for all the actions and processes occurring in their classrooms. The teachers further explained that involving their learners in group work activities entails that the teachers are expected to have knowledge about classroom interaction and all group processes. According to the participants, group work enables the teachers to know all their learners' learning styles and in turn they will be able to best assist them.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed literature that is relevant to teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in teaching ECE learners. The literature was linked to the research questions. The next chapter focused on the research methodology.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Research Methodology**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter focused on the research design employed in carrying out this research. The population and sample were identified. Further, the instrumentation, data collection procedures as well as the data analysis plan were addressed. A summary was provided at the end of the chapter.

#### **3.1 Research design**

Polit and Beck (2004) define a research design as the overall plan for obtaining answers to the research questions being studied and for handling some of the difficulties encountered during the research process. According to De Vas (1998) a research design articulates what data is required, which instruments are going to be used to collect data and analyse the data and how all of this is going to answer the research questions. A research design can therefore be defined as a blueprint for conducting the investigation. In this research, the researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design. MacMillan and Schumacher (2004) explain that the descriptive survey research design has a high degree of representativeness through sampling, the main methods for this research design in collecting data are the questionnaire, interviews, observations and tests. Also this research method describes the data collected. The descriptive survey research design enabled the researcher to work with a sample to obtain data for the research and drew conclusions of the population based on the sample. She was able to obtain the participants' opinions, perceptions and views on group work through the use of the questionnaire. Lastly, she was able to describe the findings obtained which are

allowed by this research design. Chiromo (2009) claims that the descriptive research design is perhaps the most frequently used method of research in educational research. As this is an educational research, the researcher adopted the descriptive research design in this research.

### **3.2 Population and sample**

Best and Khan (1993) define population as any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. According to Chiromo (2009) population refers to all members of a defined group under study from whom information is collected. Thus, population refers to all individuals of a particular time at a particular place that is of interest to the researcher. It covers the site and the geographical area where the study is conducted. The study was drawn from a population of seven Primary Schools in St Patrick's cluster. This cluster is in Chiwundura circuit which in turn falls under Gweru District. The population has a total of sixty ECE teachers.

#### **3.2.1 The research sample**

According to Best and Khan (2003) a sample is a group chosen from a larger population with the aim of yielding information about this population as a whole, it is a miniature picture of the entire group and it is a smaller representation of a larger whole. Chiromo (2006) defines sampling as a process of selecting a few (a sample) from a bigger group (the target population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting a fact, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group. Therefore, in order to come up with the sample size for this study, respondents were selected from the population. St Patrick's cluster consists of seven primary schools. The sample for this research was ECE teachers from five primary schools. The researcher resolved to working with five schools because of financial limitations as the schools are too far away from each other. The ECE teachers were as follows: School 'A' ten,



School 'B' five, School 'C' ten, School 'D' five and school 'E' ten. In total, the sample was forty ECE teachers in St Patrick's Cluster.

There are two main types of sampling methods namely probability and non – probability. Probability sampling ensures that each population member has a known, non zero chance of inclusion and sample members are drawn with a random selection mechanism, (Best and Khan:2003). Examples of probability sampling methods include simple random sampling, systematic sampling and stratified random sampling. Best and Khan (2003) points out that non probability sampling refers to a sampling method where some elements of the population have no chance of selection. Examples of non – probability sampling methods are snowball sampling and quota sampling.

The researcher used simple random sampling to select the sample. The researcher used random letters to represent all schools in the target population, which is St Patrick's Cluster. The letters were A, B, C, D, E, F and G which were written on scraps of paper. Of these scraps of letters representing the population, five were written 'yes' while two were written 'no'. These letters written on scraps of paper represented the seven schools. These scraps of paper were placed in a jar and the jar was shaken. Blindly, the researcher selected the five scraps of paper with 'yes' which made the sample for the research.

### **3.3 Instrumentation**

Alshenqueeti (2014) postulates that instruments are devices which the researcher uses to collect data. They are the means used by the researcher to solicit information from the respondents. The researcher used one research instrument to obtain findings for this research. The questionnaire was the instrument that was used for the collection of data in this study.

#### **3.3.1 The questionnaire**

According to Silverman (2010) the questionnaire is a list of questions to which answers are

being sought. Haralambos and Holborn (2010) view the questionnaire as a systematically prepared document with a set of questions deliberately designed to elicit responses from respondents for the purpose of collecting data. It can be deduced that the questionnaire is a list of questions compiled by the researcher, to be completed by the respondents for the purpose of gathering data for the research. Cohen (2005) postulates that the questionnaire allows participants time to consider their responses before responding. The use of the questionnaire also ensures anonymity of responses, generally resulting in honest and non-biased responses. In such a case the issue of confidentiality is upheld. Furthermore, Cohen (2005) points out that the use of the questionnaire is cost effective and saves time since it is distributed to many people at once and the researcher has no need to travel anywhere to meet respondents. According to Neumann (2000) the use of the questionnaire enables participants to have the freedom to express themselves freely.

Although there is lack of direct communication between the researcher and the respondents when using the questionnaire, the researcher was careful to reduce the variations in designing the questionnaire. The researcher was also aware that some respondents may regard the questions as difficult; while others may consider them to be too direct and some may personalize the questions which may directly influence the results of the research. She then made use of a questionnaire with closed ended items that focused the participants' responses towards what the researcher specifically wanted revealed.

### **3.4 Data collection procedures**

The researcher collected a confirmation letter that she is a student who is conducting an educational research from the Faculty of Education at Midlands State University. Permission

was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to carry out the research in the Midlands Province. After being granted permission, the researcher proceeded to the Provincial and District Education Offices to be given a letter of permission to enter the sampled schools and this was successful. Upon seeking permission, the researcher had indicated two schools but while in the process of the research it was discovered that two schools will not produce valid results and as a result five schools were used to ensure validity of the results obtained from the research. The participants were assured that data collected were to be kept confidential and that the information would be used for research purposes only. The researcher then self-administered the questionnaires to the participants in the sampled schools and waited for respondents to complete them. The researcher then collected them to ensure a hundred percent response rate. All the information that the researcher wanted responded to on the questionnaire was completed by all participants in the sample.

### **3.5 Data analysis plan**

In this research, a quantitative method of data analysis was used to analyse data collected through the questionnaire while statistical data were qualitatively described. The number/percentage statistical analysis was used. Tables, pie charts and bar graphs were used and they helped to illustrate data as well as for easier comprehension. These enabled the researcher to show facts and develop explanations. The data were analysed in a bid to answer the research questions that were posed for this study.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter described the research methodology for teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in the teaching of ECE learners. The research design, population and sample were discussed while the research instruments were identified for data collection. Also the

data analysis plan was indicated. The next chapter focused on data presentation, analysis and discussion.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter focused on data presentation and the analysis was done using number/percentage while the data were illustrated on tables. The discussion of the findings was also presented. The chapter concluded with a summary.

#### 4.1 Presentation and analysis of findings

##### 4.1.1 Showing the respondents rate, No (40)

<b>Level of ECE Taught</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires distributed</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires returned</b>	<b>Response rate %</b>
ECD 'A'	7	7	100
ECD 'B'	9	9	100
Grade 1	8	8	100
Grade 2	8	8	100
Grade 3	8	8	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1.1 The respondents rate

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015) adequate conclusions on a research topic are drawn if the response rate is above 50%. This research achieved an excellent response rate of 100%. Forty questionnaires were self-administered and were returned by the respondents.

This section presented the respondents' personal information on gender, age, academic and professional qualifications as well as their teaching experience as primary school and ECE teachers.

#### 4.1.2 Showing the distribution of respondents by gender

Gender	Male	Percentage %	Female	Percentage %	Totals
Number of teachers	2	5	38	95	40 (100%)

Table 4.1.2

The study found out that 95% of the respondents in the sample were female whilst only 5% were male. This showed that females dominated ECE teachers in this research sample.

#### 4.1.3 Showing the distribution of respondents by age

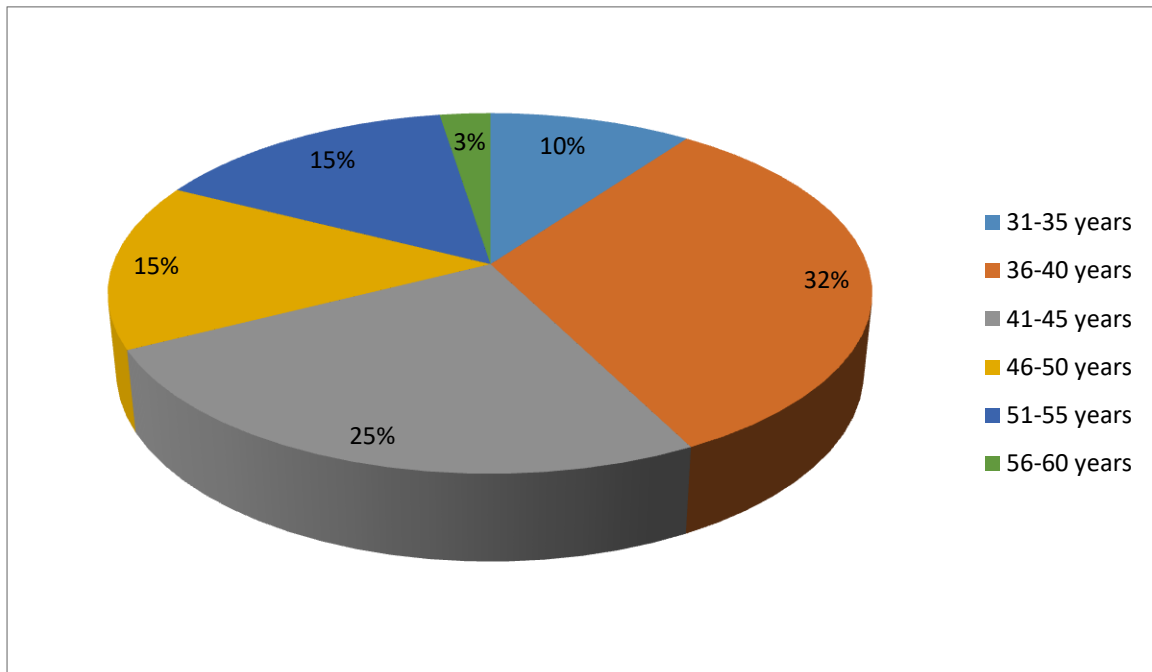


figure 4.1.1

The researcher found out that the 36-40 age category has a high number of respondents which was 32%, this meant that these ECE teachers still have years to serve in the teaching profession. The 46-50 and 51-55 age categories were represented by an equal number of respondents which was 15%.

#### 4.1.4 Showing the distribution of respondents by their Ordinary Level qualifications

<b>Academic and Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>‘O’ Level</b>	35	87
<b>‘A’ Level</b>	5	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1.3

It was clearly indicated by all respondents that they hold ordinary level qualifications whilst only 13% proceeded to advanced level and have the certificates.

#### 4.1.5 Showing the distribution of participants by professional qualifications

<b>Professional qualifications</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Dip Ed.	35	87
B Ed.	5	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1.4

All the participants in this study indicated that they were trained in Teachers’ Colleges as they attained Diplomas in Education. It was also found out that 13% of the respondents were Bachelor of Education Degree holders.

#### 4.1.6 Indicating the sample’s responses on their teaching experience (No =40)

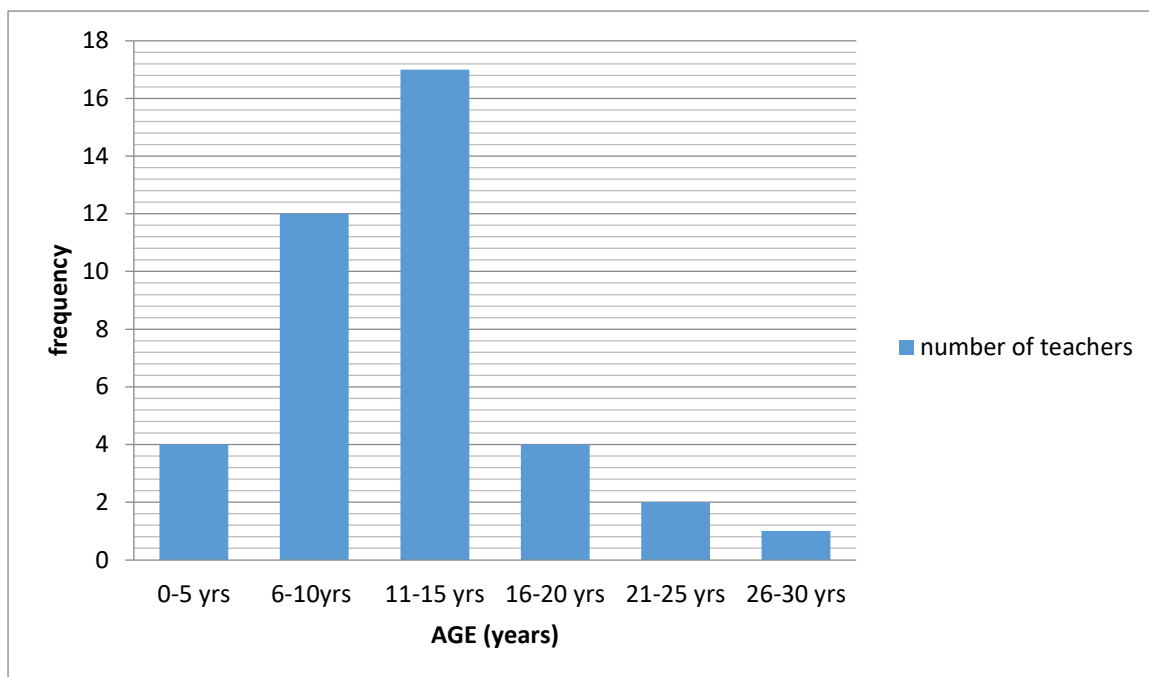


figure 4.1.2

The findings of this research revealed that only 10% of the respondents had 0-5 years teaching experience while 42% of the respondents had 11-15years teaching experience. This meant that all the respondents had experience in using different teaching methods in their classrooms with learners.

#### 4.1.7 Showing the respondents by years of experience while teaching ECE classes

<b>Years teaching ECE classes</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>0 – 5</b>	19	47
<b>6 – 10</b>	14	35
<b>11 – 15</b>	6	15
<b>16 – 20</b>	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1.5



The findings indicated that all respondents have at least one year's teaching experience while teaching ECE learners which meant that they have practical experience on how these learners acquire concepts and skills.

4.1.8 Showing the participants responses to the questionnaires distributed (No= 40)

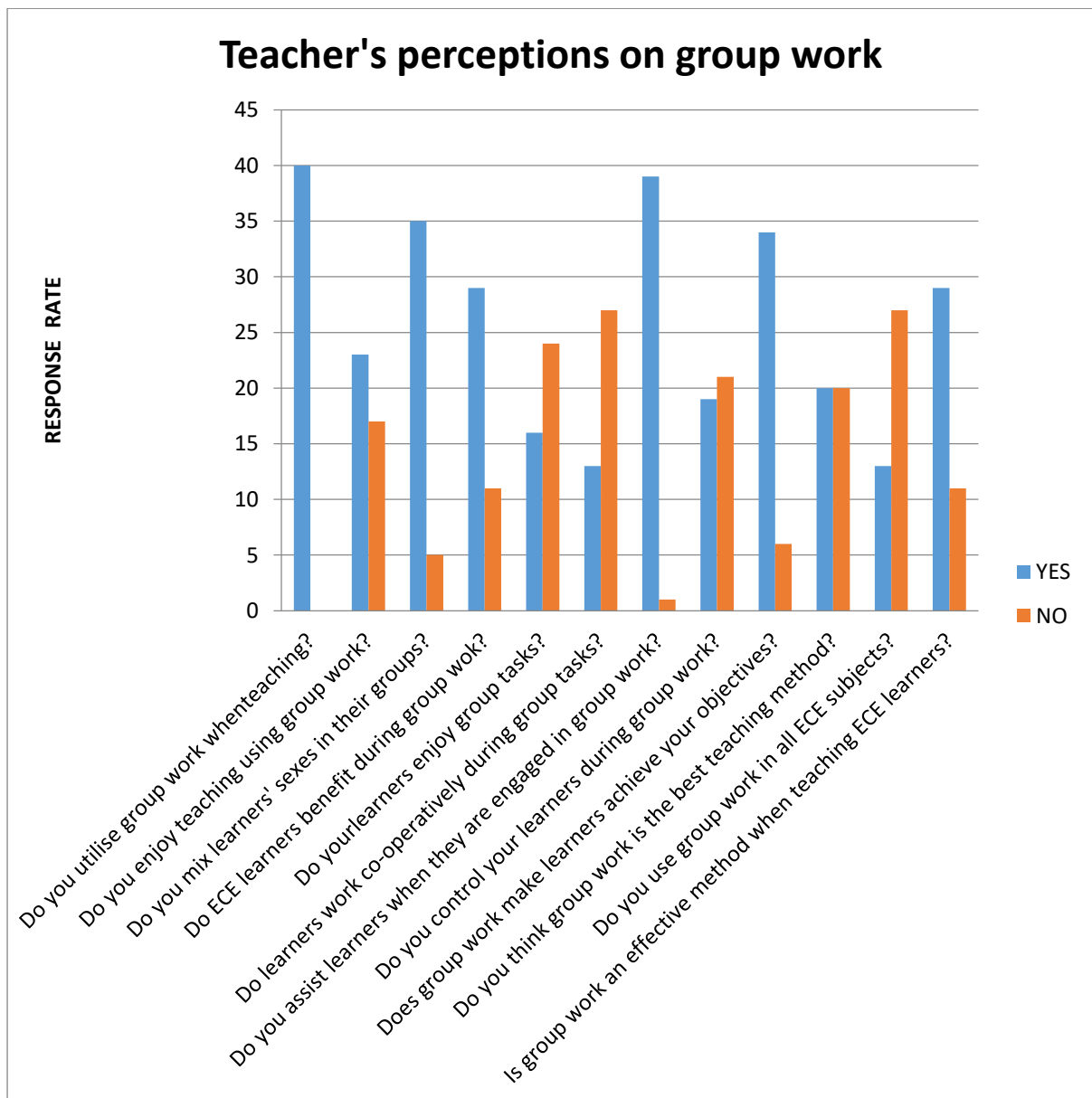


Figure 4.1.3

The above figure represents the data that was gathered on teachers' perceptions on the role of group work. all the respondents responded to the questions asked.

The data that were collected using the questionnaire revealed that the informants responded to all the questions that were asked by the researcher. It was also found out, by a 100% response to question one which asked if the sample used group work as a teaching method in their classrooms, that all the respondents utilised group work in their classrooms with ECE learners.

## **4.2 Discussion**

The findings of this research revealed that all the teachers who participated in the research, utilised group work with ECE learners in their classrooms during teaching and learning. This was so because a 100% of the respondents said that it is a good teaching method. The presented data indicated that this method was child centred and by utilising it, ECE teachers ensured that learners participated in their learning because ECE teachers are trained to actively involve learners in their learning to ensure holistic development of each learner. This coincided with the 100% respondents who said that they were Diploma in Education as well as Certificate in Education holders. This finding meant they were all qualified primary school teachers.

In regards to the participants' perceptions on the use of group work, 57% of the respondents said they enjoyed teaching ECE learners using group work because it made their learners achieve their objectives. Group work was said to be a method of teaching that enabled ECE learners to know each other during group activities and it gave their learners the opportunities to learn to interact with other group members hence the participants in this research enjoyed using it. Likewise, a study that was conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) in Australia cited in this study revealed that teachers indicated that group work enabled their six to nine-year-old learners to know each other better. However, 43% of the respondents said that they do not

enjoy using group work when teaching ECE learners despite them having previously echoed sentiments that they utilise the method in their teaching. The sample revealed that they lacked the knowledge of how to effectively employ group work so that it benefits the learners. This was also elaborated by Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) in the literature review in this research when they explained that teachers of young children in Sweden do not enjoy using group work because they do not know how to use this method with their learners. Another research conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2009) revealed teachers explaining that they do not enjoy teaching using group work because they need to teach learners how to work cooperatively with others first, before they can carry out group tasks which in turn uses most of their teaching time because their teaching schedules did not allow them free space.

Data that were analysed on the nature of the grouping revealed that 87% of the informants said that they allocate learners into groups for ease of teaching. Relatedly, a research carried out by Gillies and Boyle (2009) cited in this study revealed that the teachers of young children in Australia made the selection of the groups taking into consideration mixed gender. These teachers explained that they tried create a balance of boys and girls because these teachers perceived that group composition predicts the performance of the groups and mixing gender meant learners would work to complete assigned tasks rather than spending time playing in their groups.

In this research, it was revealed that 72% of the respondents perceived that group work was a method that benefits ECE learners in their classrooms because of the positive outcomes which this teaching method contributed to learners. In agreement, Talis (2009) revealed that most teachers in Spain utilise collaborative learning in their teaching because these teachers experience positive outcomes like improving their learners' grades. Likewise, Westbrook and Durrani (2013) was also cited as saying that teachers of primary school learners in Kenya perceived that group work benefited their learners because the method played a key role in

learners coming up with problem solving activities and in developing communication skills in learners.

Asked whether the participants thought learners enjoyed being involved in group work, it was interesting to note that 40% of the respondents agreed that their learners enjoyed working in groups as this method provided them with the opportunities to confidently express themselves to a smaller group than to the whole class. As earlier alluded to by Mafa (2013) in a research carried out in Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, teachers of primary school learners indicated that group work enabled these learners to contribute confidently with regular learners in group settings. Relatedly, the regular learners who could understand concepts easily could explain them to those learners with special needs. However, 60% indicated that the ECE learners do not enjoy working in groups. Some reasons were that the respondents did not allow learners to self select their groups hence the group members were not their friends which led to poor peer interactions. A research carried out by Baines et al (2014) revealed that teachers in his study often experienced disappointments as their learners did not enjoy group work and were sometimes reluctant to be actively participating in group activities because they had poor relations with the members of their respective groups. In a research carried out by Robyn et al (2005), the teachers involved explained that high achieving learners in their classrooms do not enjoy being involved in group work with the low achieving learners because they perceived that their good marks would be affected by the lower marks of their low achieving group members. The teachers in this study resolved the conflict by explaining to the high achieving learners that individual marks are not at all affected by the marks they receive during group work.

Having been asked if their learners work co-operatively during group work, 67% of the respondents in this research said that their ECE learners sometimes do not work co-operatively during group work, instead they preferred doing activities individually. In a study

conducted by Lee (2014), teachers in the study explained that sometimes their learners were not co-operating in group tasks because they sometimes had troubles in understanding the content being discussed during group activities which made them lose focus in the activity. Thirty-three percent of the respondents agreed that ECE learners work co-operatively during group activities.

In an effort to find out if teachers assisted their ECE learners during group work, the respondents overwhelmingly agreed by 97% that they assist their learners during group work so that the learners remain focused to the tasks assigned to them and if the tasks are difficult the teachers explained them to the learners so that they work cooperatively and assist one another during group tasks. In regards to a research conducted in Zimbabwe, Mafa (2013) also found out that the teachers involved in his research explained that as they offer assistance to their learners in groups, they also motivate the group members to perform well in their respective assigned tasks. In this study, the researcher noted that only 48% of the respondents are able to control their ECE learners during group work whilst 52% of the respondents said they found it difficult to control them. This fact contradicted with these respondents' view of enjoyment in using group work with ECE learners in their classrooms and the researcher found out that despite the challenge of failing to control ECE learners during group work, the respondents enjoyed using this method in teaching ECE learners hence they utilised it.

The informants in this study indicated that they prefer teaching using a teaching method that helps in the attainment of their set objectives. To these respondents, group work proved to be the teaching method that helped ECE learners to achieve their objectives hence teachers were prompted to use it in their classrooms. This was evidenced by 85% of the informants who agreed that group work made ECE learners achieve their objectives. In a research conducted by Oblak et al (2005) cited in this research, the findings revealed that the teachers in the

study employed group work in their classrooms in an effort not to miss opportunities to promote their learners' holistic development which included fostering learners' enthusiasm and development of their social skills. According to that research, these objectives were always successfully achieved.

The data that were analysed on the perceptions of the participants on whether group work was the best teaching method revealed that 50% of the respondents indicated that they perceived group work as the best teaching method with ECE learners. The researcher found out that these respondents based their perceptions on the factors that group work benefited ECE learners in the development of skills like turn taking and language, this method ensured ECE learners achieve their own set objectives and some learners enjoyed learning when teachers employ this teaching method.

The data that were analysed in this research revealed that 72% of the respondents perceived group work as an effective method and they indicated that they use this teaching method in some subjects when teaching ECE learners. This perception made by ECE teachers proved that sometimes they select some subjects in which they can employ group work. In relation to what the researcher cited in the literature review in this study, Phong and Nguyen (2017) found out that group work can be utilised in other curriculum areas with young children especially in Movement where learners can play group games and become winners or losers. Sadly, some 28% of the respondents indicated that they do not rate group work as an effective teaching method and somehow use it occasionally.

### **4.3 Summary**

This chapter presented and analysed the research findings. A discussion of the findings answering the research questions was done. The next chapter is the last chapter. It presented the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This last chapter of the research strived to bring up coherence to the perceptions of teachers on group work that were enclosed in this study. The chapter aimed at bringing a summary to the research. It also linked the research questions to the findings obtained in the research. Conclusions and recommendations were provided.

### **5.1 Summary**

In chapter one, the research was introduced and the aim for conducting the study was to investigate teachers' perceptions on the role of group work in teaching ECE learners in St Patrick's Cluster in Chiwundura. The researcher provided a background of previous researches on the perceptions of teachers that had been conducted globally. In these researches teachers of young children were indicating group work as a teaching method that enabled learners to get to know each other, create good relations and develop friendships. These researches also brought out the notion that through involving young children in group work, the learners will be provided with the opportunities to collaborate. Researches that were conducted regionally were also cited. In these researches, teachers of elementary grades revealed that some classroom environments were characterised by disrespect, unfairness and intolerance but through involving their learners in group work, more collaboration, less competitive behaviour and improved communication skills were observed. Researches that were conducted locally were also cited and these included the researches carried out in Bulawayo's Metropolitan Province with secondary school teachers, Masvingo and lastly the one conducted in Harare with urban secondary schools. These researches also indicated the teachers praising the role of group work in developing tolerance and respect for others in their groups. However, some teachers revealed that they were not involving primary learners



in group work with Mathematics because they felt they are still young to be working in groups. The researcher indicated few researches that were carried out on group work involving learners as young as three years in Zimbabwean primary schools as the gap that this research was covering.

In the second chapter, literature was reviewed which aimed at answering the following research questions:

- I. How do teachers perceive the use of group work with ECE learners?
- II. What prompts ECE teachers to use group work in their classrooms?
- III. Do ECE teachers enjoy using group work with learners?

Prior to researches that were conducted on the perceptions of teachers on group work with ECE learners, it was revealed that some teachers use group work because it is a positive social experience that reinforces the learning that occurs in the classroom. However, the researcher noted that some teachers do not use group work in their classrooms because they indicated that group work was time consuming and these teachers lacked the knowledge of implementing group work effectively with their learners.

It was also cited that some teachers were prompted to use group work because of the large numbers of learners in their classrooms and upon implementing group work, they were able to manage their classrooms as all learners were said to be busy focusing on the tasks assigned to them in their groups. This section of the research revealed that some teachers enjoy using group work because of a variety of curriculum areas where this teaching method could be used like in Language Arts and Social Sciences.

It was also cited that some teachers do not enjoy using group work and they were revealed indicating that they do not want to be involved with this teaching method and would rather opt for other teaching methods because group work did not benefit their learners in any way.

The researcher used the descriptive survey as the research design for this study. This research design provided the researcher the chance to select a sample to obtain data for the research. This research was conducted with forty ECE teachers and it is the responses of this sample that was used to draw conclusions and recommendations for this research. The questionnaire was the instrument used to collect the data for this research from forty ECE teachers from five schools who made the sample for the research and the researcher self-administered the questionnaires to the participants in an effort to receive a 100% response rate. This was excellently achieved as all questionnaires were returned by the participants. The biographical data as well as teachers' perceptions that were collected from the sample, were the data gathered for this research. The findings were presented using tables, graphs and pie charts. Analysis for the research findings as well as discussion of the findings were done. This included the research finding out that most respondents were female teachers while only 5% represented the male gender was done. The data that were collected enabled the researcher to draw conclusions for this research and also provide recommendations.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

- ECE teachers utilise group work in their classrooms during teaching and learning.
- It is not all ECE teachers who perceive group work as a teaching method that they enjoy using. Some teachers do not enjoy using group work.
- The ECE teachers perceive that grouping learners through mixing their sexes enables group work to be effective.
- Teachers' perceptions on whether learners benefit from group work indicated that most learners benefit from being involved in group work.

- ECE teachers perceived that most learners do not enjoy being involved in group work despite benefiting from this teaching method.
- The teachers perceived that most ECE learners do not work co-operatively during group work.
- ECE teachers perceived that offering assistance to learners during group work enabled learners to focus on the tasks assigned.
- It was concluded that ECE teachers perceived that some teachers can control learners during group work while others cannot control their learners.
- It was perceived by ECE teachers that group work enabled learners to achieve their set objectives.
- Half of the teachers in this study perceived group work as the best teaching method.
- The ECE teachers in this study perceived that group work cannot be used in all curriculum subjects.
- It can be concluded that group work is an effective method when teaching ECE learners.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Having gathered the perceptions of ECE teachers on using group work with ECE learners, the researcher came up with the following:

- ECE teachers are recommended to enjoy teaching using group work
- Teachers of ECE learners are recommended to be flexible when allocating learners in groups so as to provide ECE learners with the opportunities to self select their groups sometimes.

- The researcher recommends ECE teachers to continue using group work with their learners because of the benefits noted.
- ECE teachers are recommended to encourage learners who are not working cooperatively during group work to try so that they collaborate with other group members in their learning.
- The researcher recommends ECE teachers to continue assisting learners in their classrooms during group work as it enables learners to remain focused at tasks assigned.

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