



# **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN MALAWI-A CASE STUDY OF SAFE'S ECD CENTERS IN ZOMBA. MALAWI.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite the much investments that have been made by non-governmental organizations like SAFE to improve the Early Childhood Development education activities in Malawi over the years, there still remains a missing link between ECD center learning and home life. The overall image that arises from literature review is a genuine call for parental involvement in early learning. Early childhood development policies in Malawi emphasizes that parents are the first caregivers of a child before he/she goes to school. Currently parental involvement limits itself to provision food and escorting children to the center. The challenge is common in locally based Early Childhood Development Centers supported by NGO's and government. The private owned and city based are doing better as they have put up deliberate measures for parental involvement. Children are given take home activities to do with parents. Childrens performance in Early learning in private owned centers is much higher due strategic parental involvement measures in place.

This study aimed at investigating better ways of enhancing parental involvement in Early childhood activities in Malawi with specific case study of SAFE sponsored ECD centers in Zomba-Eastern Region of Malawi. The study sought to get views from parents and caregivers if they understand the positive impact parental involvement can bring in their children's performance. The study also sought to engage caregivers and parents in seeking better ways of improving parental involvement as Malawi strives to take early learning activities at the child's home.

A qualitative research methodology was engaged with the aim to gain rich responses from the participants. Purposive sampling method was used to identify participants who are the parents and caregivers form SAFE sponsored communities. In-depth interview method was implored to get more information form participants.

The study at the end suggested that there is a need to involve parents in early learning activities at home beyond provision food and escorting them to school. NGO's and the government should rethink of introducing a parental engagement tool in the Early Childhood Development activities curriculum. For example, take home activities. Invest in adult literacy education to raise parent literacy level so they are able to better help their children win early home learning activities.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to find ways of linking Early Childhood Education Activities with home life. This is to be achieved by investing ways of enhancing parental involvement in Early Childhood Education activities in SAFE sponsored ECD Centers in Zomba -Malawi. SAFE (Sub-Saharan Africa Family Enrichment) is one of the

organizations that has partnered with Malawi government in offering quality ECD services in Malawi and supports 9 cbcc's in Malawi's Eastern region -Zomba District. Many children from SAFE impact areas benefited from the free services as many poor parents cannot send their children to private schools.

## **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to find ways of linking of linking Early Childhood education activities happening in SAFE sponsored ECD centers and the child's homelife through maximum parental involvement. The research questions were developed in line with the purpose of the study and purposive sampling technique has been used in identifying participants for interviews. Purposive sampling as defined by Dovetail Editorial Team (2023) is a technique used in qualitative research to select a specific group of individuals or units for analysis.

The study comprised of 21 participants which included 10 caregivers, 10 parents and 1 ECD director. The participants were interviewed on their knowledge about early childhood Development activities, parental involvement and the best ways to enhance parental involvement in early learning at home. Qualitative research method has been used as the data collected was descriptive in nature with participants narrating their understanding in early learning activities and what they think are the best practices to get parents involved.

### **1.0. Introduction**

According to Gray Group International (,2024) Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of children developed. During this period, children develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that form the foundation for their lifelong learning journey. Early Childhood Education theories emphasizes the importance of providing enriching experience s that stimulates and nurture children's cognitive growth. Children can enhance their language, problem-solving and critical thinking skills through interactive activities, playful exploration and guided instruction. To achieve the desired goals in early childhood development education this research believes that taking early learning home is key as parents are the first caregivers.

In this study, the researcher is motivated by the desire to bring to light the need to involve parents in early childhood development various education activities. Linking early childhood education activities taking place in learning centers to home life. The researcher's target is to investigate ways in which every parent can be fully involved in their children's early development activities at home. The focus is to investigate how SAFE's CBCC are doing on enhancing parental participation in children's early education development. For ages it seems the task of facilitating child's education development activities have been left in the hands of preschools and Early childhood development center's caregivers. It seems that once parents enroll their children in a pre-school or ECD center they leave all the task to the caretakers and teachers and little or nothing at home is done in regards to child's education development activities. The researcher believes there must be a solution for such a challenge and it must be investigated

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The background of this study is the missing link between the early childhood education learning and home life. The study arises to enhance parental involvement in Early Childhood learning activities to enhance children performance in the process of learning. The observation has been that in Malawi Early child education activities have been for a long time left in the hands of caregivers at ECD centers. Parental involvement has been limited to provision of food, preparing and escorting children to ECD centers. The Malawi ECD comprehensive curriculum emphasizes that parents are the first caregivers at home and hence the need to involve them in their children's learning. This study aims at finding ways for maximum parental involvement in Early childhood education activities at home beyond provision of food and escorting children to school.

### **1.2 STAMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

SAFE as an organization has done a lot in supporting early childhood education in Zomba district through training of caregivers, supplying of learning materials and feeding program implementation. Despite all this great work the gap still remains on how best to get parents involved in the education activities that take place at its sponsored early childhood development centers. As per government of Malawi policy on Early Childhood Development, Parents at home are the first caregivers. In many Cbcc's in Malawi including SAFE'S sponsored ones, the situation appears to be different as many parents seem not to be fully involved in education activities of their children. This research seeks to explore ways of how SAFE and its stakeholders can get maximum parental involvement in early childhood education activities so that early childhood education development activities are taken home. The research will seek

to engage SAFE 's ECD department managers, SAFE stakeholders which include parents to hear from them the challenges that leads to parents not involved in children's education and possible solutions.

### 1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand Early Childhood education activities taking place in SAFE's ECD centers in Zomba -Malawi.
2. To discuss the role of parents in Early Childhood education development activities.
3. To discuss present condition of parental involvement in Early leaning activities in SAFE sponsored ECD centers in Zomba-Malawi.
4. To discuss ways of enhancing maximum parental involvement in Early childhood development activities.

#### 1.1.3. MAIN OBJECTIVE

To critically find ways of enhancing parental involvement in Early childhood Education Development in Malawi with specific case study of SAFE sponsored CBCC's in Zomba-Malawi.

### 1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is very important as it will provide practical solutions to the challenges facing many ECD services providers in Malawi including SAFE of practically taking ECD education activities to children's home.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This section presents literally material that other scholars have written on the subject of parental involvement in Early Childhood Development education activities with specific focus on parental involvement. **McCombes (2023)** defines literature as a survey of scholarly sources on a specific topic. It provides an overview of current knowledge, allowing you to identify relevant theories, methods and gaps in the existing research that you can later apply in one's research paper or dissertation. Good literature does not just summarize sources, it analyzes, synthesizes and critically evaluates to give a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject.

#### 2.1 Literature Review Method Used

Narrative literature review method has been used in this research project. According to Mohammed (2021), Narrative literature review summarizes on a subject of concern previously published. The focus is on concepts and hypothesis, methods of study or findings. The most significance elements of the research are the are the compilation of and synthesis of the existing literature and full report on recent expertise in the field under study. The method mostly uses secondary literature sources published by various scholars.

#### 2.2 Main Literature Reviewed

##### Ron Spreeuwenberg

Spreeuwenberg (2022) contributes to this research by highlighting some areas on the importance of parent's involvement in early childhood education. He further discusses the benefits of parental involvement, what role can parents play in Early Childhood education and tips for encouraging parent involvement.

Spreeuwenberg states that today's parents are more involved than they have been with their children's development. Except it seems when it comes to preschool. He highlights the challenge that many parents drop their kids off in the morning while the teachers take over and then pick them up at the end of the day without giving their learning much thought. He advises that to get true benefits from early childhood education, parents need to consider how they can support what their children are learning throughout the day.

##### 2.2.1 Benefits of Parental Involvement

On the benefits of parental involvement Spreeuwenberg rights that some of child's most important cognitive development happens during their preschool years. By taking an active role in the early childhood education process, parents can help ensure that their child has all the support they need to develop to their full potential. The researcher agrees with Spreeuwenberg that children have great potential to achieve great learning in early years. This cannot be achieved by teachers or caregivers alone in early childcare development centers alone. The process needs to be taken further at home and this is what this paper is all about to find ways of enhancing parental involvement in early childhood development.

Secondly, Spreeuwenberg states that parent involvement helps extend teaching outside the classroom, creates a more positive experience for children and helps children perform better when they are in school.

##### 2.2.2 What role can Parents Play in early Childhood Education

On what role can parents play in Early Childhood education, which is also the focus of this research project, Spreeuwenberg gives as some tips for parental involvement. Firstly, in his introduction on the tips he states that Parent involvement in Early Childhood education can extend the experiences that a child has in the classroom to real-world activities that happens in the home. A parent who understands what their child is working on at preschool has a better sense of their child's competency and which areas they need to work on to improve confidence. He firstly



accepts that the most difficult challenges for early childhood educators is figuring out how to better engage parents in their child's learning. He suggests that by establishing good lines of communication between your childcare center and parents, as well as making a strong effort to involve parents as an important partner in their child's education, you can make a positive impact on their learning ability. Some of the tips highlighted by Spreeuwenberg include the following:

1. Invite parents to learn more about the childcare center, staff and how childcare center operates. Making families more comfortable with the child center and the caregivers who work there will go a long way in making them feel at ease and more likely to be involved. Ensure that teachers are always greeting and interacting with parents, either in person or through a daycare management app.
  2. Ask parents if they would be interested in participating in your classroom. Find out if parents do have a special talent that they would like to share with the class. Would they be interested in volunteering to help in an art project or read a story?
  3. Ask parents if there are any topics they would like to see incorporated into the school's curriculum. One they are aware that they can have a say in what is taught in the classroom, parents may want to help shape what their child learns throughout the day.
  4. Create a daily report or journal for each child. Use these daily reports to outline their individual progress and offer a way for parents and educators to communicate and give feedback.
  5. Make useful resources available to parents. These can be related to developing motor skills, language development, behavior management and more. These resources can offer additional guidance that parents can use at home to cultivate further skills and talents in their children.
  6. Recommend complementary activities that a parent and child can complete at home. These activities can extend the school's curriculum beyond the classroom setting and reinforce what is taught. Once parents get first-hand experience teaching new things to their children and seeing the impact, they will be more compelled to take an active role on an ongoing basis.
  7. Thanks, parents, for being involved. After a parent visits or volunteers at a child day care center, caregivers or teacher must write a thank you note to let parents know that the center appreciates their time and assistance.
- The researcher finally finds Spreeuwenberg material very relevant to the study as it emphasizes on the need to find ways of parental involvement and gives a tip on some of the ways that can be considered in parental involvement. The researcher may use the information as a base for investigating more on what SAFE is doing to make sure that parents in its various supported ECD centers are involved in their children's early education development activities.

### **UNICEF Malawi: Mera Mpoyamaba| Early Moments Matter. Early Childhood Development Campaign.**

This is an Online document posted by UNICEF Malawi -Elephant Media and feeds into this research paper with information on what the government of Malawi and its partner UNICEF are doing to promote positive parenting and responsive caregiving. Positive parenting is a platform for taking Early Childhood Development activities from childcare centers to children home. At home the parents become the caregivers to their children. UNICEF assist Malawi with technical and financial support towards ECD interventions in the country. One of the main objectives in this article which echoes well with this paper is to provide and engage parents and caregivers with information and resources for positive parenting and responsive caregiving.

On Early Childhood Development in Malawi the article states that in spite of the importance of ECD services for brain development, school readiness, resilience and wellbeing, ECD, including care stimulation and learning, ECD has no adequate attention in the country. Parents are not provided with the information or support necessary to develop responsive and positive parenting skills. The article further states that about 40percent of children aged three to five years are enrolled in early learning and care centers, mostly community -Based Childcare Centers, which lack the resources and capacity to provide quality services. The quality services here include those that can be provided both at the ECD centers and children's homes.

The main challenge highlighted by this article is that many children in Malawi face challenges as their parents or guardians do not have the opportunity or adequate Knowledge and skills to develop positive and responsive parenting skills. The article also emphasizes the need to consider the first 1000 days of life as crucial to child development. At this Malawian child often experience poor health care, inadequate nutrition, little early stimulation and learning and the absence of protective environment. Negative social norms, cultural believes, gender socialization and power dynamics at the household and community levels have also hindered the acquisition of knowledge and skills and adoption of improved positive and responsive parenting practices and behaviors overtime. The researcher agrees with the article in the sense that all these cultural norms, believes can act as a barrier in the process of involving parents in early childhood development activities. The researcher is eager to here from parents, guardians and caregivers under SAFE 's ECD centers if these are part of the factors hindering their participation in early childhood

development activities in their ECD centers. Finally, the researcher will work on how to provide solutions to such challenges so that parental involvement in ECD is enhanced.

The UNICEF's action point in addressing the challenges in ECD; the focus on positive parenting is a clear indication for the need to involve parents in early childhood development activities and the realization of this goal is the core of this research project.

### **Ebtehal Alhashem-Parental Involvement in Preschool Education**

Alhashem (2016) has been used in this paper to provide information on definition of Parental Involvement preschool education which is part of early childhood development. Alhashem also provides information on parental involvement options, advantages of parental involvement and theories supporting this study.

**Parental Involvement Definition:** Alhashem defines parental involvement is the process of connecting parents and schools to achieve a positive outcome for children. He also adds that parental involvement includes participating in children's education through communication or behaviors. Alhashem's focus areas of parental involvement that concerns this study include: provision of family education programs, family communication activities, in class and out of class activities, involvement of parents in administrative roles and decision making and volunteering.

### **Advantages of parental involvement**

Alhashem firstly, states that the connection between home and school has a positive outcome for children's academic achievement, social development and attitude. Secondly, he cites that there is a positive effect on children's academic achievement. For example, children whose first language is not English show an increase in academic achievement, an improvement in English language skills, better cognitive ability and better behavior in school as a result of increased parental involvement. He emphasizes the strong relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement especially in preschool. Thirdly, Alhashem states that parental involvement has significant impact on children's education and both schools/centers and teachers look for programs to improve its efficiency. Fourthly, the cooperation between teachers or caregivers at an early age gives children trust and security. Fifthly, Alhashem states that Children's success in education is influenced by several factors that are related to teachers, home, curriculum and instructional home parent's behaviors, activities and attitudes towards their children's education at school affect the outcomes of their Children's academic achievement. Finally parental involvement in preschool tends to improve social competence and learning behaviors in children.

### **Transformation Education Summit -National Consultation Malawi Report.**

National Consultation Malawi Report (2022:5) provides information on the most current status of Early Childhood education Development in Malawi by highlighting the key areas to improve by 2025. One of the main points that this research is interested in from the report is the government's desire to expand environments for Early Childhood education. According to the report stakeholders agreed on the need to strengthen and accelerate the adoption of society-wide systems of open and flexible models of Early Childhood education in different educational strategies, prioritizing family and community relationships, and cognitive, emotional, sensorial development. This research interest in this paper is on the family and community relationships in early childhood education which directly involves parents and guardians in the processes.

National Consultation Malawi Report (2022:7) highlight the need for preparing for future school disruptions. Stakeholders agreed on the need for Malawi to learn from past disruptions and pay attention to projected changes and demographic shifts to reinforce public education systems and ensure responsiveness and resilience to future change. The report refers back to the outbreak of COVID 19 outbreak in 2020 where by school and children centers were closed for 6 months, the cholera out that hit the nation just recently in 2023 and the tropical cyclones that rendered all southern regions schools closed. Though not highlighted by this report the researcher believes that without deliberate strategies to prepare parents involvement in early childhood education, Malawi cannot achieve its resilience and sustainability of continued provision of early learning during such eventualities. If Early education was taken home by fully preparing parents in the process there would be no worry of school closures. Parents would still deliver the learning at home just as exactly as did caregivers and teachers at child centers. The increased use of electronic media leading to digital literacy as suggest in the report (p.8) cannot be achieved minus parental involvement. There is a need to include parents in the preparation for schools for future disruptions.

### **Cambridge School Noida -Why Parent Involvement is Important in Early Childhood Education.**

Cambridge School Noida (2021) firstly highlights that a Child's learning starts from home, and parents are their first teachers. They are a role model for their kids and have a significant role in building up their kids' character. That's why parents should be a helping hand in their kids' educational journey and encourage them with true inspiration. The article states that according to best school in Noida, parent's involvement in their kid's education has appositve and lasting impact on their children's academic skills. When children are properly stimulated from a young age by their parents, they tend to perform better academically in the long run

1. Pre-school is child's first time out of the comfort zone.

Usually, preschool is the first time a child gets out of the house and from the protective shadow of their parents for this much time. It's a tough transition for kids, but it's also the parents first experience of letting their child away from them. Therefore, they need to prepare themselves and their child for enabling this transition as smoothly as possible. While it facilitates learning away from the children, it does not mean that parents cease to play a role in this learning. They are still their role models as well as active facilitators of their child's needs and must continue to provide guidance for their actions.

2. Early childhood Education requires Parents cooperation

Parents have to realize their roles are not limited to performing a supportive role in their child's education. Children feel more confident and content with their outlook towards education when their parents encourage them to learn and do better. With their active participation, they enable the child to extend their education beyond the school's walls. Here are some ways on how parents can engage in their child's early childhood

### **Mazikana (2023) The Role of Parental Involvement at ECD Level at Your School.**

Mazikana (2023:1) writes that parental involvement is critical in the development of children as parents are the first teachers of any child. Mazikana emphasizes this point by stating that parents who are involved in their Childs education create a connection between the home and school. Parents are the first educators of their child and hence their involvement in their Childs early education activities both at home and the center.

## **CHAPTER THREE-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the description of the study area, research design and approach, population of the study, sampling procedure, sample size, sources of data collection, methods used in data collection, tools for data collection, tools for data analysis, research ethical consideration and conclusion.

### **3.1 Description of the Study areas**

This study will be carried in Zomba Malawi where SAFE'S CBCC are located. Five cbcc's have selected form a total of nine and these are: Mphanje, Kondanani, Simiyoni, Mwaiwandigwera, Kawiya Tadziwana.

### **3.2. Research Design and Approach**

The research data will be collected within a period of 14 days form the day of start of interviews. In this research, qualitative research method will be used because much of the data to be collected will be presented in a descriptive form. Qualitative research method is a method used in collecting data which involves the use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and observation in order to understand and explain a social phenomenon. Desk research method will be employed in literature review. During data collection process, interviews will be conducted through purposive sampling method since the participants are known, Care givers and parents from the targeted Cbcc's will be interviewed. According to Palinkas, [Horwitz and Green 20215](#), Purposive sampling is a method used in research which involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups that are knowledgeable about the subject under investigation. In ethical consideration, permission will be sought first to all respondents to be interviewed. The interview will only be conducted to those who give consent. The researcher will make sure that the information collected be used for the sole purpose of the research and confidentiality will be maintained where necessary. Desk data analysis of results will be applied after the data collection and the findings will be presented using descriptive method and themes as applied in qualitative research.

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

The target population in this project is 21 participants selected from the 5 SAFE'S sponsored CBCC'S in Zomba-Malawi. 2 caregivers and 2 parents will be interviewed from each of the 5 cbcc's making a total of 20 participants form the cbcc's. One officer from SAFE ECD section, will be interviewed.

### **3.4 Sample Procedure**

In this research purposive sampling method has been used to identify respondents. Purposive sampling as defined by Dovetail Editorial Team (2023) is a technique used in qualitative research to select a specific group of individuals or units for analysis. Participants are chosen "on purpose," not randomly. It is also known as judgmental sampling or selective sampling. In this procedure the researcher has specific purpose or objective in mind when selecting the sample. Therefore, the sample is selected on the characteristics or attributes that the researcher is interested in studying. The researcher has used purpose sampling since the participants are already known and the needed characters already known. These are caregivers who run SAFE sponsored ECD centers, parents who bring their children to the centers and ECD director at SAFE who are implementers of early learning activities in the selected communities.



### 3.5. Sample Size

Coursera (2023) defines Sample size as the number of observations or individuals included in a study or experiment. It is the number of individuals, items or data points selected from a larger population to represent it statistically. The sample size is a crucial consideration in research because it directly impacts the reliability and extent to which you can generalize those findings to the larger population. In this research a total of 21 participants will be interviewed from the 5 selected SAFE sponsored CBCC in Zomba and SAFE office. In this sample ,2 caregivers and 2 parents will be interviewed from each cbcc making at total of 20 participants from the SAFE sponsored CBCC'S. 1 ECD Director will be interviewed from SAFE ECD section. The selection is gender sensitive where possible especially in the identified centers.

### 3.6. Sources of Data Collection

Dovetail (2023), defines Data source as any location where you can find facts, figures, or other relevant information to support your research. This can be created through experimentation, surveys, or observations or use data produced by other researchers. The data sources should be based on relevance, reliability, context and perspective.

In this research data will be collected from caregivers, parents and SAFE'S ECD section. These are the teams to be involved in data collection. Literature review data will be gathered from secondary literature from various scholars who have written on the subject under study.

### 3.7. Methods of Data Collection

Simplilearn (2023) defines data collection as the process of collecting and evaluating information or data from multiple sources to find answers to research problems, answer questions, evaluate outcomes and forecast trends and probabilities. It is an essential phase in all types of research, analysis and decision-making, including that done in the social sciences, business and healthcare. Simplilearn highlights primary and secondary methods of data collection as the two approaches used to gather information for research purposes. Primary data collection involves the collection of data directly from the source or through direct interaction with the respondents. This method allows the researcher to obtain first-hand information specifically tailored to their research objectives. Surveys and interviews are some of the examples of techniques under this method. This research uses direct interviews in primary data collection as the researcher will interact directly with the respondents. The interviews will be conducted in the cbcc's and SAFE ECD section. Scheduled interviews will be made for all respondents before the I interview date. Structured and semi-structured question will used during interviews.

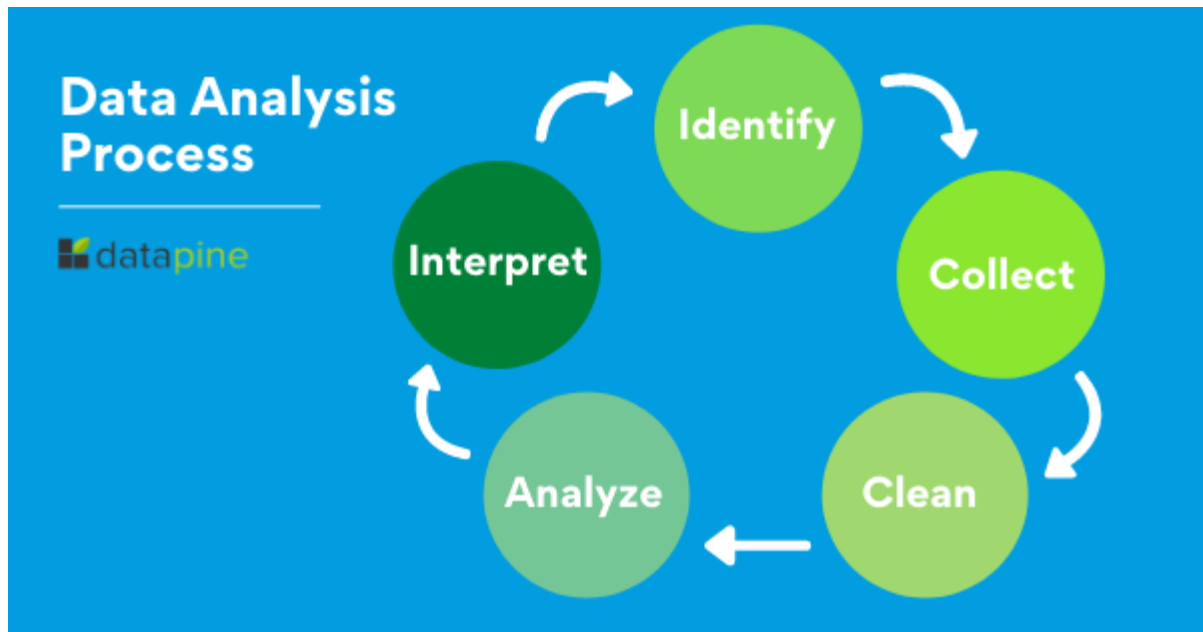
Secondary data collection method which involves using existing data from already existing scholarly materials will be used in literature review.

### 3.8. Tools for Data collection

Busayo Longe, defines Data collection tools as the devices/instruments used to collect data, such as a paper questionnaire or computer-assisted interviewing system case studies, checklist, interviews, observation sometimes and surveys or questionnaires are all tools used to collect data. These tools include interviews where data is collected on face to face with the respondents. Questionnaires which involve collecting data through an instrument consisting of a series of questions and prompts to receive a response from the individuals it is administered. In this research, the researcher will use face to face interviews to collect data. Verbally administered with structured and semi-structured questions will be employed in the process. The researcher will face caregivers, parents and the SAFE's ECD Director at their respective sites.

### 3.9. Tools for Data Analysis

Bernardita (2023) defines data analysis as the process of collecting, modelling and analyzing data using various statistical and logical methods and techniques. The data is analyzed to extract relevant conclusions in research. Bernadita highlights the 5 stages of data analysis process which the researcher sees necessary to be taken into consideration. The stages highlighted include:



Firstly, before every data is collected, the researcher needs to answer why the need to collect the data in the first place. Determination of the questions to be answered takes place at this stage. The data in this research is key in informing SAFE and its stakeholders in the best ways of how to involve parents in early learning activities. The data will assist in the process of taking early leaning home.

Secondly, the data collection process is done. This is where the researcher starts collecting data by defining the data sources to be used in the research. The researcher in this research will use interviews as a source or data. The researcher will interview caregivers, parents and ECD Directors at SAFE. Thirdly, data cleaning will be done to deal away with unnecessary information that may arise during the interviews.

Fourthly data analysis will be data using qualitative methods are defined as the observation of non-numerical data that is gathered and produced using methods of observation such as interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and more. In this research Narrative and descriptive analysis used. The research will have time to look at narrative responses of the situation given by respondents on the ground at the time of interviews and draw conclusion of the current status of parental involvement in early learning. The descriptive process will bring to light the mind of parents and caregivers and other stakeholders on how to better improve the process of early learning in SAFE sponsored CBCC, s as far as home parental engagement is concerned in actual education activities.

Finally, the process ends with data interpretation, a process where the researcher will come up with courses of action based on the findings.

### 3.10. Research Ethical Consideration

Pritha Bhandari (2023), defines Ethical consideration in research as a set of principles that guide your research designs and practices. Scientists and researchers must always adhere to a certain code of conduct when collecting data from people. These considerations work to

- protect the rights of research participants
- enhance research validity
- maintain scientific or academic integrity

The researcher in this project shall make sure to take care of the respondent's safety, rights and well-being. The researcher shall further seek consent to all institutions and participants to be involved in this project. Interviews shall only be conducted to those who have given their consent prior to the interview date. Interviews shall be conducted in places that respects the privacy and safety of the respondents. The data collected shall be solely used for the intended purpose

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.0 Introduction

This section presents the process of converting the gathered data to meaningful information. According to Karrin Kelly (2023) concurs with Taherdoost as he defines data analysis as a process of cleaning, changing and processing raw data and extracting actionable relevant information that help business or stakeholders make informed decisions. The researcher in this research uses qualitative descriptive data analysis and interpretation. Themes based on questions guiding this research will be used for data presentation and interpretation. Data analyzed in this research will help SAFE and other concerned stakeholders to make informed decisions on how to enhance parental involvement in early childhood education activities in Malawi.



The purpose of this study was to find ways of linking early childhood education to home life of a child. This would facilitate fully parental involvement in early childhood education activities. The research is very important to all ECD stakeholders as the data will help to improve ECD services delivery at home. The Study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the main early childhood education activities taking place in SAFE's ECD centers in Zomba - Malawi.
2. Discuss the role of parents in early childhood education development.
3. Investigate the present condition of parental involvement in early childhood in SAFE ECD Centers in Zomba -Malawi
4. Discuss ways of enhancing maximum parental involvement in Early childhood development activities In Malawi.

#### **4.1 Demographic of Participants and Sites**

Sub-Saharan Africa Family Enrichment supports 9 community Based childcare centers in Zomba District alone which is the focus of this study. The organization has other supports other 11 cbcc's in other 4 districts in Malawi. SAFE is a faith based Non-Governmental Organization but there is no religious requirements for children's admission in its cbcc's.

##### **4.1.1 How Does SAFE provide Early Childhood Education Services in Zomba.**

SAFE provides its ECD services through partnership with Community-Based Organizations (CBO's) in all the 9 communities. These CBO'S have independent functioning committees that run these cbccs on behalf of their communities. SAFE provide technical support by training caregivers, help in cbcc infrastructure development by supporting construction of classroom and play ground. Support with provision of supplies inform of teaching and learning materials and feeding program materials. SAFE also supports the payment of caregiver's allowances in all its sponsored cbcc's. These are channeled through the SAFE coordinators and cbcc committees which represents the CBO committee. SAFE employed a community supervisor who links the organization and the community. The ownership of the cbcc's remains in the hands of the communities through CBO committees. So, the partnership based on a written Memorandum of Understanding is between SAFE and the CBO'S from the 9 communities. This research selected 5 cbcc's to represent the 9 in Zomba.

##### **4.1.2 Characteristics of Participants**

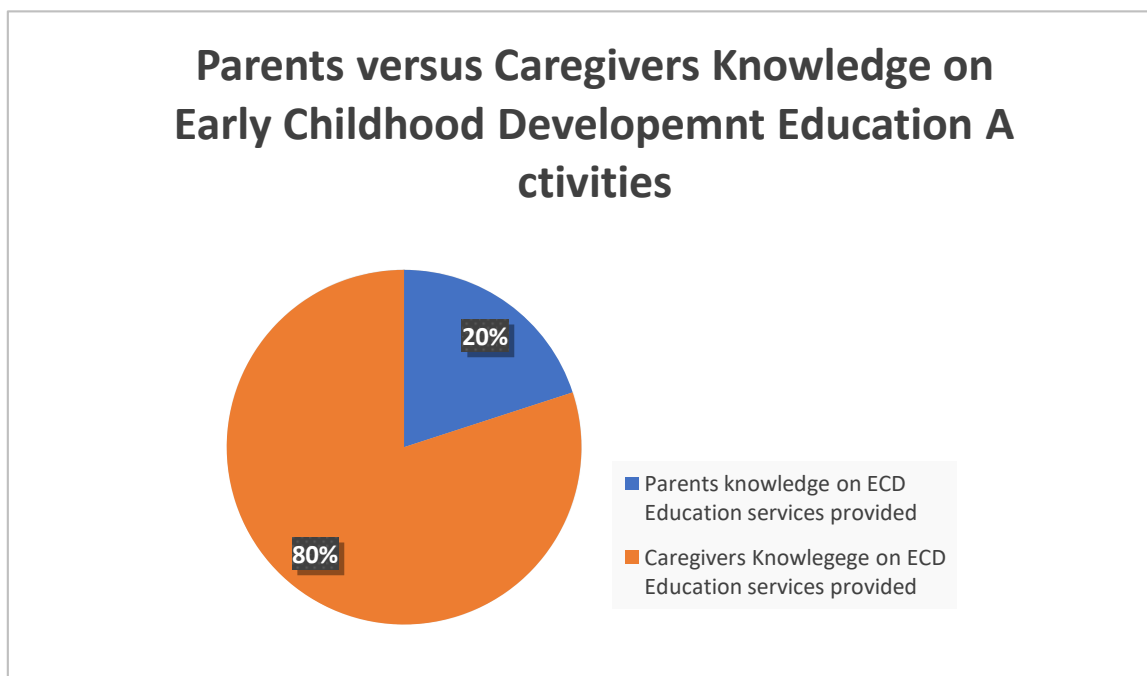
Interviewed participants consisted of 21 participants,10 caregivers,10 parents and 1 ECD director. Among the caregivers, a majority are female participants as many early childhood centers caregivers are females. For example, out of the 10 caregivers from the 5 cbccs only 3 are males representing 30% of the total population. The gender balance worked in males as 5 were females and 5 were males. Among caregivers 70% had gone as far as form 4 level in secondary school education which is the highest level at secondary level in Malawi. Only 10% had gone below this level. Among Parents only 20% had gone beyond secondary level



**4.1. Table 1. Number of Participants Interviewed**

ITEM	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Care Givers Interviewed	3	7	10
Parents Interviewed	5	5	10
Directors Interviewed	0	1	1

**4.2. Chart Representing Caregivers and Parents Knowledge Acquisition on Early Childhood Development Education Activities In SAFE sponsored CBCC’s in Zomba-Malawi.**



**4.3. Interpretation**

**Table:1**

The table 4.1 above represents the number of participants who were interviewed from 5 sampled SAFE cbcc’s in Zomba District. SAFE sponsors a total of 9 Cbcc’s in Zomba and the researcher decided to purposefully sample 5 to represent the 9 in this study. At each cbcc 2 care givers and 2 parents were interviewed on the knowledge bordering services offered in Child Based Care centers and parental involvement in these programs. A total of 21 participants have been interviewed in this study. The director of early childhood development program at SAFE was also interviewed separately to get the true picture of the organizations expectation and role it plays to ensure maximum parental involvement in the services provided in its sponsored cbcc’s. The Directors knowledge was used as a benchmark for evaluating the caregivers and parent’s knowledge on early childhood education activities offered especially in line with parental involvement. The participants were interviewed from the following cbcc’s: Mphanje, Kondanani, Mwaiwandigwera, Kawiya Tadziwana, and Simiyoni. The researcher was gender sensitive in selection of participants as seen from the table. The only challenge is in caregivers because mostly female members easily give their time for voluntary services compared to men. There are few male caregivers in the observed CBCC’s.

**Chart 4:2 Represents Caregivers and Parents Knowledge Acquisition on Early Childhood Development Education Activities In SAFE sponsored CBCC’s in Zomba-Malawi.**

The chart above indicates the Early Childhood education activities knowledge attainment gap or difference between caregivers and parents in the five investigated SAFE Early Childhood Development Centers. The chart shows that 80% of the caregivers have good knowledge of the content of the early childhood education curriculum in Malawi. When asked what they expect to be taught in their centers, 8 out of 10 got the content correct representing 80 percent of their population. Establishment of knowledge attainment between the two groups was very crucial in this research because it facilitates the transition of early childhood activities from school or centers to the Childs home. As indicated in the chart the little knowledge parents have has a negative impact in their child education involvement. If parents don’t know what their children learn in school it is very difficult for them to participate in helping their

children in school work at home. This was discovered when their caregivers were asked about the challenges, they face in parental involvement in child's education activities.

A majority indicated that many parents don't have the knowledge of what is taught in the centers which makes it difficult for them to help their children in school. According to some caregivers this might be attributed to parent's lack of interest to visit the centers and for the curriculum or content. Some attributed that challenges to lower level of education of some parents. Many parents who send their children in villages have not gone far or never attended any education in their life. For example, those who cannot literarily read and write cannot help their children even in counting numbers, working on alphabetical letters, shapes, colors and other lessons which at least require some basic level of education. Among the parents interviewed 2 out of 10 proved to have a good content of the activities representing 20% of the parent's population. It was discovered that these had gone as far as attaining Malawi school certificate of Education which is a secondary school graduating certificate. Parents who have attained Junior certificate of Education and above seem to have interest in asking their children what they learnt in school unlike those below. They are able to help their children do the work they do in school at home because at least at their level they can understand the content.

Caregiver highest attainment of knowledge in early childhood Education activities is attributed by the thorough ECD basic training they receive from SAFE. According to Mary Phiri, ECD programs Director at SAFE, the organization drills all its care givers in the 14-day recommended ECD basic training. The training covers the government approved ECD curriculum which stipulates the learning content and childhood development centers are managed.

### **Lack of ECD Basic Knowledge In Early Learning Activities by Parents**

Some of the parents though educated but they have no knowledge of ECD services provided in their centers. Lack of training and awareness on ECD services to parents is a contributing factor to the gap in knowledge. The interviewed parents revealed that if center managers, ECD partners and the government could organize community awareness meetings on ECD services provided could help to boost their knowledge and thereby enable them to better take part in helping their children at home. Some parents cited the example of helping their primary level students with homework because they too passed through the same education level.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter presents a lengthy discussion on research findings using a theme-based approach. The findings have been generated from the data collected using questions that were formed to guide the research. Furthermore, conclusions will be drawn from the findings, suggestions and recommendations will be highlighted by the researcher. Limitations and areas of further study will be presented with a final presentation of references and bibliography.

This research is guided by the following research question:

1. What are the main early childhood education activities taking place in SAFE's ECD centers in Zomba - Malawi.
2. Discuss the role of parents in early childhood education development.
3. Investigate the present condition of parental involvement in Early Childhood development activities in SAFE ECD Centers in Zomba -Malawi.
4. Discuss ways of enhancing maximum parental involvement in Early childhood development activities In Malawi

### **5.1. Discussion of Research Findings and Connections.**

The findings to each research question are discussed in this chapter using themes derived from the questions. The results are compared and contrasted with previous literature.

#### **5.1.0. Research Question One.**

#### **Early Childhood education activities taking place in SAFE's Early Childhood Development centers in Zomba-Malawi.**

Research question one asked about the Early Childhood Development activities taking place in all the SAFE sponsored cbcc's. The purpose is to measure the parents and caregivers' knowledge on what is to be taught in the centers. The researcher believes that parent's knowledge on ECD curriculum content can help them to participate or get involved in Early Childhood education activities better at home.

Research was conducted in the selected five out of nine SAFE sponsored cbccs. In these Cbccs, 10 caregivers and 10 parents were interviewed to understand their basic knowledge on education activities that are provided. The Director of Early Childhood activities at SAFE was also interviewed on the subject matter. According to Mary Phiri, the Director of ECD at SAFE, the following education activities were outlined:

#### **i. Numeracy**



In numeracy children aged between 3 and 5 years are expected to learn numbers through identification and writing. All SAFE caregivers are trained on how to teach children so that the time they live the cbccs to go to primary school they know numbers, counting and able to write. All 5-year-old children are expected to at least know numbers from 1-30. They should be able to pick these numbers even at random placement.

#### ii.Literacy

In literacy children learn alphabet letters which include knowing, identifying and writing all the 26 letters. By the time children reach year 5 they should be able to identify, write and know numbers.

#### iii.Weather

Children learn how to tell and differentiate daily weather outlook. They should be to tell the difference between sunny days, rainy days or cloudy days

#### iv.Health and personal Hygiene

Children learn how to take care of themselves and their surroundings. They also learn about the common cause of common sicknesses related to personal hygiene.

#### v.Colors

Children are taught various colors of objects. They should be able to identify and differentiate objects of various colors.

#### vi.Drawing and Coloring

Children have time to draw different pictures and color. They also do color already drawn pictures from selected books.

#### vii.Songs and Stories

Children have time to sing educative songs and listen to stories from caregivers and designated story tellers. The Organization recruits special story tellers so that they are able to tell different stories which are cultural or traditional related. Malawian society is more of an oral based where much of information is passed from one generation to another through oral means. From our traditions, parents especially grandparents will sit with children around the fire and tell moral stories. These stories carry moral lessons to help children grow with good behavior and manners. Caregivers also read stories from various story books with lesson explained. The principle is that children learn much as they watch and listen. The schools have learning centers with the classes and one of the learning centers is music corner where various items resembling various music equipment are placed. Children must know both traditional and modern music equipment used in music industry. Tins resembling drums, locally made shakers, guitars, sticks are some of the items placed on the music corner to help children know the equipment in music.

#### viii.Outdoor Play activities

In all SAFE sponsored centers children do various outdoor play activities to help children grow physically. SAFE has helped to build children friendly play grounds with various playing equipment placed. Some of the play equipment one will find in these centers include swings and sliders. Caregivers play various games with children. This research revealed that 80% of the caregivers know the ECD curriculum content while 20% of the parents have the knowledge of the curriculum. This has been represented on the chart above. Lack of ECD curriculum content knowledge among parents has makes it difficult for them to help their children with school work at home. Many parents do not know what is taught in schools. When caregivers were asked about the reason why many parents do not know what is taught in schools, various reasons were cited. Some of the reasons include parents lack of interest to know the content. It was revealed that many parents don't visit the centers to ask from caregivers what their children learn at the center. Poor parent education background was also cited as one contributing factor. Parents who did not go far or did not attend any school cannot know what it taught and cannot help their children in doing homework or just revising what is learnt in School. An example was cited of parents who are not able to read and write that such cannot help their children in reading letters or numbers at home hence hindering their involvement. Out of the 10 parents interviewed,8 showed that they know only 1 or 2 of the listed content above. One of the opening questions was for them to tell their education level, only 2 had gone beyond junior certificate of education and the rest below or never attend school at all. Only 2 parents were able to mention at least 5 of the listed activities.

### 5.1. 1.Research Question Two.

#### **The role of parents in Early Childhood education Development in the cbcc's.**

Research question two sought to learn from caregivers, parents and the ECD director the role of parents in early childhood education activities in Zomba. The research discovered that parents don't understand exactly their role in early childhood activities. Many were able to only tell that preparing and bringing their child at the center is the main role. The ECD director and caregivers indicated that parents are a crucial component in early childhood activities as they are the first caregivers at home. According to Mary Phiri, ECD Director at SAFE, she emphasized that parents prepare their children for learning, they teach children manners at home, they feed their children. She further

highlighted that parents are expected to check children work or ask children about what they learnt in school. Mary's sentiments were also echoed by all the interviewed caregivers. In SAFE sponsored cbcc's parents do provide firewood for children feeding program, they also donate some maize after the harvest season to make sure that there is food in the centers. Many of the interviewed parents showed that they are able to prepare children for school, bring fired or donate food but have challenges in helping children with education activities due to lack of knowledge or poor education background.

### **5.1.2. Research Question Three**

#### **Present Condition present condition of parental involvement in Early Childhood education activities in SAFE sponsored ECD centers in Zomba-Malawi.**

The third research question seeks to understand the present condition of parental involvement in Early Childhood education activities especially at home. Seeks to find out whether parents are able to help their children with school activities at home. The first question guiding this research questionnaire was to find out if SAFE sponsored cbcc's give specific homework to children to be done at home. The question targeted to find out if there are specific activities that require direct parental involvement. The research found out that parental involvement in early childhood activities at home is minimal when it comes to some learning activities. There is no formal homework given to children to take home unlike in other private nursery schools where kids get homework once or twice a week. The homework provided in private schools helps parents to get directly involved as they will make sure to help their child with the school work. In locally based cbcc's Many parents have no idea of what exactly their children learn. They may just know a few like they do numbers and letters. Many of the interviewees could not go beyond these two activities when asked about the curriculum content. They dint know that their children learn about weather, personal hygiene, sports and games. If they knew, possibly they would give children time to do these activities at home. Lack of enough knowledge on early education activities has already been shown in the chart. No one can be involved in a thing he doesn't know. Much of the work is left in the hands of caregivers. When the Director of ECD was asked about parental involvement it was discovered that many parents are basically involved in preparing and sending their children in school, provision of maize for porridge making and not much beyond. As to the reasons contributing to low participation poor education background was cited by caregivers and director of ECD.

### **5.1.3. Research Question Four**

#### **Discuss ways of enhancing maximum parental involvement in Early Childhood Development Activities In Malawi.**

The fourth question seeks to address the problem which is the gap between Early Childhood education at ECD centers and home life. Parents, caregivers and the Director of ECD at SAFE were asked the question to draw responses on whether they have ideas on how to get maximum parental involvement or how to take Early Childhood education activities at home. The research revealed the following ways of addressing the problem.

Firstly, all respondents suggested that organizing community awareness campaigns on the importance of Early Childhood education. In this campaign parents from the feeder communities will be called for a meeting where the cbcc committee, caregivers and SAFE Directors or supervisors can talk to the parents about the content of Early Childhood education curriculum and highlighting the areas in which parents can assist their children at home. On this meeting parents can also be told the importance of early childhood education to their children. This will encourage those who may be keeping their little ones at home to bring them to the ECD centers.

Secondly, the research revealed that parents need to be encouraged to regularly visit child education centers and find out on how their children are progressing in learning. Such visits will also give parents opportunity to interact with caregivers on one-on-one basis. Parents will be able to familiarize themselves with the Early Childhood Development activities in centers and thereby able to take the activities home. For example, if a parent visits the center during outdoor play time, he/she will find children playing different games which can also be done at home. One of the activities done indoor is story telling which can also be done at home. In the interviews, caregivers complained the tendance of many parents who come to education centers with their children and drop them just few meters from the center. Some parents drop their children at centers entrances and can't even dare to meet the teachers. Caregivers expressed that they would love to see parents coming along with their children at school in the morning and also interact with caregivers to know much about ECD.

Thirdly, caregivers suggested that taking ECD home can be properly achieved when parents are able to at least read and write. As indicated earlier many parents cannot help their children in Early Childhood education due to poor education background where by they can't read the basic alphabet letters and numbers. In view of this concern the respondents suggested that both government and partner organization like SAFE should put up mechanisms to encourage adult literacy education attendance by all parents who cannot read and write. Caregivers also suggest an increase in numbers of centers where adult literacy education can be offered. This will make it easy for parents to

access such a service within their reach. Adult literacy according to Tarrant Literacy Coalition is define as the adult's ability to read and write. It involves basic understanding and writing simple sentences and numbers.

Fourthly, participants suggested the need to consider giving carry home activities that parents can do at home with parents. These activities have to be tailored in line with the education levels of parents within a particular community. Participants believe that they are still some parents who will be willing to work with their children if they are given specific home activities like other private institution such activities are call "Home Work". The homework activities can be designed with a range of varieties for example to those who are able to read and write homework in letters and numbers can be provided. Coloring, outdoor play work, storytelling to those not able to read. By the end of the day each parent will have participated in taking early childhood education activities home.

Finally, continued interaction between caregivers and parents be encouraged. Some caregivers reported that they are times they get oral feedback from parents on how children are demonstrating the impact their learning home. This happens as the caregivers move around in communities since many of them stay in the same localities with the children they teach. Some parents approached them to report about the change in behavior of children attributing it to be a result of ECD services offered in the earlier.

## 5.2. Conclusion

The section presents a brief summary of the research paper. This research paper focused on investigating best ways of linking Early childhood development activities taking place in ECD centers in Malawi to the children's home life. The researcher's hypothesis has been that there is a missing link between children's activities in ECD and the home life. The drive in this research is a belief that parents are the first caregivers at home. That means first early learning begins at home and therefore parental involvement in the process is crucial in taking ECD activities home. Both home and school environment must provide a conducive atmosphere for children's early learning. Any missing link between the two will affect child's learning process as children do other things at school and does a different thing at home.

A number of scholars have been consulted to provide relevant information on literature review on the subject under discussion. These scholars include: McCombes who has contributed to the definition of literature review, Ron Spreeuwenberg (2022) contributed on the importance of parental involvement in early learning. UNICEF Malawi provides information on what the government of Malawi and its partners in ECD are doing to promote positive parenting and responsive caregiving, Koch, who feeds this research with relevant information on parental involvement in Early Childhood Education and its Impact on the development of Early Language and literacy skills-parent involvement model. Mazikana (2023) on the role of parental involvement at ECD level in school. A number of scholars have also been consulted and their input used in other section of the research as presented in the referencing section of this research.

Stake holders in early learning activities such as parents, caregivers have been engaged through interviews to get their input the best ways to enhance parental engagement in early learning activities in Malawi. SAFE sponsored CBCC's were sampled in Zomba as a study field for the subject under discussion. A number of recommendations have drawn from the research form stakeholder and they will be presented in the next section of this chapter. Both the researcher and the respondents agree the existence of a missing link between early childhood learning activities and home life and the need to link the two for better.

Finally, the researcher believes that all stakeholders in Early Childhood services will take the results and recommendation of this study seriously with the aim of improving the early learning situation for our children in Malawi. Parental involvement is key as Malawi strives to take early leaning activities to children's homes.

## 5.3. Suggestions and Recommendations.

From the research conducted it has been made clear that a gap exists between early childhood activities taking place at CBCC's and the home. Parental involvement in early childhood activities is key in taking ECD services to children's home. The evident situation is that current parental involvement limits itself to provision of food and escorting children to the centers. SAFE is doing a great job in provision of early childhood development services in Zomba and across the country by putting up infrastructure, feeding program, training of caregivers and supply of teaching and learning materials. There is still a need to invest more in parental involvement in the learning process. In view of this need, the recommendations to this research are as follows:

- Both non-governmental organizations and the government to help in mobilizing putting up measures to make parents involved in children's early learning beyond food, play materials supply and escorting children.



- Government and stakeholders to invest in elderly literacy education to help give basic education to parents so that they can be able to understand the basics in early learning activities. It has been evident in the research that poor education background of many parents hinders them in taking part in their children's education.
- Early childhood Development services providers should rethink of incorporating parental involvement tracking tool in the ECD curriculum. The tool may include specific activities that caregivers can give children to do with their parents at home. Example of such is homework activities which private early learning center providers give to children once or twice in a week. These activities aim at deliberately making parents involved in their children's education. The tool should be user friendly bearing in mind the parent's education levels in the communities.
- Organizing regular community awareness campaigns on the importance parental involvement in early childhood education activities. Parents must be encouraged to visit the centers and interact with caregivers on the learning activities provided.
- Government and NGOs in Early Childhood development can organize orientation workshop on early childhood Development curriculum content to able parents. By able parents, implies those who can at least read and write.



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