

## AUTHOR:

Tuelo Matjokana<sup>1</sup> 

## AFFILIATION:

<sup>1</sup>University of South Africa,  
South AfricaDOI: [https://doi.org/10.38140/  
pie.v42i4.7636](https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v42i4.7636)

e-ISSN 2519-593X

Perspectives in Education

2024 42(4): 201-215

## PUBLISHED:

10 December 2024

## RECEIVED:

23 October 2023

## ACCEPTED:

27 September 2024

# Barriers to collaboration in implementing early childhood care and education policies in Gauteng province, South Africa

## Abstract

*The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. The UNCRC sets out specific rights of children. Countries that are signatories to the UNCRC commit themselves to ensuring that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3); and that every child has the right to life, survival and development (Article 6).*

*South Africa, a UNCRC signatory, has developed early childhood development (ECD) policies. These policies require collaboration among stakeholders for quality services. The study aimed to explore strategies for strengthening the implementation of ECD policies to improve children's development. To compare the results of various contexts, two ECD centres in rural and semi-urban areas were purposefully sampled. Data was also collected through semi-structured interviews, writing notes and observation to understand the ECD participants' experiences.*

*This study has used Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller's (2011) conceptual framework on quality to understand the collaborative support required to ensure the holistic development of young children. The findings revealed a lack of synergy in the roles and responsibilities of ECD stakeholders in implementing policies. The planned ECD policy intentions of key stakeholders - to provide care and education services - have thus far fallen short of its intended goals. It is recommended that continuous dialogue and interaction among ECD stakeholders at the national, provincial, district, and ECD centre levels must be strengthened through the implementation of ECD policies.*

**Keywords:** ECD Policy, quality, implementation, collaboration, stakeholders

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Early childhood education (ECE) is regarded as a primary driver of development. This sentiment is expressed in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Published by the UFS

<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie>

© Creative Commons

With Attribution (CC-BY)



“We recognise the need and commit to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all,” states Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Visser, *et al.*, 2021). Investment in ECD is the key to preventing the escalation of poverty and unemployment in society (Hendricks & Thengela, 2020).

Recent studies show that high quality early learning programmes are critical for foundational skills. For example, a study conducted by Bendini and Devercelli, 2022 found that both parental involvement and community support lay a groundwork for cognitive and social development in young children.

Furthermore, the collaborative efforts between government departments, non-governmental organisation (NGOs), private sector and local communities are important in improving the ECD interventions (Buccini, *et al.*, 2023). These collaborations are critical to address the specific needs of children varied context for access to quality learning early learning environments.

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2019), nations across the globe, including South Africa, have made progress in ensuring that children have access to education. However, access to quality learning is inadequate. Nearly 3.3 million of the seven million children in South Africa between the ages of 0 and 5 still do not have access to any type of ECD programme (Thorogood, *et al.*, 2020). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) research states that 81% of South African learners in lower primary Grade 4 are unable to meaningfully access basic information from text to respond to simple answers (PIRLS, 2021). According to the PIRLS report, only 1% of South African Grade 4 learners achieved the Advanced Benchmark. Children in poorly resourced communities drop out of school and repeat grades due to an inadequate early learning foundation. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has also negatively impacted access to essential ECD services and education.

Despite having an extended education programme for ECD centres, South Africa has thus far failed to stop reproducing inequality (Case, 2022). The quality of ECD in South Africa is hampered by fragmented services. This is because key stakeholders have failed to collaborate to provide environments and resources that will allow children to develop to their full potential and increase access to high-quality ECD services. According to Visser *et al.* (2021), novel approaches are needed to address every child’s right to obtain a high-quality education. These approaches should include innovative humanitarian activities like collaborative practices.

## 1.2 Problem of the study

A growing body of research indicates that policies are essential for creating and enhancing robust ECD systems to improve access to high-quality learning opportunities. However, due to the multifaceted nature of ECD services in South Africa, it has proved difficult to achieve the desired ECD policy intentions (Theobald, 2019). Private, public-private, and NGO providers have historically been the main drivers behind the expansion of the delivery of ECD services. Most of the poorest South African communities’ ECD programmes are run out of private residences and public and rented spaces (Wills, *et al.*, 2020).

The South African National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, acknowledges that the development of young children is the responsibility of the state. It places emphasis on the importance of an effective and integrated system to ensure that essential ECD services are available to all young children, particularly in vulnerable communities (Davids, *et al.*, 2015).

The policy goal of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD) (RSA, 2015) is to bring synergy to different programmes provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Housing (DoH), Department of Social Development (DSD) and the private sector (DSD, 2015).

Both the NDP and NIECD policies are aligned with the UN's SDG and seek to create a multi-sectoral enabling environment for the delivery of comprehensive ECD services. Despite this, there is still limited collaboration among stakeholders responsible for ECD services, namely the DBE, DSD, DoH and private sector, to improve access to ECD provision in South Africa. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent and level of ECD stakeholder collaboration in South Africa.

### 1.3 Research gap study and objectives

Children's rights are prioritised by the government in Section 4 of the Bill of Rights (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) ( Mbarathi, *et al.*, 2016). However, the prevalence of poverty continues to undermine young children living in disadvantaged areas such as rural areas, townships, and informal settlements (Case, 2022). The lack of cohesion and collaboration among key ECD stakeholders in providing quality ECD services contributes to a fragmented foundation for young children's social and academic advancement. Conversely, Finland's educational and social policies are seen as authentic due to extensive consultation, open dialogue, and collaborative planning (Hardy, *et al.*, 2021). Shared leadership is distributed across all ECD practitioners, managers, and administrators, fostering ownership and integration (Heikka *et al.*, 2018).

For this reason, this paper aims to investigate the following issues:

- The level of stakeholder collaboration in implementing ECD policies.
- Challenges in the participation of ECD stakeholders.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1 Stakeholder participation

According to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, every nation should develop its own comprehensive national strategies to ensure quality services for its nation (Pillay, 2014).

In response to the African Charter, the South African government has partnered with international aid agencies such as the UNICEF and NGOs to provide ECD centres with basic services for the education of children from birth to four years of age. Policies such as the National Integrated Plan for ECD (NIPECD) provide an enabling framework for multiple role-players to deliver a comprehensive integrated service. In this regard, focused vision and strategies to strengthen ECD provision by key ECD stakeholders in the DSD, DoH and the DBE have been established in South Africa (Twala, 2021).

According to Matjokana (2021), the gap between policy intention and policy implementation in South African education policy is due to a lack of participation in the policy development process and policy understanding by end-users, who are ECD practitioners. Young children in vulnerable communities still face limited access to quality care and education due to inadequate advocacy, ECD practitioner training, monitoring, management, leadership, infrastructure, and funding (Biersteker, *et al.*, 2022).

To redress the prevailing limited ECD services in South Africa, a diagnostic review was conducted to identify the gaps and constraints in the development and implementation of ECD policy (Davids *et al.*, 2015). An ECD awareness campaign was launched in 2012 in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, including policymakers, donors, development agencies, faith-based organisations, civil society, and government departments (Davids *et al.*, 2015). ECD practitioners were polled at the provincial level about their experiences before the campaign. According to the diagnostic evaluation report, effective collaboration between the DBE, DoH, and DSD is critical to establishing a shared vision in implementing ECD policies (Davids *et al.*, 2015; DSD, 2015). Despite the notable challenges, the socioeconomic variables continue to aggravate the fragmentation of ECD participation across government departments in South Africa.

In marginalised communities, ECD centres are primarily supported by NGOs and the private sector. As a result, the quality of early childhood education and care cannot be guaranteed.

## 2.2 The challenging situation of ECD

South Africa, like Finland, has developed ECD curriculum standards and guidelines, which are documented in the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) (DBE, 2009). The policy guidelines are primarily concerned with the early development and learning needs of children aged birth to four years (DBE, 2009). The NELDS document is intended to aid in the development of programmes and activities that allow children to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as to provide practitioners with knowledge on how to enrich children's environments (DBE, 2009). The NELDS policy document acknowledges its shortcomings by addressing multiple audiences, including lowly qualified practitioners (Matjokana, 2021). The researcher explains that the process of implementing changes to the policy has been delayed due to the fragmented nature of ECD and the lack of a shared vision.

The NIECD policy provides for national norms and standards for resource distribution; however, there are disparities and inequality across and within provinces (DSD, 2015). The ECD facilities in rural areas are lacking basic amenities like running water, electricity access, and adequate sanitation due to disintergrated services from the key stakeholders; DBE, DSD and DoH (Shikwambane, 2023; Mbarathi *et al.*, 2016). This challenge remains unchanged; even according to a national audit conducted in 2000, 8% of ECD centres lack basic infrastructure (Matjokana, 2021).

It is within these under-resourced settings that the ECD sector is expected to offer programme options to meet young children's needs. There is no single model or complete programme that would be appropriate to replicate in all settings, with all communities, and for each child.

According to Statistics South Africa's ECD 2016 report, South Africa has nearly 8.2 million children under the age of six. Approximately half of those children are from the poorest 46% of households and are not enrolled in any early learning programmes (Black, *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, 40% of children in the highest income bracket attend ECD programmes. Children in low-income areas have limited or no access to ECD services. The situation for these children is exacerbated by a lack of collaboration among ECD stakeholders, namely the DBE, DSD, and DoH, to improve access to ECD services (Biersteker *et al.*, 2022).

Quality provision of ECD programmes in South Africa is especially dependent on the commitment and consultation of key government departments and ECD stakeholders in the provision of funding, capacity building, monitoring, and support for ECD centres (Matjokana & Bipath, 2024). Good planning and mobilisation of resources are required for the effective and quality implementation of ECD policies (Ssewanyana, *et al.*, 2023; Mthethwa, 2012). Quality ECD provision requires good governance from all ECD stakeholders at the national, provincial, and local levels. Quality leadership, according to the literature, necessitates collaboration, and continuous dialogues to facilitate a conducive working environment and professional development (Muff, *et al.*, 2020).

### 3. Theoretical framework

Britto, Yoshikawa, and Boller's (2011) conceptual framework, emphasises on the importance of collaboration in the quality implementing ECD policies. The authors contend that, quality provision of ECD services contours across different levels. The key ECD stakeholders from the level of ECD practitioners; education district, provincial and national offices play a pivotal in providing quality caregiving. Therefore, it is important that there is common understanding and collaboration amongst stakeholders in providing quality care giving to generate intended ECD policy outcomes.

In addition, the provision of quality physical resources, as well as the emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development of young children, are all dependent on the level of ECD stakeholder's interaction and engagement. In this regard, ECD stakeholders should work collaboratively to strengthen the implementation ECD programmes.

### 4. Method

In pursuance of the above-stated study objective, a qualitative research design with an interpretive perspective was chosen to obtain rich data about the ECD stakeholders' experiences of collaboration in implementing ECD policies (Alas, 2017). Furthermore, an interpretive paradigm approach was found to be useful and relevant for this study because it allowed the researcher to interact with key stakeholders - ECD practitioners and managers, a district official, the Provincial Education Department (PED) and the DBE officials. Participants' perspectives and experiences in implementing ECD policies were sought.

The researcher used multiple case studies to closely examine data, gain a deeper understanding of the same phenomena, and draw rich interconnected information from various ECD centres (Idowu & K'orowe, 2016).

#### 4.1 The sample

The sample of this study consists of a total of n=9 participants, n=2 ECD managers, n=4 ECD practitioners, n=1 ECD district official, n=1 PED official and n=1 official of the DBE. The sample was purposively selected by involving participants who are proficient and experienced in the phenomena of interest. Additionally, random sampling was also used to reduce bias and prevent hidden patterns from skewing the sample, but it necessitates a comprehensive population list, which can be challenging or impossible to obtain (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020).

The participation was entirely voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all participants (Creswell, 2013). Necessary permission for the study was granted by the relevant university faculty.

*(Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants)*

**Table 1:** Profile of participants

Participants	Pseudonym	Designated office	Brief description
DBE Official	NO	National Department	The national official is responsible for developing education policies for children aged 0-4 years for quality care and education.
PED Official	PO	Provincial Department	The provincial official's role is to implement the national department education policies.
District Official	DO	District office	The official supports schools to ensure quality teaching and learning in accordance with the regulations and legislation governing education.
ECD Manager	EM 1	ECD Centre	An ECD manager oversees development of the young children. Also hiring, supervising staff and managing the budgets.

## 5. Data collection and analysis

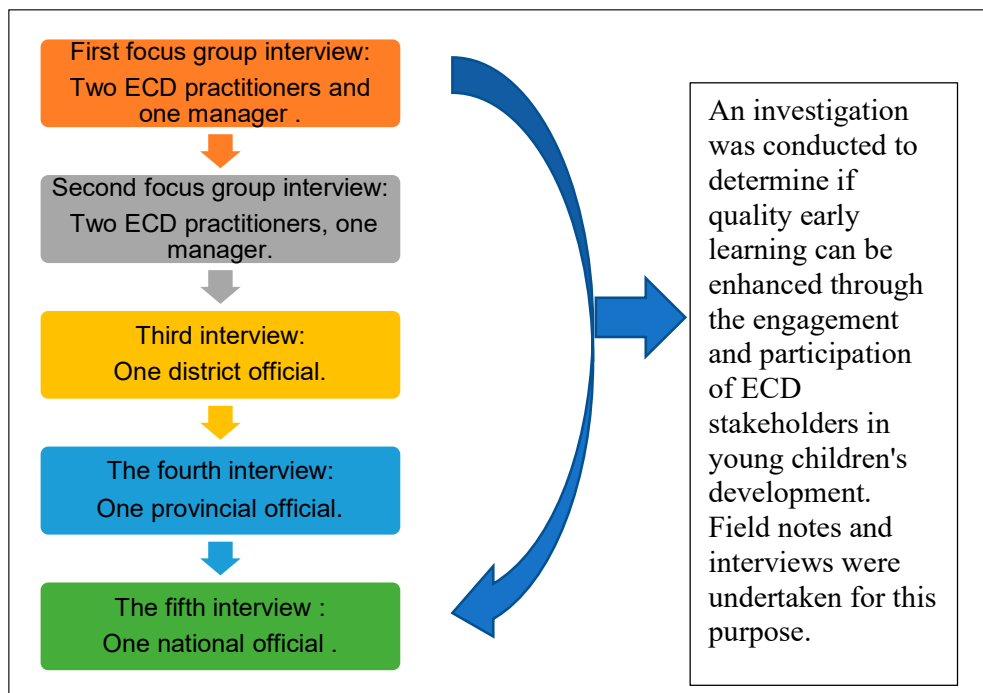
The data of the study was generated using both focus group and individual interviews with ECD officials from national, provincial and district offices, ECD managers and practitioners in their respective fields to investigate their perceptions of implementing ECD policies. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used during the interviews to obtain participants' honest views and opinions without imposing the interviewer's viewpoint (Ranney, *et al.*, 2015). The interviews provided rich and in-depth detailed information on the views of ECD officials from national, provincial and district offices, also ECD managers and practitioners. Additionally, data was also collected by taking notes, audio recordings and observations to validate the findings (Maree, 2015).

Interviews were conducted with ECD centres managers and practitioners, education district, provincial and national officials at The City of Tshwane, Johannesburg Metropolitan municipalities in Gauteng.

The researcher recorded the interviews and taken field notes. The first group interview was conducted with two ECD practitioners and one manager . The second group interview was done with two ECD practitioners, one manager. The third individual interviews were conducted with the one district official. The fourth interview with the provincial official. The fifth interview was with the national official in her office.

Both field notes and interview recordings were conducted by the researcher. Two ECD practitioners and one manager participated in the first group interview. In the second group interview, two ECD practitioners and one manager participated. Individual interviews took place with officials from the district, provincial and national offices to investigate the level of stakeholders collaboration in the development of young children.

**Table 2:** Data collection and analysis



## 6. Data analysis and interpretation

A content analysis was performed on the study’s data. To generate the description of the setting, multiple data sources were used for analysis, such as notes and word categorisation (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Mayo, 2013). The data was analysed inductively, primarily by reading interview transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The verbatim quotes from participants’ experiences were used to generate themes and categories. The researcher identified common themes through coding and subsequently interpreted data from multiple research sites (Stenfors-Hayes, Hult, Dahlgren, 2013).

**Table 3:** Themes and sub-themes identified from the transcribed semi-structured interview audio recordings

Themes	Sub-themes
Strategies for strengthening the implementation of ECD policies	1. Consultation and collaboration with ECD forums and other COPs
	2. Dialogue and negotiation between ECD stakeholders

## 7. Findings and discussion

### 7.1 Sub-theme 1: Consultation and collaboration with ECD forums and other COPs

*The findings related to the opinions of national officials concerning working with ECD forums and other stakeholders to provide integrated services.*

Data revealed that there is a lack of communication on developed policies from the national office to the provincial and district offices.

One of the national office participants mentioned that consultations with ECD stakeholders are taking place to implement ECD policies. However, based on these findings, there is little evidence of collaboration between national and district offices in implementing ECD policies.

During the interview, the national official confirmed that even though there are developed ECD policies, frameworks, and forums in place to foster collaboration with other departments, there is no synergy in providing quality ECD services. She highlighted the lack of collaboration among key stakeholders in other departments by saying:

*There are challenges in integrating services partly. Sometimes officials go to ECD centre A, today I go there as an official from DBE, tomorrow, so and so go as an official from DSD, tomorrow or the other date off from DoH. I think, if possible, go there as one, if possible, talk in one language, go with one thing in common. Problem is when going there differently in one ECD centre. How about going there collaboratively. Practitioners get confused but they say they are from the government; they do not have a platform to tell even anything about salaries. Whoever goes there is they accepted him and welcome. Communication is not strengthened; we should go there collaboratively. For example, when given funding, ECD centres, become difficult for all the departments to monitor how funding was used. (NO)*

When the national official (NO), who was responsible for ECD policy development, was further interviewed on her management role in implementing ECD policies, she explained:

*Province does presentation in interprovincial meetings on quarterly basis..., National Strategy for Learner Achievement (NSLA) come to us in a form of reports on quarterly basis., through this we are able to see a number of ECD practitioners trained in various levels, towards NQF Level 4 registered under SAQA. Through the NSLA we can see the number, how practitioners implement NCF and how provinces are strengthening collaboration with various departments. Province does presentation in interprovincial meetings on quarterly basis and we are able to see how provinces are implementing NCF and other policies.” (NO).*

However, the official emphasised the importance of committee collaboration to improve the quality of care and development of young children:

*We need support to strengthen collaboration through National Interdepartmental Committee (NIDC) and Interdepartmental forums to take ECD forward, by being, trained on curriculum, funding, health care nutrition to improve our ECD centres..., having one information is important. (NO).*

Data show that key departments lack continuous consultation and dialogue to share responsibilities at the interdepartmental level to strengthen all stakeholders' participation required by the National Integrated ECD policy of 2015. This report also indicates a lack of a systematic strategy to improve ECD policy implementation. According to Britto *et al.* (2011) and Sayre *et al.* (2015), the implementation of ECD policies must be systematically evaluated and documented through continuous consultation and negotiations with all stakeholders. The lack of systems amongst stakeholders at the local level compromises the quality of implementing ECD policies for quality care and development.

*The following findings are based on the views of district officials (DO) and ECD managers responsible for implementing ECD programmes.*



The lack of standardised ECD programmes at ECD centres in marginalised areas persists, compromising access to quality learning opportunities. DO and EM1 expressed their heartfelt frustration with the lack of standardisation of programmes. The fragmented programmes have an impact on the foundational knowledge that young children receive.

*We visited the ECD centre when the MEC for infrastructure was there, we checked how ECD centres operate, they have little ones of that age (0-4 years). They say they follow CAPS (National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement) but none so far. (DO).*

The official further emphasised how disjointed the ECD policy programmes are at the centres. She clarified, saying:

*The challenge is that they don't have a policy, they have their own structure, no one trained them..., they are following their own programme, each have its own programme..., have two levels, 0-4 age group and 4-6 age group in one centre..., the ones taking care of 4-6 follow CAPS, they are trained. (DO).*

The participant further indicated the challenges they are facing in monitoring ECD centres, due to a lack of collaboration in disseminating information from the National and Provincial offices.

*Going there as an official you cannot say you are wrong or right here because you don't have anything..., like if you look at the little ones obviously, they need care more than the grown ones, so how do they care for them? Once you become aware there is child of maybe six months how do they feed them, when do they feed them? (DO).*

The interview with the ECD manager brought to light another dimension of inadequate collaboration at the centres:

*How can we make parents to be involved inside the school, parents just bring kids in the morning they are not involved and say as long as I pay, it's a serious problem..., we need support to make team buildings for us, they can combine day cares and get support from outside, what I do here they can do it at Sunshine because we differ. (EM 1).*

Considering these responses, it is evident that there is a lack of consultation and dialogue between parents and ECD centres, nor even shared best practices to ensure quality development of young children.

## 7.2 Sub-theme 2: Dialogue and negotiation among ECD stakeholders

*This findings in the theme highlighted that communication among ECD stakeholders is a vital component to strengthen the care and development of young children.*

During the interviews, participants expressed the following.

*NIECD policy is used to work with various departments through National Interdepartmental Committee (NIDC) where several departments meet quarterly. DSD, DoH, DSD meet quarterly...The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) from 0-4 years is used in collaboration with National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) policy, which was developed together with other departments. working with ECD, DoH and DSD shows responsibilities of the department. (NO), also*

*We share ideas on how to move the ECD forward for instance, DoH's role is immunisation or nutrition, DSD registers all ECD centres..., makes sure that children receive food and give practitioners a stipend. (NO)*

The participant shared elaborated on the strategy in place where key ECD stakeholders communicate and negotiate to establish an enabling environment at the centres. Contrarily, the response from the national official (NO) working at the level of policy development showed that stakeholders work in silos in providing ECD services. There is limited shared responsibility or ongoing dialogue across interdepartmental levels to improve quality learning environment. Considering these responses, it is evident that there is a lack of consultation and dialogue between parents and ECD centres, nor even shared best practices to ensure quality development of young children.

## 8. Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the challenges encountered in implementing ECD policies and the level of stakeholder participation. Considering these participants' responses, it is evident that there is a lack of consultation and dialogue among ECD stakeholders. The findings revealed that ECD stakeholders provide disintegrated services with conflicting interests at the ECD centres.

Britto *et al.* (2011) emphasise the importance of continuous collaboration and dialogue among ECD stakeholders in improving policy execution for high-quality care and learning.

The assertion is in line with the DSD (2015), which claims that ECD policies are designed to promote common understanding and regulate daily activities to ensure quality access to ECD services. However, participants from the national (NO) and district (DO) offices mentioned that there is a disjuncture to reach a common goal when visiting the ECD centres.

Participant NO mentioned that there are plans in place, such as the NSLA, for engagement with ECD stakeholders. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the NIDC is the vehicle for a national policy of collaboration with other departments. However, despite the strategies that are at hand, the findings revealed that there is no synergy between amongst these departments because of inadequate consultation.

Additionally, the experiences of participants in management and leadership roles — PO, DO, and ECD managers — showed a lack of delegated tasks and interaction among themselves to enhance meaningful dialogues and ensure coherent practices. In this regard, the officials' plans to visit ECD centres are not aligned to reach common goals in supporting ECD managers and practitioners for quality care of young children. Furthermore, in the study, EM1 shared that there is a lack of dialogue and consultation with other ECD centres and parents to strengthen ECD policy implementation.

Also, according to the findings various ECD programmes are provided by the ECD centres in the same community, in this regard young children are prepared differently for school readiness. Additionally, the experiences of participants showed that different ECD programmes are offered by ECD centres in the same community. In this regard young children are prepared for school readiness in diverse ways.

The DO and EM1 expressed their deep frustration about the lack of standardised programme at the ECD centres. The participants shared how the fragmented programmes impact the fundamental education that young children get at the ECD centres. The partial or inadequate implementation of these integrated services puts children's rights to quality care and education at jeopardy. Therefore, young children at the marginalised communities continue to lack access to quality learning opportunities.

Participants' experiences have consistently demonstrated a close link to Britto *et al.*'s (2011) conceptual framework, which holds that quality requires ongoing negotiation and interaction between ECD role players to reach common understanding and agreement.

Additionally, continuous dialogue and negotiation among ECD stakeholders foster an environment that makes it possible to uniformly implement policies for quality care and learning. However, the findings revealed disjuncture and a lack of meaningful relationship between the national, provincial and district offices to ensure implementation of ECD policies.

Britto *et al.*'s (2011) conceptual framework could be an effective strategy in aligning the practices of officials, ECD managers and practitioners for quality provision of ECD services. Data has proven that the level of competence of ECD role players and their interaction has an impact on the quality of care and education of young children. This study thus adds to the body of knowledge and future ECD practices.

## 9. Implications and suggestions

The leaders at the national, provincial and district levels should have a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities for the effective implementation of ECD policies. National, provincial, district and ECD managers should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as interaction at all levels.

- To ensure uniformity and accountability in management, officials at national and provincial offices should collaborate with district officials and ECD managers every quarter. The formation of a community of practice can allow ECD role players at all levels to actively engage and negotiate their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a meaningful manner (Wanger & Sornlertlumvanich, 2012).
- ECD centres should be paired to engage in joint activities and share information on their best practices. As a result, a reciprocal relationship can be formed allowing managers and practitioners to learn from each other and compare the quality of the learning environment (Wanger & Sornlertlumvanich, 2012; Britto *et al.*, 2011; Excel, 2016).
- The implementation of ECD policies should be evaluated continuously at all levels from national, provincial, district offices, and ECD centres to identify gaps and review strategies. Collaborative seminars should be established to share information on issues at hand and ensure uniformity across all levels. Furthermore, the national office should develop a reporting system with time frames for the province, district and ECD centres to discuss progress and barriers in implementing ECD policies.
- Common practices from national, provincial and district offices, as well as ECD centres, can thus be aligned to strengthen the quality foundational knowledge of young children.

## 10. Limitation

This research was limited to individual participants at national (DBE), provincial (PDE), and district officials to prevent generalisation and to gain understanding of a specific phenomenon; the impact of collaboration in the implementation of ECD policies in South Africa.

## 11. Conclusion

Despite the government's efforts to improve ECD services, research conducted in this study revealed that children in Hammanskraal ECD centres do not have access to quality childhood care and education. The study's findings revealed a lack of common understanding

among ECD stakeholders in strengthening ECD policy implementation. It can be concluded that consistency and interaction among ECD stakeholders at all levels — that is, national, provincial, district, and ECD centres — are critical.

## References

- Alas, R.M.S., 2017. *Examining trainee therapists' use of recommended counseling strategies for facilitating posttraumatic growth in psychotherapy with clients who have experienced trauma: A qualitative analysis. Dissertation.* Graduate School of Education and Psychology. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/765>
- Bendini, M. and Devercelli, A. eds., 2022. *Quality early learning: Nurturing children's potential.* World Bank Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1795-3>
- Biersteker, L., Berry, L. and Gwele, M., 2022. In whose best interests? The ECD regulatory framework, understandings of the best interests of the young child and access to quality early education. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 38(3-4), pp.215-239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2023.2169750>
- Buccini, G., Kofke, L., Case, H., Katague, M., Pacheco, M.F. and Pérez-Escamilla, R., 2023. Pathways to scale up early childhood programs: A scoping review of Reach Up and Care for Child Development. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 3(8), p.e0001542. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0001542>
- Black, M.M., Walker, S.P., Fernald, L.C., Andersen, C.T., DiGirolamo, A.M., Lu, C., McCoy, D.C., Fink, G., Shawar, Y.R., Shiffman, J. & Devercelli, A.E. 2017. Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. *The Lancet*, 389(10064):77-90. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(16\)31389-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(16)31389-7)
- Britto, P. R., Yoshikawa, H., & Boller, K. (2011). Quality of early childhood development programs in global contexts: Rationale for investment, conceptual framework and implications for equity - Social Policy Report., *Sharing child and youth development knowledge* 25(2):1-26. <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/j.2379-3988.2011.tb00067.x>
- Case, A. S. A. (2022). Delivering Integrated Early Childhood Education and Development Through Family in Focus. *Research Anthology on Balancing Family-Teacher Partnerships for Student Success*, p.92. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7601-7.ch005>
- Creswell, J.W. 2013. *Educational Research Planning conducting and evaluating.* London: Oxford Publishers.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five approaches. *Sage Publications.*
- Dauids, M., Samuels, M.L., September, R., Moeng, T.L., Richter, L., Mabogoane, T.W., Goldman, I. & Buthelezi, T. 2015. The pilot evaluation for the National Evaluation System in South Africa – A diagnostic review of early childhood development. *African Evaluation Journal*, 3(1):7-12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v3i1.141>
- Ebrahim, H.B. 2019. Output 3: Programme Framework for ECCE Qualifications (Diploma & Degree):9. University of South Africa. *Department of Higher Education and Training.* <https://piece.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/piece-programme-framework.pdf>

Hardy, I., Heikkinen, H., Pennanen, M., Salo, P. and Kiilakoski, T., 2021. The 'spirit of the times': Fast policy for educational reform in Finland. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(7), 770-791. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320971530>

Hendricks, E.A. and Thengela, N., 2020. The Role of Education in Alleviating Poverty, Inequality and Promoting Economic Development in South Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2020/10n3a11>

Idowu, T.E., Nyadawa, M.O. and K'orowe, M., 2016. Seawater intrusion vulnerability assessment of a coastal aquifer: north Coast of Mombasa, Kenya as a case study. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Application*, 6(8),37–45. [https://www.ijera.com/papers/Vol6\\_issue8/Part-%203/G0608033745.pdf](https://www.ijera.com/papers/Vol6_issue8/Part-%203/G0608033745.pdf)

IEA (2021). *Pirls 2021*. [https://pirls2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/files/0\\_About-PIRLS-2021.pdf](https://pirls2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/files/0_About-PIRLS-2021.pdf)

Maree, J. G. (2015). Career construction counselling: A thematic analysis of outcomes for four clients. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 86:1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.10.001>

Matjokana, T. N., & Bipath, K. (2024). Unblocking the System to Strengthen Implementation of Early Childhood Development Policies and Practice in South Africa. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 6(1), 32-51. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2024.3>

Matjokana, T., 2021. Strengthening the implementation of early childhood development policies to improve quality. Doctoral dissertation, *University of Pretoria*. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/80390>

Muff, K., Liechti, A. and Dyllick, T., 2020. How to apply responsible leadership theory in practice: A competency tool to collaborate on the sustainable development goals. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(5): 2254-2274. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1962>

Mayo Jr, J. B. (2013). Critical pedagogy enacted in the gay–straight alliance: New possibilities for a third space in teacher development. *Educational Researcher*, 42(5):266-275. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13491977>

Mbarathi, N., Mthembu, M., & Diga, K. (2016). Early childhood development and South Africa: A literature review. *University of KwaZulu-Natal*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/13338>

Mthethwa, R.M. 2012. Critical dimensions for policy implementation. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 5(2): 36-47. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/20618>

Mweshi, G.K. and Sakyi, K., 2020. Application of sampling methods for the research design. *Archives of Business Review–Vol*, 8(11). <https://doi.org/10.14738/abr.811.9042>

Pillay, J. (2014). Advancement of children's rights in Africa: A social justice framework for school psychologists. *School Psychology International*, 35(3):225-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034313515990>

Ranney, M. L., Meisel, Z. F., Choo, E. K., Garro, A. C., Sasson, C., & Morrow Guthrie, K. (2015). Interview-based qualitative research in emergency care part II: Data collection, analysis and results reporting. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 22(9):1103-1112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acem.12735>

Republic of South Africa (RSA). (2015). *National integrated early childhood development policy*. Government Printers. [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201610/national-integrated-eed-policy-web-version-final-01-08-2016a.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201610/national-integrated-eed-policy-web-version-final-01-08-2016a.pdf)

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1996. *South African School Act 84 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printers. <https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=alolZ6UsZ5U%3D&tabid=185&mid=1828>

Sayre, R. K., Devercelli, A. E., Neuman, M. J., & Wodon, Q. (2015). Investing in early childhood development: Review of the World Bank's recent experience. *World Bank*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0403-8>

Shikwambane, E., 2023. *The factors associated with the access to early childhood development (ECD) facilities in South Africa: Insight from the 2021 General Household Survey (GHS)*. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape. <https://hdl.handle.net/10566/14844>

Ssewanyana, D., Martin, M.C., Angwenyi, V., Kabue, M., Proulx, K., Zhang, L., Malti, T., Njoroge, E., Nasambu, C., Marangu, J. and Odhiambo, R., 2023. Stakeholders' perspectives of enablers and barriers to successfully implementing an integrated early childhood development program in an informal urban settlement in Kenya. *Sage Open*, 13(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231208986>

Stenfors-Hayes, T., Hult, H. and Dahlgren, M.A., 2013. A phenomenographic approach to research in medical education. *Medical Education*, 47(3), p. 261-270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12101>

Theobald, M. (2019). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: "Where are we at in recognising children's rights in early childhood, three decades on...?"* Queensland University of Technology. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13158-019-00258-z.pdf>. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-019-00258-z>

Thorogood, C., Goeiman, H., Berry, L., & Lake, L. (2020). Food and nutrition security for the preschool child: Enhancing early childhood development. *South African Child Gauge*, 96–110. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349648055>

Twala, Z., 2021. A great chance to accelerate early learning development for children in South Africa. In E. Atmore, M. Ashley-Cooper, L. van Niekerk, L. (Eds.) *Thought Leaders on Early Childhood Development in South Africa: A Collection of Thought-Provoking Essays*. Cape Town: Centre for Early Childhood Development. pp.4-9. <https://cecd.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/thought-leaders-on-eed-in-sa-e-book.pdf>

United Nations Children's Fund. (2019). For every child, every right: The convention on the rights of the child at a crossroads. United Nations Children's Fund. (UNICEF) <https://www.unicef.org/media/62371/file/Convention-rights-child-at-crossroads-2019.pdf>

Visser, M., Grossmark, J., Krüger, S., Smith, C., van Zyl, M., Willemse, Z., & Wright, C. (2021). The challenges experienced by practitioners from under-resourced early childhood development centres in South Africa: A single site study. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 51(3):14-24. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n3a3>

Wanger, S. P., & Sornlertlumvanich, K. (2012). Leading Educational Change in Thailand: Implementing National Public Policy in a Multi-Campus University System. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 12(1):11-18. [http://www.na-businesspress.com/JHETP/WangerSP\\_Web12\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.na-businesspress.com/JHETP/WangerSP_Web12_1_.pdf)

Wills, G., Kotzé, J., & Kika-Mistry, J. (2020). A sector hanging in the balance: Early childhood development and lockdown in South Africa. *University of Oxford, working paper*, 30. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2020/055](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2020/055)