

Book Review

Munsaka, E., & Kalinde, B. (2017) *Laying the foundation for optimal outcomes in Early Childhood*, University of Zambia Press, Lusaka, 172 pp. (A5), \$12.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-9982-02-099-1

Although the necessity for the provision of quality early childhood education has been acknowledged in the local and international development literature, there are currently few books written on early childhood education in Zambia. The need for such resources is justified by the fact that 68% of Zambian children are not accessing pre-primary education relative to primary education in this country (McCoy, Zuilkowski, Yoshikawa & Fink, 2017), resulting in poor cognitive performance (Hsiao, Richter, Makusha, Matafwali, Van Heerden & Mabaso, 2017).

While previous studies report the benefits of quality early childhood education

in Zambia, including early school enrolment (Zuilkowski, Fink, Moucheraud & Matafwali, 2012), acquisition of minimum skills for active and meaningful citizenship (Nsamenang cited in Serpell, 1992 :468), and cognitive, fine motor and task performance skills (McCoy, Zuilkowski, Yoshikawa & Fink, 2017), some studies have concluded that Zambia is not ready for early childhood education due to its impoverished primary school sector which suffers from classroom shortages, unavailability of textbooks to students, and poor quality of teaching (Ministry of General Education, 2019).

This 172-page book is among the first attempts to provide a teaching resource to the Zambian readers, co-authored by Ecloss Munsaka and Bibian Kalinde, who are both experienced and accomplished authors in child development, teaching and learning in early childhood care, development and education.

The bright, creative illustrations on the cover page are an outstanding exhibition for of what the book stands for. The authors

identify problems in the current Zambian early childhood education programme such as poor teaching methods, use of inappropriate teaching methods, and use of unfamiliar language and the absence of parent-teacher collaboration. The authors suggest practical solutions to address these challenges using locally available resources.

The book has seven chapters which vary in content and depth. While the first chapter charts the local and international processes that explain the development of early childhood education in Zambia, the second to the fourth chapter detail human developmental domains including physical, cognitive and socio-emotional developmental milestones and their accompanying theories. Research on physical development in Zambia is well described in the chapters that follow. The cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of play in children are empirically and theoretically supported. Negative effects of excessive television exposure on children and relevant examples from the Zambian early childhood curriculum of how play can be maximized in the teaching and learning context are discussed (p.85). Detailed descriptions of Zambian games and songs that promote

cognitive development make this book exceptional (p.63).

Chapters four to six discuss the role of language in early childhood education in Zambia. The book's appalling observation that more than 700 Zambian early childhood centres across the country use English as a language of instruction even though learners are not familiar with it is a source of concern (p.93). The authors provide convincing evidence on the advantages of using the mother tongue in preschool (Ohannessian & Kashoki, 2017; Mwanza-Kabaghe, 2015; Tambulukani & Bus, 2011; Heugh, 2005; Mbewe, Matafwali & Mwanza-Kabaghe, 2016). Finally, effective strategies of involving parents in the education of their children are discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

The book makes a unique contribution to the field of early childhood education. First, the suggestion of play-based pedagogy involving songs, and games in teaching is provided, consistent with evidence on effective pedagogical practices in low resource settings (Adams-Ojugbele & Moletsane, 2019). Second, the book proposes time out and other behaviour modification techniques as measures for pupil misconduct (Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007). Third, the authors confirm evidence-based practical

strategies for addressing maladaptive behaviour in childhood in Zambia (Mwanza-Kabaghe, 2015). Lastly, the authors suggest that physical-cognitive development are best achieved by using song, play, dance and story-telling.

The strengths of the book are apparent. The book highlights three essential characteristics of an effective early childhood education programme in Zambia, which include quality of instruction that incorporates play and a familiar language, emotional support to learners by teachers and active parental involvement in the education of their children for better learning outcomes. Second, a description of play and how it can be effectively used to foster holistic physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development is clearly illustrated by local examples from the Zambian setting, consistent with evidence (Kelly, Dissanayake, Ihsen & Hammond, 2011). Third, the book provides a strong theoretical framework to support early childhood care and education. However, explaining socio-emotional development using both Erik Erikson and the attachment theory developed by John Bowlby (Bowlby, 2008) would have provided more insight on the role of attachment in predicting optimal

development and academic achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

As with other good studies, this book also has weaknesses. First, one of the childhood problems identified by the book is obesity. This may not be a practical challenge in contemporary Zambia due to the reported high malnourishment and stunted growth (McCoy, Zuilkowski, Yoshikawa & Fink, 2017). Second, the absence of a glossary in the book to provide detailed explanations of the meaning of complex terms is inexcusable and yet the authors promised the readers that complex words would be explained (see preface). This omission makes it difficult for readers to fully benefit from the book.

Third, while the authors agree with prevailing evidence (Ojanen et al., 2015; Ohannessian & Kashoki, 2017; Mwanza-Kabaghe, 2015; Tambulukani & Bus, 2011; Heugh, 2005; Mbewe, Matafwali & Mwanza-Kabaghe, 1996; Serpell, 1992) that reading acquisition in the mother tongue (initial socialization) is the direction to follow for the promotion of “pedagogical efficacy and cultural continuity between home and school” (Serpell, 1992: 468), their observation that some Zambian children’s mother tongue is English (p.144) would have benefitted from evidential support.

Fourth, the book's observation that insufficient and unmotivated preschool teachers (Ojanen et al., 2015) might harm Zambia's early childhood education sector needs to be extended to suggestions of how the government can effectively train community school teachers (who cater for massive preschool enrolments in Zambia and yet remain isolated from the public preschools).

Fifth, given that most Zambian Parents now spend less time with their children, the authors are right to lay emphasis on healthy teacher-parent collaboration in early childhood instruction for effective teaching and learning (Chansa-Kabali & Westerholm, 2014; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). They are also right to emphasize the need for parents to support and supervise their children's homework and together with them to get involved in co-curricular activities so as to restrain pupils' excessive television viewing at home and to otherwise fill their time with constructive activities (p.135-136). However, the authors fail to highlight recent research on how parents neglect adversely affect cognitive development. All these parent and teacher strategies are mere suggestions if they are not supported by evidence.

Finally, one would have wished that the reference literature meets or even exceeds standard expectation from the scientific community. For instance, out of 121 reference sources (p. 147-157), only 43 references (less than half) were published in the last 10 years (2008-2017). This is not a good indication for a book that promotes current best practices in the field that is in its infancy in Zambia. A few typographic errors have also been noted on a number of pages (p.10, 11, 24, 29,53,67,80 and 100) and one judgmental statement: "we need to treat children the way Jesus Christ treats us, he hates the sin, but unconditionally loves the sinner" (p.122). Such a statement suggests a problematic religious (clearly Christian) bias in a book that targets all readers regardless of religion.

In conclusion, the book is suitable for all teachers regardless of the qualification and specialization, and institutional setting—whether university or college. It is suitable for literate parents and for the Sunday school teacher as it encourages a child perspective in dealing with children's issues. While highlighting major early childhood education problems including poor pedagogical practices and the absence of parent-teacher collaboration, the book suggests best

practices in early childhood education in Zambia. This resource is evidence-based, practical, and engaging; qualities that make it a unique contribution to early childhood education, care and development in Zambia.

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