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**Early Childhood Development teachers' understandings of Indigenous Knowledge and their strategies for incorporating IK in their pedagogical practices**

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**Abstract**

The article explores Early Childhood Development teachers' understandings of Indigenous Knowledge and their strategies of incorporating this knowledge into their pedagogical practices. This article is based on my PhD studies and only presents one facet of the thesis. A qualitative research paradigm was adopted because this enabled me to obtain in-depth information from the teachers in their natural setting. A case study method was followed drawing on three schools which were purposively sampled to provide rich, in-depth data. The participants drawn from these schools comprised six early childhood development teachers and three School Heads. Semi- structured interviews, surveys, observation and document analysis were used to collect data. The findings revealed that participants have mixed understandings of what constitutes IK and of its value in the ECD setting. They also at times struggled to include relevant IK into their ECD practices. Findings also revealed that though teachers could identify various strategies for incorporating IK into their classroom practice they lacked the agency to do so as they did not see themselves as important stakeholders being able to make a positive contribution to ECD classroom implementation.

**Key words:** Early Childhood Development, ECD Curriculum; ECD Pedagogical Practices; ECD Policy, Indigenous Knowledge.

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### **Introduction**

Within the Zimbabwean education system, since the turn of the century Early Childhood Development (ECD) as well as the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) into teachers' classroom practice have become focus areas (Statutory Instrument 106 Of 2005). Prior to this renewed interest both areas had been disregarded and neglected; ECD because of Zimbabwe's colonial past (Mugweni, 2017) and IK because of disdain by Western scientific and academic establishments (Shizha, 2006; 2008) for the value of this type of knowledge, especially in teaching and learning contexts. As the benefits and value of ECD began to be recognised, the Zimbabwean Government introduced two compulsory ECD classes (Ministry of Education, 2004) for all Zimbabwean children between three to five years. ECD curriculum implementation was, however, strongly driven by a more formal approach to teaching and learning and the knowledge base was predominately informed by Western ways of knowing and doing (Dyanda, Mudukuti and Kuyayama, 2005). Little attention was given to the inclusion of IK into this curriculum.

Yet it is a well-recognised and widely accepted that quality ECD practices should be informed by the child's life world (Morrison, 2008). Both content and teaching strategies should be based on children's needs and interests and these interests and needs should be informed by local knowledge and local ways of doing, in other words by IK which according to Semali and Maretzki (2012) refers to local ways of knowing, seeing, and thinking that are passed down orally from generation to generation. Thus, there should be a dynamic relationship between ECD and IK which underpins teachers' pedagogical practices. However, for successful incorporation of IK in ECD, there is a need for a grounded understanding of IK by teachers. Hence, it is the aim of this article to establish how the ECD teachers understand IK and how they incorporate it into their pedagogical practices. This article sets out to explore the following research questions:

1. What is teachers' understanding of IK?
2. How and to what extent does indigenous knowledge inform teachers' classroom practices?
3. What strategies are identified by teachers to better incorporate IK into their pedagogical practices?

I first unpack the contested nature of IK and examine the relationship between quality ECD implementation and IK. Through empirical research I investigate the apparent disjuncture between teachers' practice and the inclusion of IK into this practice. Finally, I explore strategies identified by teachers to better incorporate IK into their practice and make recommendations for a way forward.

### **Understanding IK and its place in the Zimbabwean curriculum**

Responding to the world call, Zimbabwe, for the past decade, has been arguing for the realigning of the education curricula to incorporate indigenous knowledge thereby making the education more relevant to the country's and learners' needs. As recently as 2012 when

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officially opening the 2012 Research and Intellectual Exposition, the then President, Robert Mugabe, said that the African University should serve its role as an agent of the continent's political, social, technological and economic development. It should not produce students who are totally divorced from and alien to Africa's needs (*The Herald*, 5 September 2012).

To heed this call, both subject content knowledge and pedagogical practices should be informed by indigenous knowledge. Given that ECD is the foundation of the Zimbabwean education system and that young children learn best in circumstances that meet their specific contexts, ECD practices should be strongly underpinned by indigenous knowledge. However, Dziva, Mpofu and Kusure (2011) note that this is not necessarily the case. Zimbabwean education policy and syllabus documents bear little resemblance to learner culture. Ayasi (2003) claims that the main function of policy frameworks in Zimbabwe are centred on resources and service provision and not on forms of knowledge creation.

There are generally different forms of knowledge in the world's education systems. These include Western or scientific and indigenous knowledge. Western knowledge is that knowledge which was introduced to the indigenous people with the advent of colonisation whereas indigenous knowledge is the knowledge the natives had before colonialism (Nyota and Mapara, 2008).

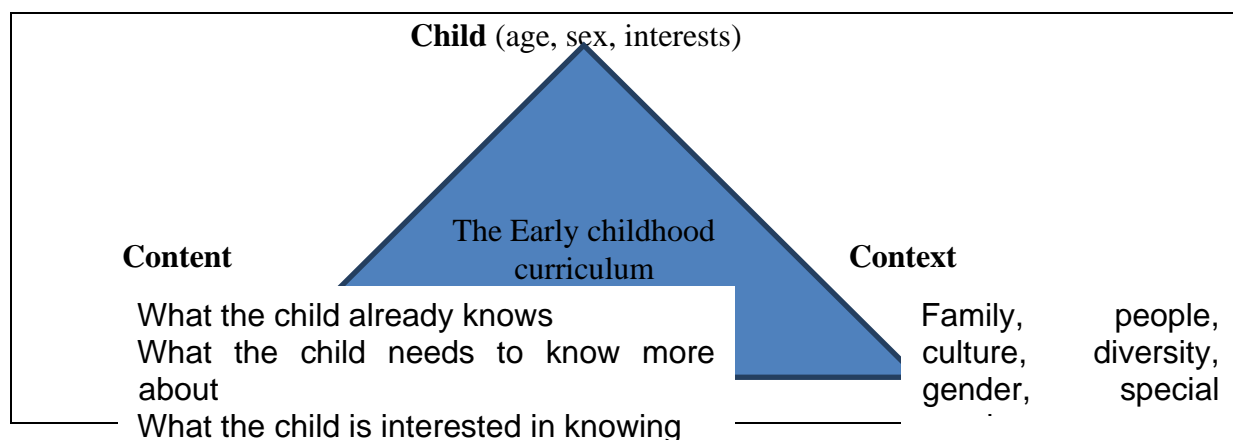
Indigenous knowledge (IK) is also referred to as traditional knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge or local knowledge. It is knowledge embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous or local communities. According to Greinier (1998) IK is the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific condition of women and men indigenous to a particular geographical area. Thus, indigenous knowledge should not support backwardness but rather it should promote a strong cultural identity. The importance of indigenous knowledge is supported by the United Nations (2007) Article 14 (1) which argues that indigenous people have the right to establish and control their education systems and institutions in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Nyota and Mapara (2008) acknowledge that indigenous knowledge is expressed in a variety of ways including stories, legends, folklore, rituals, songs, games and even laws. Emeagwali (2003) asserts that the community is recognised as a source of strength for indigenous knowledge in terms of the discovery process and knowledge production. Thus, in this study, indigenous knowledge includes traditional knowledge that is often contained in stories, games, songs or rhymes and language; thus, IK is closely aligned to cultural practices as well as to accepted ECD methodologies such as playful pedagogies (Wood, 2009; Gordon and Browne, 2017).

### **The relationship between IK and quality ECD**

According to Bruce, Meggitt and Greiner (2010) quality ECD curriculum framework has three determinants namely the child, the context and the content. These are sometimes called the 3c's of the ECD curriculum. The 3c's are illustrated in Figure 1.1 below:

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**Figure1:1 The 3c's of the ECD curriculum** (Bruce et al., 2010: 377).

Bruce and Meggitt (2005) state that when planning and designing an ECD curriculum, these three aspects of the ECD curriculum need to be considered and balanced. Failure to strike a balance leads to producing a substandard curriculum. Balancing the 3c's makes play more central to the child's learning (Bruce et al., 2010) and promotes the development of the whole child. It also strengthens the incorporation of IK in ECD because of the acknowledgement of relevant content which draws on IK as well as the context which is fundamental to curriculum planning and implementation.

The thrust of the ECD curriculum is thus to ensure the total development and wellbeing of the child, laying a foundation for successful living and lifelong learning. This approach strongly aligns with the developmental underpinnings and the eclectic nature of ECD (Minnet, 2005). Thus, the child's learning opportunities should draw heavily on IK (Bruce et al, 2010, Morrison, 2001). The learning process is far more culturally responsive and contextually relevant if it draws on relevant IK and this helps to ensure that the child is the focal point of the curriculum. Each aspect is briefly discussed.

### **The child**

A basic tenet of quality ECD is that the child should be central to the ECD curriculum, which is known as child-centred practice (Morrison, 2001). However, teachers' perceptions about the child will influence teaching strategies and how the teacher incorporates (or not) IK into their teaching practices.

### **The context**

According to Bruce et al. (2010), Anning, Cullen and Fleer (2009), Ndawi and Maravanyika (2011) the context involves family, culture, diversity, gender, special educational needs, access, materials and resources, places and events. Therefore, within an ECD context, IK which draws on local, traditional practices, should be incorporated into all ECD practices and should form the foundations upon which the ECD curriculum is developed. Within the traditional context, ECD has been recognised as an ongoing part of the child rearing processes (Nyandiyi-Bundy, Chiswanda, Khani and Matsungu, 2000). From a more formal western perspective, definitions have varied over time. Older definitions, such as those provided by Harmse, du Toit and Broeksma (1998:14), suggest that ECD refers to

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“appropriately adapted activities designed and conducted to meet the needs of those children who have already outgrown their early infancy, but have not yet reached the school age.”

### **The Content**

An important focus of the ECD curriculum is the content. Phenix (1962), cited in Lunenburg (2011) describes content as including the whole range of matter in which the child is expected to gain some knowledge. In addition, Lawton (1972 cited in Ndawi and Maravanyika, 2011) describes a curriculum, especially the content, as a selection from culture. Hence, what is learnt in ECD must be relevant to the child's everyday life and thus salient content is best drawn from the child's community and should thus be informed by IK.

### **Conceptual Framework**

drew on Vygotsky's (1978) Socio Cultural Theory as the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems in ECD contributes immensely to the selection and mediation of content as it is an important early learning principle that content should be culturally relevant (Gordon and Browne, 2017). As Vygotsky (1978) argues learning is situated within a particular culture and society which enables knowledge to become contextually defined and relevant. And as previously mentioned IK is frequently expressed through story, rhyme and song which are supported as extremely relevant playful pedagogical practices to enhance development and learning (Bruce et al., 2010; Wood, 2009; Gordon and Browne, 2017). Vygotsky believed in the centrality of language as a tool for thought and as a powerful means of mediation (Mitchell, & Myles, 2004). Within children's socio-cultural context parents speak to children in their mother tongue; they correct and suggest patterns of behaviour imparting IK. It is this interaction that children internalise and use private speech. I suggest that private speech can be likened to indigenous language or mother language.

According to Ogunniyi (nd.), the experiential knowledge the children have can be equated with indigenous knowledge.

Before I went to school, I knew a lot about my environment. I knew the names of hundreds of plants and trees and what they are used for. When I went to school, I was introduced to different names, and different systems of understanding my environment. As a result, I forgot what I had brought with me from home- just as many indigenous people may forget that they have knowledge to contribute (Ogunniyi, nd in Msimanga and Shizha, 2014:138).

From the assertion above, it is worth noting that there is a missing link between modern pedagogical practices and IK. Studies such as those by Shizha (2007) and Matowanyika (1997) have acknowledged the complexities involved in incorporating indigenous knowledge using mother tongue in the school curriculum. In addition, there have been repeated calls (Shizha, 2006, Dei, 2001) to realign the education curricula to include aspects of IK. This is especially important for the ECD phase where IK is frequently transmitted through the mother language. Thus, the incorporation of IK in early childhood is very practical as IK is gained mostly through everyday experiences and play. It is a well-accepted early learning principle that knowledge is drawn from the child's life world and that learning through play mediated by mother tongue is a fundamental pedagogical aspect in early learning. Therefore,



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the incorporation of IK in early learning would make a close link between what a child learns from school and life at home.

Thus from a socio-cultural perspective the ECD programme should draw on IK and be underpinned by a playful pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

### **Research methodology**

I adopted a qualitative research paradigm as this is an inductive, subjective process of inquiry undertaken in natural settings in order to build a holistic picture that include the detailed views of the informants' dialogues captured in informal personal language (Chakraborty, 2012). A multiple case study was adopted as the study was carried out in three sites. The sample comprised six ECD teachers and three school heads. The participants were purposively sampled. The data collection methods included open- ended surveys (questionnaires), interviews, document analysis and observation. The use of varied methods helped to obtain data which are valid, credible and trustworthy (Kumar, 2014; Bhebhe, 2014, Magwa and Magwa, 2015). Open- ended surveys were initially administered to teachers and school heads, followed by observation and interviews.

Tove (2010) asserts that observation is a technique where the quality of data that are generated depends on what the researcher sees, hears and interprets. Through observation I was able to explore the extent to which IK was being incorporated in the ECD classes. Video recording of some observations was done and to encourage a participatory approach, teachers were asked to shoot some photos. Taking photos by teachers gave the participants some agency as they were asked to make decisions about what to photograph (Mason, 2002). Observations were followed by semi-structured and informal interviews which enabled me to explore in greater depth what I observed in the classroom and clarify responses given in the surveys (Punch, 2005). Ethics is a key consideration in research as such ethics clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand. A totemic approach was used to give pseudonyms to participants for anonymity. Data were coded and analysed in themes which are unpacked in the next section.

### **Findings and discussion**

The findings were analysed in themes which are ECD teachers' understandings of IK and their pedagogical practices as well as strategies identified by teachers in incorporating IK.

#### **ECD teachers' understandings of IK and their pedagogical practices**

ECD teachers' understandings of what comprises IK were analysed and three categories of teachers' understandings were established. These included reasonably good understanding, partial understanding and limited understanding. The input was drawn from the survey, interviews and observations.

#### **Reasonably good understanding**

Teachers who mentioned all or most of the aspects about IK were regarded as having a reasonable understanding of IK. During analysis, it became evident that two teachers had a reasonably good understanding of IK. Mr Hove acknowledged that he got to know about IK from the Teachers' College when he was training to become a teacher and also that he also heard about IK at University during a Philosophy lecture on African Traditional Education. He elaborated; *IK is the knowledge that children acquire from the local environment for their survival in later life* '31 October 2015'.

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Mr Hove further mentioned in the interview,

IK is Knowledge for Africans by Africans which they use in their day to day life such as education and child rearing. IK is transmitted to the young generation informally by the elders such as grandmothers and grandfathers. He added “*munguva yechirimo/ chando vanambuya nana sekuru vaigara nesu pasi manheru tichidziya moto votitaurira ngano dzaana Tsuru naGudo dzaitidzidzisa zvakawanda setsika nemagariro kana mabasa neumhizha.*”

[during the winter season, the elders like grandmothers and grandfathers would sit around the fire warming themselves with the young (approximately from 3-10 years) children telling them folk stories such as about hare and baboon characters teaching them (the children) cultural norms and values. They would also teach the young craftsmanship.

Observation of Mr Hove's lessons corroborated his understanding of IK. For example, he taught the “*Chitubu*” (spring) concept as a source of water in Maths-Science, used “*Ehuwe nyarara mwana*” (keep quiet baby) a lullaby in Language Arts and traditional games such as “*chibata mabvi*” (touch your knees game) in Expressive Arts. Furthermore, he advocated for its (IK) use in ECD especially for content and methodology selection by ECD teachers.

Mrs Dube wrote in the survey that she heard about IK during her studies both at the Teachers' College and University. Mrs Dube confidently declared that she is aware of IK and is knowledgeable about it. She described IK as,

... local knowledge for local people. It can also be viewed as traditional African Knowledge which children get from the elders usually through the word of mouth or engaging in given activities (Interview, '31 October 2015').

She gave an example of learners gaining knowledge as they perform given tasks such as baby minding which teaches them child rearing practices. Mrs Dube said, “To me IK is life itself”. She used this metaphorical description to suggest that there is no time when children will be given formal lessons about IK. They are immersed in it throughout their day-to-day activities. However, she felt she could become better informed,

... However, I still feel I need to know more about IK for there is much talk about it in the Zimbabwean education system, let alone ECD.

This quote suggests that Mrs Dube is aware of the current emphasis on the place and positioning of IK in the curriculum (*The Herald*, 2017). During my observation date of Expressive Arts activities, she engaged children in traditional games such as “*nhodo*”, “*pada*”, “*raka raka*” and “*zai rakaora*” showing her understanding of IK. She would use the games as a basis for imparting knowledge as she would further explain the concept linking with the game.

Both teachers showed that they have a reasonably good understanding of IK. Their responses resonate well with Greiner (1998, cited in Schafer et al., 2004) who described IK as unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific condition of indigenous people to a particular geographical area.

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In addition, one School Head, Mr Sigauke, also demonstrated a reasonably good understanding of IK. During the interview, he said *“I heard about IK through interaction with society, readings and from my studies both at the teachers' college and the University.”* This claim that he had heard about IK from different sources reinforced the signal that IK is a topical issue in the country in general and the education system in particular (Msila and Gumbo, 2015).

Mr Sigauke described IK in the interview '16 November 2015' as, *“the traditional knowledge passed from generation to generation and it is part of a people's culture.”* He further went on to say,

IK gives people identity and, in this case, it can be described as African Knowledge. IK is passed from one person to the other orally since most of it is undocumented and as Africans, we had no school system before colonisation. We have IK in various facets of life such as child rearing, education, agriculture and medicine, only that we have been brain washed to look down upon it because of colonisation.

Mr Sigauke's definition of IK aligns with Takawira's (2002) claim that indigenous knowledge is the local community-based knowledge that is unique to a given culture, is often developed over generations and it reflects the commonly held norms and values of a society.

To confirm this understanding of IK during the interview, Mr Sigauke mentioned that the teachers make use of traditional song and games such as *“Dudu muduri”* and *“Sarura Wako”* and Shona folk stories of *“Tsuro naGudo.”* in their lessons. Mr Sigauke pointed out that IK is embedded in the child's culture and mother language, therefore it limits communication barriers as children learn about things they meet in their real world (Chen, 2001).

### **Partial understanding of IK**

Three teachers had a partial understanding of IK. Mrs Moyo mentioned that she has heard about IK before at the college where she studied, saying *“lecturers would constantly refer to the use of IK when teaching in ECD without clearly elaborating what it is and how it can be used”* (interview, '13 November 2015'). She further explained *“IK is local knowledge”*. When I probed further, she could not readily elaborate on her understanding of local knowledge. She said *“uuuummmm I have forgotten”* and she scratched her head. However, she could identify forms of IK as certain games, song and stories but could not give areas in which IK could be meaningfully used within the ECD curriculum. This partial understanding was reinforced during my observations. For example, she used the rhyme, *“I am a little teapot”* exhibiting lack of depth in terms of Shona children's rhymes and songs. Thus, her teaching clearly showed that she has partial understanding of IK. She attempted to include IK in her teaching practices but this was done inconsistently and at times haphazardly. She also stated her lack of detailed understanding when she said *“because of this [not being fully taught] I cannot confidently say I am knowledgeable about IK”*.

Mrs Sibanda, described IK as local knowledge which is unique to a culture or society that one lives. This description resonates with that of Greiner (1998) who says IK is the unique, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area. Mrs Sibanda defined IK well



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enough. During the interview '13 November 2015', she said she just heard about IK in passing. However, she too was not able to elaborate further. . She, for example, could not name any forms of IK. She said *"there are many ways of passing IK as there are many forms of IK"*. This she heard during the curriculum review consultations in 2015.

The third participant in this category, Mrs Shava also mentioned that she has heard about IK before. She wrote on '14 January 2016' *"IK is local knowledge"* without further elaboration and mentioned that *"IK is transmitted to children through the word of mouth"*. She was not able to not mention some forms of IK that might have shown a deeper understanding of IK despite the encouragement given by the interviewer to do so. . She was hesitant to answer questions or chose to repeat the questions instead of answering them. In the interview '14 January 2016', she said, *"I have heard about IK at a workshop done by the district personnel on the use of participatory methods."*

A workshop does not necessarily allow for sufficient time to develop a deeper understanding of concepts such as IK. Despite the popularity of workshops for professional teacher development purposes they have been shown to be problematic. It seems as if teachers have difficulty in applying the information and strategies they have been taught in a workshop to the classroom context (Dixon, Excell and Linington, 2014). It is also questionable if the facilitators would have taken time to discuss IK in detail since the workshop was about participatory methodologies and not IK.

From the teacher's explanation, IK is knowledge that is obtained from the community and is transmitted through participatory methodologies such as games, folk stories, riddles, song and dance (Nyota and Mapara, 2008). Mrs Shava saw games, folk stories, riddles, song and dance only as a way of transmitting IK without regarding these as forms of knowledge. She could not give examples of traditional games, folk stories, song and dance that could be used in ECD as forms of IK.

The other two school Heads also appeared to have a partial understanding of IK. Mr Zhou agreed that he has heard about IK saying it is native knowledge found in nature or communities. In the interview '02 November 2015', he said, *I have heard about IK before in the academic fora*. He was reluctant to elaborate on the nature of the academic fora. It seems unlikely that he went through a formal session of learning about IK. He further said,

I have little knowledge about IK and methodologies such as games, song, rhymes and stories which are widely acknowledged preschool/ ECD teaching and learning methods as it was not my area of study.

As he mentioned in the quote above his insight into ECD is questionable for he is not ECD trained. In addition, ECD is new to the formal education system and is still received with mixed feelings (MOESAC, 2004).

According to the other School Head, Mr Sithole, IK is knowledge obtained in the local community and has seen the test of time. However, he could not elaborate on the form of knowledge obtained in the local community that could be classified as IK such as child rearing practices, games, folk stories or song. He had however, heard about IK from various sources such as during his own studies and through the curriculum review process.

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### **Limited understanding of IK**

The third category of teachers was those with limited understandings of IK. Only one teacher, Mrs Gumbo fell into this category and was so placed as she gave very 'thin' answers and was unable to give any details about IK. Mrs Gumbo forthrightly said that she is not aware of IK. She further supported her sentiments saying she never came across IK in her educational journey. However, during observations '25 January 2016' it was noted that she made use of locally made materials in her classroom such as millet, "guyo" and "huyo". Other self-made resources included drums, *duri* (mortar) and *mutswi* (thistle) which are cultural artefacts (Vygotsky, 1978, Woolfolk, 2004) that scaffold the learning process. She appeared to have an intuitive understanding of IK as she found it prudent to source learning materials from the children's culture. Her practice also resonated well with good ECD pedagogy that advocates for starting with what the child knows (Bredenkamp and Coople, 2007). As mentioned previously, in ECD there is a close correlation between IK and tried and trusted ECD pedagogical principles.

Another reason for Mrs Gumbo to profess ignorance about IK is possibly, as Shiza (2008) notes, it is recognised that some people view being traditional as being backward. Thus, Mrs Gumbo might feel that by saying she makes use of IK in her classroom some people might view her as incompetent, not moving with the time and adding little value to new knowledge as she indicated during the interview '14 January 2016',

As I teach, I use the available materials but they [education officials] seem to add value to important knowledge wanted to prepare children for future competitive world. We need to have more technology to move with time.

Her concerns confirm assertions made by Sibanda (2017) that, "some intellectuals have warped ideas about IKS because they associate it with the uneducated and backward just as the coloniser wanted them to believe" (*The Herald*, 14 June 2017: 8).

### **Strategies identified by teachers for the inclusion of IK**

Despite not necessarily having a clear understanding of what constitutes IK in the ECD space teachers were able to identify some strategies to ensure that ECD programme in Zimbabwe incorporate IK and also treat it as an important strand of knowledge without undermining it (IK) at the expense of global knowledge. A balanced approach to the two forms of knowledge should be sought (Shizha, 2006). Thus, the place of IK should be explicitly outlined at various levels in the ECD programme, beginning with policy change and then carried through to all tiers of the education system to enable ECD teachers to be more knowledgeable about and confident to include IK in their everyday practice.

### **ECD Policy and IK**

Policy changes therefore becomes an essential first step to the inclusion of IK in the ECD programme. Participants unanimously agreed that the ECD policy needed to be reviewed to strongly reflect an IK incorporation matrix. In the survey '30 October 2015', Mr Hove wrote, "ECD policy should be revisited to clearly articulate IK issues as the current one is silent about it". He corroborated this in the interview saying "For successful incorporation of IK to be realised, there is need to have an ECD policy which is clear about that." Mrs Dube concurred. Mrs Moyo further stated (survey, '12 November 2015') "I need to be guided by policy to be able to effectively incorporate IK into my day-to-day teaching", and in the

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interview, asked, “How can I be expected to struggle to include something that is not asked for by the policy? Mrs Sibanda reinforced this view when she said, “we need to be clearly guided so that we can meaningfully incorporate IK into our practices. This guidance can only come through a comprehensive policy” (Interview, ‘13 November 2015’). Mrs Shava concurred and claimed, in the interview (‘14 November 2016’), she corroborated her view saying “We need policy, policy not cheap talk. We work with policy, that is what we are constantly reminded to use by the heads and Inspectors but this seems to be elusive.”

From the evidence presented it is clear that all the teachers concurred that policy needs to be revisited as a strategy to incorporate IK into the ECD teachers' pedagogical practices. The teachers can then easily influence the change in micro policy which is actionable at their schools (Haddad and Demsky, 1995). However, macro policy which it is a long-term strategy first needs to be addressed followed by more realistic short-term goals that could be implemented at district and then school level to support the inclusion of IK.

Wide community consultations would be necessary to effect realistic policy changes as IK is drawn from local and cultural practices (Ndawi and Maravanyika, 2011). Stakeholders such as parents, traditional leaders, teachers and other ECD experts should be instrumental in shaping the comprehensive ECD IK policy. Drawing from the research findings aspects to consider might include:

1. The nature of the IK to be incorporated into the ECD curriculum.
2. IK competencies expected by ECD teachers and children.
3. Resource allocation for including IK in the ECD programme.
4. How IK and ECD pedagogies can be integrated to ensure a quality ECD programme.

It was however interesting to note that in their responses teachers showed very little initiative in becoming proactive; to find out more about IK or to consider different strategies of including IK in their daily practice. This was possibly due to their perceived lack of agency which is explored later in this article.

### **The provision of literature**

Participants also suggested that literature on IK should be made available to the teachers. Mr Hove wrote in the survey, “*Literature on IK should be made available so that teachers can use.*” In the interview (‘31 October 2015’), he said,

Literature on IK should be made available to teachers for use during teaching. The indigenous games and play should be documented. In addition, in the absence of literature, resource persons like adults who are custodians of IK should be called to assist during teaching.

Mrs Dube reiterated Mr Hove's idea when she wrote, “*Literature on IK should be made available for teachers to use*” (Survey, 30/ 10/15). In the interview (31/ 10/ 15), she also mentioned that,

There is need to document IK that is suitable for ECD. Literature is needed so that teachers can have somewhere to start.

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Mr Sigauke was also of the view that literature on IK should be provided to teachers. In the interview (16/ 11/ 15), he said, *“because of the need to re- awaken IK, teachers need to be provided with literature since IK has been gradually dying.”* Mr Sithole concurred and added

It is prudent to give literature to the teachers and other stakeholders such as Heads and Schools Inspectors (interview, 15/ 01/ 16).

The above contributions by participants give testimony to a need to have literature on IK so that teachers can use it. This will assist them to have a good understanding of IK and incorporate it better into their pedagogical practices. The ideas resonate well with research in Ghana by Almor (2016), Abdulai (2016) and in Botswana by Bose and Seetso (2016). These researches confirm the need to document indigenous plays, songs or rhymes as way to enhance the incorporation of IK into ECD pedagogical practices.

### **Staff development**

Another strategy that was unanimously suggested to enable the incorporation of IK was that of staff development. Teachers felt that they need to be capacitated through workshops. Both Mrs Dube (31/ 10/ 15) and Mr Hove (31/ 10/ 15) concurred in their interviews that for teachers to fully and knowingly incorporate IK in their teaching, they need to have staff development programmes like workshops.

Mrs Moyo, Mrs Sibanda and Mrs Shava agreed in the survey that teachers needed to be capacitated through workshops. Mrs Moyo wrote in the survey *“We need to have workshops on IK so that all teachers are fully equipped to use it during teaching”*. Mrs Sibanda also wrote *“I need to be exposed more to IK, may be through workshops”*. In the interview, Mrs Shava said workshops to assist teachers on the incorporation of IK should be done at various levels such as national, province, district, cluster and school level to make sure that no one is left behind. Mrs Gumbo also suggested in the interview said, *“I suggest that the Ministry of Education embark on workshops teaching us on the incorporation of IK. They should also send teachers for refresher courses that are a bit long so that they have ample time to learn more about IK.”*

From teachers' assertions, workshops need to be done to expose the teachers to more IK and how it can be incorporated into their pedagogical practices. Teachers also advocated that the workshops should not be a once of thing but should be offered at different levels starting with the Ministry of Education. They also claimed it should be the responsibility of the Ministry to assist in cascading the information to all. It is of concern that teachers place so much importance on workshops as workshops frequently do not reach the desired outcomes. Teachers find it difficult to transfer what they have heard or experienced in a workshop to their daily practice (Dixon, Excell and Linington, 2016). Thus, workshops have dubious success rates.

It is also concerning that teachers place so many of their expectations on the Ministry of Education, especially when they have all acknowledged that the ministry has failed to provide reasonable guidelines in relation to IK and its implementation in the classroom.

Based on the findings, there is need for staff development of ECD teachers and other stakeholders such as School Heads and Schools Inspectors so that their understanding of IK ECD can be enhanced since they are both the policy implementers and enforcers. Nsamenang (2009:119) has called for *“the training of ‘culture informed and context-tuned ‘experts’ especially with the nerve and adroitness to dare step out of the Euro-Western box*

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to articulate their own or creatively gain from donor- posited guidelines....”. Thus, a sense of agency and creativity should be inculcated in the ECD teachers through staff development initiatives such as workshops, in- service training and refresher courses.

However, it is worth exploring some of the gaps in the participants' answers. The teachers' responses focused on what could be done for them; providing them with appropriate literature and workshops for example. Perhaps strategies have to be suggested that will enable teachers to focus on what they themselves can do to deepen their own IK and to explore additional strategies so that they can successfully share IK with the children they teach. For instance, the literature could be home- grown and ECD teachers should be invited to make contributions on the generation of such literature so that the IK is culturally and contextually appropriate, for example, appropriate stories written by the teachers with input from the local community.

### **Identifying gaps in the suggested strategies**

It was deemed useful to identify factors that were not mentioned by participants, namely what they themselves could do to access more information related to IK, the place of the curriculum and the role of parents and the community were not possible strategies considered by the participants. Teachers seemingly did not see a role for themselves in sourcing IK and exploring ways of sharing this knowledge with children. They also did not seem to question the subject-based curriculum which is a deterrent for adopting a more play-based pedagogical approach. Though many mentioned the subject based approach there was little suggestion that this approach could be altered.

IK is local knowledge, related to cultural practices and is thus steeped in all community members. Yet again, no teacher even hinted at the possibility of forming a partnership with parents or community elders who perhaps have better insights into the local customs and who might better be able to share this knowledge with the children. When there is active participation in schooling children achieve better results (Epstein, 2001).

Teachers appear to have very little voice and agency. They do not see a role for themselves in shaping or changing the ECD curriculum. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century and especially within the African context where there is a huge campaign to decolonise education one must query why teachers feel so lacking in agency (Ferrante, Seedat-Khan, Kaziboni and Uys, 2016). It might be worthwhile for them to consider that contemporary understandings of practice should not necessarily lead to polarisation or only one way of doing things. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) suggest the notion of 'both/and' rather than the more dualistic 'either/or' approach could be an additional way of successfully including IK in the early childhood curriculum.

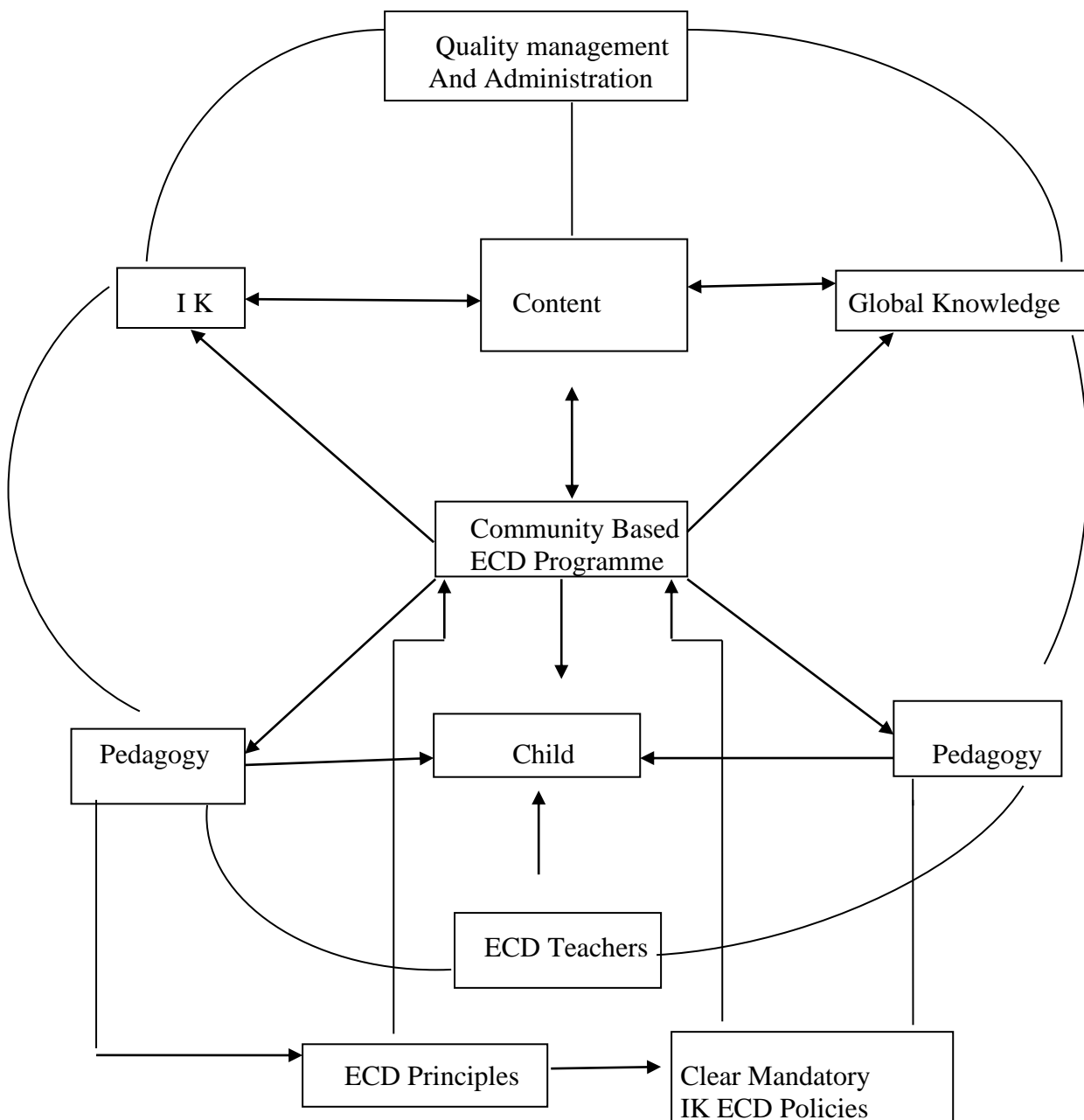
### **The way forward: Incorporating IK in ECD**

To facilitate implementation of the recommendations given above, an ECD model that incorporates IK into the ECD programme is proposed (see Figure 1.1). This model is grounded in socio-cultural theory and the ECD principles that state that development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts (NAEYC, 2005). In addition, a learner is viewed as a whole person who is part of a family, a community and a culture (North Carolina Division of Child Development, 2008). Play-based pedagogies such as traditional song and game are an integral part of the model. The anchor of the ECD programme in this model is the relationship between the 3Cs namely child, context (community), content and pedagogy. The relationship between stakeholders who constitute



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the ecology of ECD (community) is critical in implementing an ECD programme that incorporates IK. Below is a proposed IK- ECD model.



**Figure 1.2:** A proposed IK- ECD model

Figure 1.2 shows a community based ECD model I have named IK- ECD model. The model which is based on six main aspects which are community, content, pedagogy, child, ECD principles and policy is briefly explained.

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### **Community**

The community is both the source of knowledge and context in which the ECD child is taught. The ECD child lives within the community and is immersed in the community dynamics. Thus, the content which is derived from that community is more comprehensible to the child. According to North Carolina Division of Child Development (2008) the child's culture may seem obvious due to ethnic origins, but it is more than these obvious differences. The community guides the children's way of life. Hence, it sets the content and methods of imparting knowledge and these are part of the people's culture. For these standards to be achieved, there are teaching methods that are peculiar to certain communities such as songs, rhymes, dances and games. These are used to transmit IK from one generation to the other. A community also has its views about childhood. This includes behaviours, expectations and growth beliefs such as norms and values.

### **Content**

The community can provide the much-needed IK such songs, stories, games, norms and values. The songs, stories and games should be developmentally and culturally appropriate (Bredekamp and Copple, 2009). Knowledge comprises both IK (traditional stories, games, songs, stories and dances) as well as global knowledge. Global knowledge is also found in the community, for example, through schooling. In this model, the two forms of knowledge should not be viewed as competing or running parallel to each other but should complement each other or overlap where possible.

Figure 1.2 shows that IK and global knowledge occupy the same level; hence, no form of knowledge is better than the other. However, in teaching ECD children, it is prudent to begin with IK which will form the basis for introducing global knowledge and the IK thread should become extinct when global knowledge is introduced. Instead, the two should be juxtaposed. The ECD teachers should use both forms of knowledge to complement each other.

### **ECD Policies**

The incorporation of IK into ECD teachers' pedagogical practices would be enhanced by having solid ECD policies with clearly outlined strategies for the inclusion of IK. Clear ECD policies mentioning the type of questions to ask have been explained above.

The ECD policies should also make it mandatory for ECD teachers to incorporate IK into their pedagogical practices so as to avoid its extinction. As previously mentioned, the policies must also be clear on the competencies and qualifications of ECD administrators so that favourable ECD policies that allow for the incorporation of IK into teachers' pedagogical practices can be designed. Promotions of ECD should be based on ECD qualifications and ECD merit to avoid non- specialists make critical decisions that might affect the effective incorporation of IK in the area.

### **Pedagogy**

The ECD pedagogies would be enhanced by incorporating indigenous methods. The methods would include the use of more locally available traditional song, dance, games and stories. The use of songs, dances and locally produced toys in ECD should be promoted (Sagnia, 2004). For these to be effectively embraced, there is need to have much of children's literature drawn from the indigenous people. However, the challenge is that not that many

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children's stories that can leverage the incorporation of IK have been written, especially in indigenous languages.

Teaching methods used by teachers strongly influence the quality of ECD programmes in that child's mastery and holistic development is enhanced (UNICEF, 2000; Excell and Linington, 2011).

These methods need to become entrenched in ECD teachers' strategies. Both indigenous and western strategies need to be considered. Resource persons need to be embraced, in for example, the teaching of games and telling of such traditional stories. In these ways, the community becomes the nerve centre of ECD activities. The teaching and learning materials must be drawn much from the children's culture to minimise the reliance much materials drawn from the world alien to the children.

### **ECD principles**

The ECD principles would be based on both the global theories of child development and the indigenous view of childhood. The indigenous view will assist the ECD teachers to incorporate the desired competencies of both their communities and development. The principles would influence the choice of the content to be taught, learning materials and the pedagogy.

### **Conclusion**

The study established ECD teachers' understandings of IK and their strategies on the incorporation of IK into their pedagogical practices. Views of School Heads and ECD teachers as well as observations of teachers' practice gave valuable insight into the ECD teachers' pedagogical practices in Manicaland Province schools. The more formal approach to ECD curriculum delivery further challenged teachers as playful pedagogies were also marginalised in the attempt to meet timetable constraints. In addition, learning materials leaned towards being pro-western with minimal opportunities to children to play with locally resourced materials which were to be found in the cultural huts. Teachers mentioned a variety of strategies to support the inclusion of IK in the ECD programme. However, they failed to see an active role for themselves in making this happen. Findings revealed that teachers appear to be voiceless and lack agency. Thought should be given on how to better support teachers to become more proactive because they are crucial to the implementation of quality teaching and learning in the ECD phase.

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