



INTRODUCTION

This research study explores the views of stakeholders in the early childhood development (ECD) sector on the essential components that contribute towards the making of quality ECD centres. ECD is vitally important in the South African context; however access and quality of ECD services is a significant challenge. While accessibility to ECD services is progressively being realised for young children; the quality of these services remains a challenge.

There are a vast number of ECD centres providing ECD services which are, in reality, informal custodian care. The reasons for this phenomenon are linked to poverty, lack of skills and inadequate or absence of formal ECD qualifications for teachers. Furthermore, while there is a growing body of research on the value of quality ECD for young children, there is still a lack of awareness of the importance of ECD particularly amongst impoverished communities; where ECD services are needed to reduce levels of inequality and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. This research study aims to provide stakeholder views of best practise for effective ECD centres.

This study was carried out with a sample of fifteen principals of effective ECD centres in the Western Cape, South Africa. The study adopted a qualitative, exploratory approach using a semi-structured interview schedule for face-to-face interviews with the participants. A

purposive sample was used and the selected sample were geographically spread across the Western Cape Metropolitan area.

THE RESEARCH AIMS OF THE STUDY ARE:

To examine the programme components that make for an effective ECD centre.

1. To determine the type of governance required and the role of governing bodies of effective ECD centres.
2. To establish the elements of an ECD centre building that contribute toward the effectiveness of an ECD centre.
3. To investigate the elements of a quality ECD learning programme.
4. To explore the role of teachers in creating quality ECD centres.
5. To investigate the essentials of management and administration for effective ECD centres.
6. To determine the elements of funding and financial management that enhance the effectiveness of ECD centres.

THE FINDINGS REVEALED THE FOLLOWING:

Effective ECD centres that provide quality care and education are of critical importance and should be prioritised in South Africa. Governing bodies play critical roles in the effectiveness of ECD centres; these roles include: governance and accountability, ensuring financial sustainability, decision-making and administration, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict resolution. ECD forums are also a valuable asset for ECD centres.

Structure and routine, indoor learning materials and the arrangement of the classroom are important components of a quality early learning programme.



Qualified ECD teachers provide quality learning programmes for children and outdoor play is important for children's holistic development. Parental involvement improves learning outcomes for children and relationships with key stakeholder's assists centres in providing a holistic programme. Principals play a crucial role in ensuring a quality service is provided.

THE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED:

ECD centres should register with government departments and comply with their regulations. The required norms and standards should be upheld as these ensure an environment conducive to learning is provided. The learning programme of an ECD centre should be registered, should be structured and based on the prescribed curriculum, indoor equipment should be available, and the classrooms should be arranged with specific areas. The ratio of teachers to children and toilets to children should be in line with Department of Social Development (DSD) regulations. Classes should not be overcrowded. Teachers must be qualified to provide quality care and education for children and parental involvement should be encouraged.

Governing bodies are recommended for effective ECD centres and principals should lead the ECD centre with the support of the governing body. ECD centres should join a local ECD forum and relationships with key stakeholders should be sought. Financial records should be stored in an efficient manner and ECD centres should employ a structured fundraising strategy.

The ECD centre building should be fire proof, equipped, accessible for children with disabilities, have adequate space for required rooms and classrooms, and should be clean, safe and secure. Kitchen facilities should be equipped, hygienic and located in a separate room from children. Nutritional meals should be provided to children and should be planned weekly. Outdoor play facilities should be accessible for children.

CONCLUSION:

Quality ECD services unlocks potential in young children which has life-long benefits. ECD centres are the optimal environment to develop children holistically, and thus it is paramount that ECD centres are effective and provide quality services. In South Africa, many centres in under resourced communities provide sub-par education and care for young children which has life-long negative consequences often including the missed opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. This research study identifies key elements of effective ECD centres – in terms of governance; components of an ECD centre building; elements of a quality ECD learning programme; the role of teachers; management and administration; and funding and financial management - with the aim that these elements will be implemented in underperforming ECD centres in South Africa to improve the standard, and provide children with equitable access to quality ECD services and ensure their future success.



To read the full research article:

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