University of KwaZulu-Natal

College of Law and Management Studies

School of Law

An implementation evaluation of the departmental function shift in the provision of early childhood development programmes from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education, in the Endumeni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal

Thobeka Ntombeningi Mbatha

208515270

This mini dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters in Philosophy in Child Care and Protection.

As the candidate's supervisors, we agree to the submission of this thesis.

Supervisors: Prof WA Holness and Dr A Juan

2024

Declaration regarding originality

I, Thobeka Ntombeningi Mbatha declare that;

A. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
B. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
C. This dissertation does not contain any other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from such other persons.
D. This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing or ideas unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from such persons. Where other written sources have been used then:
   a. Ideas from such sources have been summarised in the present author's words, but the ideas have been attributed to such sources, which have been referenced.
   b. Where exact words from these sources have been used, these words have been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.
E. Where I have reproduced a part of a publication of which I am an author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail whether that part of the publication was written by myself alone, or by myself together with others and I have fully referenced such publications.
F. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the sources detailed in the body and/or reference section of this dissertation.

Signed ..  .....

Date .....12/03/2025.....

Acknowledgements

- I would like to firstly thank God for giving me the strength, courage and perseverance to have finally completed this degree.
- This study would have not been possible without the support of my two dear sisters, Nokubonga Kunene and Lusiwe Khoza, who always opened their hands to take care of my daughter while I was busy with study.
- To my aunt Gugu Mbatha and my partner S'busiso Thwala, for the financial support which does not go unnoticed.
- To my friends, family and my colleagues from the Department of Social Development Dannhauser Services, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout this journey, which kept me motivated.
- To the Early Childhood Development practitioners from in Endumeni Municipality, for taking their time to participate in this study, I am deeply grateful.
- Lastly, to my supervisors Professor Holness and Dr Juan: You provided me with constant support and motivation when I felt like giving up. Thank you for believing in me and this study at times when I thought it was undoable. You never gave up on my idea to pursue this study. You were indeed my anchor. Thank you does not seem enough. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Abstract

The early childhood development sector (ECD) in South Africa is mainly an informal sector providing care and early learning opportunities for children between birth and four years of age by independent providers. The government plays an essential role in regulating the sector. ECD Before the 1st of April 2022, the regulation of the ECD sector in South Africa was mainly the responsibility of the Department of Social Development. The functions of the ECD programmes have since been shifted to the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Before the implementation of the function shift were the ECD sector was faced with different challenges that prevented them from providing children between birth and four years of age quality of ECD programme. The main aim of this study is to determine the impact of the function shift as it affect the quality of ECD programmes rendered at ECD centres. Since the implementation of the function shift, no study has been conducted to evaluate, the impact of the function shift at it early stage. Therefore, the rationale of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on ECD programme since no study has been conducted to evaluate the impact of the early phase of the implementation of the function shift as it affects the quality of ECD programmes provided as ECD centres.

A qualitative research study was conducted, using focus group discussions and document analysis to construct data for this study. The findings of the study were thematically analysed. The findings indicated that, under the DSD, the ECD sector was characterised by strict adherence to regulatory frameworks, low qualified ECD practitioners, challenges in accessing government subsidy, and inadequate provision of inclusive ECD programmes, yet ECD centres played an important role in the referral function of children in need of child protection services to the DSD. The findings further revealed that since the implementation of the function shift, the ECD sector is still encountering financial challenges, highly burdensome administrative process for the registration of ECD centres, inadequate provision of inclusive ECD programmes, and less interaction between the DBE and the ECD sector, which led to uncertainties among the study participants.

Based on the study findings: it is recommended that the Children's Amendment Bill should be finalised by the DBE to address the strict regulatory framework currently faced by ECD centres. A separate ECD Act should be developed separate from the Children's Act. A standardised ECD programme should be formulated and should be monitored by people trained

in ECD education. The current funding model for ECD programmes should be reformed to allow for better access to financial support and equip ECD with better resources and infrastructure. The government should also ensure increase accessibility to inclusive ECD programmes and to provide adequate financial support and increased incentives to ECD centres providing inclusive ECD programmes. The conclusion drawn from the study findings is that the functional shift has not been positively received by the study participants. This is due to increase financial challenges encountered by ECD centres, lack of adequate resources to provide quality ECD programmes, poor incentive remains a challenge for ECD practitioners and implementation of inclusive ECD programme remain unrealisable.

Key words: Departmental function shift, early childhood development centres, early childhood development programmes, inclusive early childhood development programmes, quality early childhood development programmes

Abbreviations and acronyms

COVID-19:	Coronavirus disease
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DSD:	Department of Social Development
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
EELC:	Equal Education Law Centre
EPRI:	Economic, Policy Research Institute
NCF:	National Curriculum Framework
NDA:	National Development Agency
NELDS:	National Early Learning Standards
NIECD:	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
NPOs:	Not-for-Profit Organisations
NQF:	National Qualification Framework
SAQA:	South African Qualification Authority
SAVF:	South African Council for Child and Family Welfare
SAAECE:	South African Association for Early Childhood Education
SSA:	Sub-Saharan Africa
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Training
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO:	United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Fund

Contents Page

Declaration regarding originality i
Acknowledgements ii
Abstract iii
Abbreviations and acronyms v
Contents Page vi
CHAPTER 1 1
INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background and outline of the research study 2
1.2.1 Historical context in the regulation of ECD in South Africa 2
1.2.2 Democratic change in regulation of ECD programmes in South Africa 3
1.3 Aim and rationale of the study 6
1.4 Research problem 7
1.5 Research question 7
1.6 Theoretical framework of the study 7
1.7 Definition of terms 8
1.8 Chapter outline 9
1.9 Conclusion 10
CHAPTER 2 11
LITERATURE REVIEW 11
2.1 Introduction 11
2.2 The description of the South African ECD sector 11
2.3 Factors contributing to quality early childhood programme in South Africa 12
2.3.1 Staffing and qualifications of the ECD sector 13
2.3.2 The expertise and qualification level of ECD practitioners 14
2.3.3 Adequate and safe learning environment. 15
2.3.4 Interaction between the practitioner and children 16
2.3.5 Active learning 16
2.3.6 Management and leadership 17
2.4 Challenges impeding ECD practitioners from implementing quality ECD programmes in ECD centres in South Africa 18
2.4.1 Financial challenges 18
2.4.2 Inadequate infrastructure 20
2.4.3 Poor working conditions 21

2.4.4 Lack of proper training and education of ECD Practitioners 22
2.4.5 Compliance with legal regulatory frameworks 23
2.4.6 Other challenges 24
2.5 The impact of the function shift 25
2.6 Conclusion 26
CHAPTER 3 28
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 28
3.1 Introduction 28
3.2 Research design and methodology 28
3.3 Study setting 28
3.4 Sampling method 29
3.5 Sample size 30
3.6 Data collection tool and process 31
3.6.1 Focus group discussions 31
3.6.2 Document analysis 32
3.7 Data analysis 33
3.8 Data management 34
3.9 Trustworthiness of the data collected 34
3.10 Limitations of the study 35
3.11 Ethical considerations 35
3.12 Conclusion 36
CHAPTER 4 37
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ECD LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 37
4.1 Introduction 37
4.2 The constitutional duties of the South African government in the provision of quality ECD programmes 37
4.3. The rights to equality and education as it regulates equal access to quality ECD programmes 37
4.4. The roles and responsibilities of different government departments 39
4.4.1 The regulation of ECD sector 39
4.4.2 Funding of early childhood development programmes 42
4.4.3 Development of a structured learning programmes 44
4.3.4 Training and compensation for ECD practitioners 46
4.4.5 Provision of inclusive ECD programmes 48
4.4.6 Monitoring and evaluation of ECD programmes 48
4.5 Conclusion 50
CHAPTER 5 52

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS 52
5.1 Introduction 52
5.2 Theme 1: Characteristics of the Early Childhood System 52
5.2.1 The importance of ensuring compliance with the regulatory framework 52
5.2.2 Difficulties accessing government subsidy 54
5.2.3 Low education qualifications required for ECD practitioners 57
5.2.4 Provision of child protection services 58
5.2.5 Inability to accommodate and include children with disabilities 59
5.3 Theme 2: The lived experiences of the ECD practitioners in providing ECD programmes under the DBE 60
5.3.1 The inadequate administration of the government subsidy by the DBE 60
5.3.2 Parents have become more reluctant to pay ECD centre fees 62
5.3.3 Irregular DBE support and oversight visits to ECD centres 63
5.4 Theme 3: Expectations of the function shift by ECD practitioners 64
5.4.1 Reformation of the current funding model 64
5.4.2 Adoption of a collaborative approach 65
5.5 Theme 4: Uncertainty among ECD practitioners about the implementation of the function shift 66
5.6 Conclusion 67
CHAPTER 6 68
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS 68
6.1 Introduction 68
6.2.1 Complicated registration process. 68
6.2.2 Inadequate funding model for the implementation of ECD programmes 70
6.2.3 Inadequate implementation of the inclusive ECD programme 71
6.2.4 Inadequate assessment of the implementation of quality ECD programmes 73
6.2.4 Increased financial crisis faced by ECD centres 74
6.2.5. Impact of the function shift on ECD practitioners 74
6.3 Recommendations 75
6.4 Further research 76
6.5 Conclusion 76
References 78
Appendixes 94

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The South African government has recently moved away from providing early childhood development (ECD) programmes as care and protection programmes for children but rather as an early learning programme. The function shift indicates that the South African government recognises the importance of ECD in the long-term educational and life outcomes. This was operationalised by shifting the administration functions of ECD from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the 1st of April 2022. This study was aimed at evaluating the consequences of the departmental shift which was mandated by the resolutions of the African National Congress 54th conference and the National Development Plan 2030 (DBE, 2022). The main purpose of the departmental shift was to improve the quality of the ECD programmes in the country and to be in line with other countries, which view the ECD programmes as less focused on childcare and more of an educational programme (DBE, 2022b).

An ECD programme "provides one or more forms of daily care, development, early learning opportunities and support to children from birth until the age before they enter formal school" (Republic of South Africa, 2015:12). In South Africa, there are two types of ECD programmes, namely, centred-based and non-centred-based ECD. Non-centred ECD programmes include home-based, community-based, mobile ECD, toy librarian, outreach, and child-minding programmes. However, non-centred ECD programme are not clearly regulated by the Children's Act 38 of 2005. Centred-based ECD programmes are offered in ECD centres and in Child and Youth Care Centres (Ilifa Labantwana, 2016b, p. 1).

ECD practitioners are the carers or teachers who are responsible for providing ECD programmes to children enrolled at these programmes. The provision of quality ECD programmes enables children to be meaningful contributing members of society. Defining what constitutes quality ECD programme is a difficult task due to it nature and complexities (Excell, 2016, p.2). However, Chapter 2 of this mini-thesis will describe factors that contribute to quality ECD programme in South Africa which well be use to evaluate the quality of ECD programmed as impacted by the function shift. Since the departmental shift has been

implemented, there is little to no research that has been conducted to assess the impact of the function shift on ECD function shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners. This study specifically was aimed assessing the implementation of the departmental function shift as it affects ECD practitioners providing centred-based ECD programmes at ECD centres.

This qualitative empirical study was conducted in the Endumeni Local Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Chapter One provides the background and problem statement of the research study, the research questions, objectives, rationale, the theoretical framework underpinning the research study, as well as the research methodology utilised to conduct the research study. It will also underline the definition of terms used in the study and provide a chapter outline.

1.2 Background and outline of the research study

This section describes the historical and contemporary context of ECD provision in South Africa.

1.2.1 Historical context in the regulation of ECD in South Africa

In 1908, the South African Council for Child and Family Welfare (SAVF) investigated the causes of the high infant mortality and morbidity rate. It led to community initiatives aimed at providing care and education services to children outside their family environment (Williams, et al., 2001, p. 8). Historically, ECD programmes in South Africa have been provided by Non-for-Profit Organisations (NPOs), the former Department of Social Welfare, and the Department of Education (Williams et al., 2001, p.8).

During the 1940s, nursery schools and crèches rendered ECD programmes for children outside the family environment, and their functions were differentiated. Nursery schools provided educational functions for white children and received subsidies from the provincial department of education (Williams et al., 2001, p. 9). Crèches, on the other hand, provided custodial services for black children and received per capita subsidy from the Union Department of Social Welfare.

The South African Association for Early Childhood Education (SAAECE), was a body responsible for setting standards that regulated the ECD programme. During this era, Ally (2022, p. 3) asserts, inspection of ECD centres were conducted to ensure health and safety standards were maintained, however the safety standards were not legislated. Racial discrepancies and a lack of policy frameworks regulating the ECD sector characterised the

sector. During the 1980s and 1990s, the government started to recognise the importance of ECD. This was after the De Lange Commission emphasised a need for pre-primary education for children from poor communities (Williams et al., 2001, p. 9.) The White Paper on Provision in Education in South Africa in 1983 accepted the recommendation of the De Lange Commission for the introduction of pre-primary education (Williams et al., 2001, p. 9). Despite the recognition of the ECD sector which and policy formulation the ECD sector during apartheid was characterised by, the state involvement in the ECD was inadequate, segregated, fragmented, uncoordinated, and lacked comprehensive visions, lack democratic participation, totally inadequate among other things (Van De Berg and Vergani (1986) in Atmore (2013, p. 153)).

1.2.2 Democratic change in regulation of ECD programmes in South Africa

The legacy of the apartheid regime and socio-economic challenges such as poverty contributed to the majority of South African children being unable to access formal ECD programmes. In 1994, when the democratic government came into power, only 6% of black children in South Africa children had access to ECD programmes (Atmore, 2013, p. 153). The government identified ECD as a possible strategy to address the past inequalities among South African children (Rudolph et al., 2019, p. 4). The White Paper of Social Welfare Services 1997 particularly identified children from disadvantaged families and children with disabilities as needing access to ECD services. It further emphasised the need for an intersectoral approach in implementing ECD policy and providing ECD services (White Paper for Social Welfare Service, 1997). Based on the historical inequalities of the apartheid regime functions of the ECD programmes for children were placed within the DSD during the infancy of democratic South Africa.

The roles and responsibilities of the DSD in the regulation of ECD for children from birth until four years old were first spelled out in the National Integrated ECD Plan 2005-2010 (Republic of South Africa, 2012), Children's Act 38 of 2005, the National Plan of Action Children 2012-2017 (NPAC) and in the National Integrated ECD Policy 2015 (NIECD Policy 2015). The most common roles and responsibilities assigned to the DSD in the herein-mentioned legal and policy frameworks for the implementation of ECD services include ensuring that children have access to quality ECD programmes, ECD programmes are provided in a conducive and safe environment, ECD practitioners are equipped with adequate skills and knowledge to provide quality ECD programmes, monitor the implementation of ECD

programmes, and collaborate with other stakeholders in the implementation of quality ECD programmes and ensuring that children with disabilities are able to access quality ECD programme, to name just a few (UNICEF & DSD, 2005, Republic of South Africa, 2012, Republic of South Africa, 2015 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005).

In tracking the efforts made by the DSD to ensure that ECD programmes are accessible to children below the five years, the National ECD Audit of 2001 conducted by the DBE, the 2013/2014 National ECD audit by the DSD and Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) (2014) and the National ECD census 2021 by the DBE have been conducted. The results from the national ECD audit and ECD census only give numerical data that describes the nature of the ECD sector in South Africa. It does not provide qualitative data that describes the role played by the DSD in ensuring that children below the age of five years have access to quality ECD programmes.

The quantitative data provided by the national ECD audit however, allows us to track the progress on accessibility of ECD programmes for younger children. Accessibility here relates to how many children are able to access ECD programmes, how ECD programmes are spatially distributed in terms of socio-economic background of the community and the types of programmes available to younger children. The latest statistics from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2022, p. 9) indicated that there are 5.8 million children in South Africa between birth and four years of age. Approximately 3.4 million children in this age group having access some form of ECD programme South Africa (Stats SA, 2022, p. 36). Out of the 3.4million children accessing different types of ECD programmes:

- 59.8% access ECD programmes at ECD centres;
- 12.2% access ECD programmes in preschools;
- 16.7% are being taken care of by child-minders;
- 10.1% attend community play groups, and
- 1% attend other ECD programmes. (Stats SA (2022 p. 36).

The results from Stats SA (2022) indicate double the increase in the number of children accessing ECD programmes compared to the findings by the DBE national ECD census (2022, p.19), which indicated that approximately 1.7 million children were registered into ECD programmes. The increase may be a result of the national census was conducted after the

COVID-19 lockdown regulations were lifted. Therefore, more children started to access ECD programmes again.

In terms of the spatial distribution of ECD programmes, the national ECD census indicated that 41% of the ECD programmes were found in rural communities, and 59% were located within urban areas (DBE, 2022, p.32). Based on the presented literature children in urban areas have better chances of accessing ECD programmes compared to children in poorer communities because there are more ECD programmes situated in urban communities compared to rural communities.

Authors such as Wills, Kotzé, and Kika-Mistry (2021, p.7) identified that the majority of the ECD programmes are rendered by private providers, NPOs, subsistence entrepreneurs, or micro-social enterprises providing informal services. This further indicates that the provision of ECD programmes for children between birth and four years is community-driven rather than being driven by the state. However, both the national ECD census and the national census have been unable to provide accurate data on the number of children with disabilities who have access to ECD programmes.

The lack of reliable data on the number of children with disabilities accessing the ECD programmes will not only affect the ability of the South African government to ensure children with disabilities are included in receiving quality ECD programmes (Nkgadima, 2020). The inability of children with disabilities to access the ECD programmes is also a breach of their right to equality (Fredman, Donati and Naicker, 2022, p. 183). Moving forward, the DBE needs to ensure that children with disabilities can access quality ECD programmes.

Despite the increase in the number of children who are between birth to four years old, who have access to ECD programme after 1994 as reflected here. The quality of the ECD programmes provided to children in this age group remains a concern in South Africa. This is based on various studies conducted by Atmore et al. (2012), Baloyi and Makhubela (2018), Harrison (2020), and Bipath, Aina, and Zulu (2022) on the challenges that have long persisted within the ECD sector that affect the provision of quality ECD programmes. These challenges will be discussed further in chapter two.

1.3 Aim and rationale of the study

The aim of this study is:

- To evaluate the impact of the departmental shift of the ECD programme from the DSD to the DBE as perceived and experienced by the ECD practitioner in Endumeni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.

The objective of the study is:

- To determine the impact of the departmental shift in the implementation of quality early childhood development programmes, from the experiences and perceptions of ECD practitioners in Endumeni Municipality.

The sub-objectives of the studies are:

- To assess the quality of the early childhood development system under the Department of Social Development.
- To assess the quality of the early childhood development system under the Department of Basic Education in comparison with the DSD.

The rationale of the study:

Weiss (1998) in Auriacombe (2011, p.41) asserts that complex policies and programmes are often difficult to evaluate because the inspiration to develop the policies is poorly constructed. As a result, little attention is given to the early and mid-term indicators needed to reach long-term goals. The rationale of this study is to contribute to the ECD literature since there is no study that has been done to evaluate the early phase of the implementation of the departmental function shift as it affects the quality of the ECD programme provided at ECD centres.

This was also confirmed by Miss Geyer, the Deputy Director for Planning and Delivery Oversight from the DBE during a parliamentary meeting on the comprehensive progress report on the ECD function shift. Therein she stated that the DBE would factor in research on the input of the transition phases of the ECD function shift (DBE, 2023). This study will contribute to the ECD literature.

1.4 Research problem

The global educational objectives to increase access to quality ECD programmes have led to African and international countries rapidly increasing access to ECD programmes, and focusing less on the quality of ECD programmes (Akkari, 2022, p. 3). South Africa is no exception to this global fluctuation of increasing access to ECD programmes for all children. The departmental shift of ECD functions within the DBE can be viewed as a strategy applied by the South African government to comply with the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs).

SDG goal 4.2 challenges member states to ensure that all girls and boys have access to developmental activities early childhood care and a good quality of pre-primary education before entering formal schooling by 2030 (United Nations Development Plan, 2015). The practical problem identified through documentary analysis is that the ECD sector is faced with various challenges that impede its ability to provide quality ECD programmes. Key aspects to be assessed on what constitute quality ECD programmes was based on the perspective of the study participants. This study in particular wanted to evaluate the impact of the implementation of the function shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners.

1.5 Research question

The main research question that guided this study was:

- How has the shift in ECD responsibilities affected the provision of quality ECD programmes as perceived and experienced by ECD practitioners?

To deepen the analysis, the sub-questions are as follows:

- What was the nature of the early childhood development system under the Department of Social Development concerning the quality of the programmes?
- What is the nature of the early childhood development system under the Department of Basic Education concerning the quality of the programmes?

1.6 Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is a programme evaluation theoretical framework. Rossi et al. (2018, p.41) define programme evaluation as "the application of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention

programmes in ways that are adapted to their political and organisational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions." Through applying a qualitative research approach, the proposed study was able to extract in-depth information from ECD practitioners to assess the impact of the departmental shift on ECD centres.

To determine the impact of the function shift process evaluation was applied in the study. Rossi et al. (2018, p. 187) provides that process evaluation, also known as implementation evaluation, assesses how well the programme is being implemented according to the planned procedures or legislation. Assessing the impact of a programme on the client it serves plays an important role is critical role in the evaluation of the programmes Rossi et al. (2018). This study targeted ECD practitioners as study participants because they are responsible for rendering quality ECD programmes to children between birth and four years of age.

The manner in which the DBE implemented the function shift will influence how ECD practitioners provide ECD and this may have an impact on the outcome of the quality ECD programmes provided to children. Rossi et al. (2018) describe an outcome as a state of a social condition with which the programmes intervene on a characteristic or behaviour the programmes might potentially affect. The proposed overall aim of this study is to assess the impact of the departmental function shift as perceived and experienced by ECD practitioners.

1.7 Definition of terms

The following key terms, as defined below, will be used in this study:

Child with disabilities: There is currently no fixed legal definition of what constitutes a child with disabilities. Two legal documents have been referred to develop a definition of a child with disabilities for this study. In terms of section 28(3) of the South African Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, a child means a person under the age of eighteen. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) describes a person with disabilities as a person "who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (Article 1). Therefore, for this study, a child with disabilities is any person under the age of 18, who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Early Childhood Development Centre: "A partial care facility that provides early childhood development programmes with early learning and development focus for children from birth until the year before they enter Grade R/formal school." Republic of South Africa Policy (2015, p. 11).

Early Childhood Development Programmes: A programme that provide one or more forms of daily care, development, early learning opportunities, and support to children from birth until the year before they enter school Republic of South Africa (2015, p. 12). A programme structured within the early childhood development services to provide learning and support structure appropriate to the child's developmental age and stage (Children's Act, 38 of 2005 as amended)

ECD Practitioner: A person who provides early childhood services, through formal development programmes, family services, playgroups, and training, as well as providing management and support services to these workers Republic of South Africa (2015. p. 12)

Function Shift: Function shift is purely an administrative process where functions, or roles and responsibilities, are transferred from one Minister to another (Centre for Early Childhood Development, 2022).

Quality ECD programme: Defining the quality of the ECD programmes is difficult because quality in ECD programmes is both multidimensional and context-specific UNESCO (2010, p. 42). However, in the Sub-Saharan African Region, the quality of the ECD programme is assessed using four dimensions namely: the quality of infrastructure and teaching materials, educational qualification of ECD teachers, programme content or curricula, and systems used to measure and evaluate gains of children who access ECD programmes (UNESCO, 2010).

Special needs: The Cambridge dictionary defines special needs as, "particular things needed by or provided to help people who have an illness or condition that makes it difficult for them to do things that others do."

1.8 Chapter outline

Chapter One of the dissertation introduced the study by outlining the background and problem statement, research questions, objectives, and the rationale including the significance of the study. The theoretical framework guiding the study is outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two of the dissertation reviews the extant literature on ECD provision in South Africa. The review covers the following themes: the background of ECD in South Africa,

factors, and challenges contributing to the provisioning of quality ECD programmes in South Africa. **Chapter Three** outlines the research methodology adopted for the research. **Chapter Four** is a critical analysis of the relevant legislation and policy on ECD provision in South Africa.

Chapter Five provides the findings of the research study; the findings are categorised and linked with the objectives of the study and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. **Chapter Six** comprises the discussion of the study, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a general overview of the study. The introduction of this chapter provided a historical and contemporary background of the ECD sector in South Africa. It included the aim, rationale, research problem, the theoretical background of the study, and how the mini-dissertation is structured in terms of the chapter outline. The next chapter will provide an overview of the available literature review of the provisions of the ECD programme in South Africa.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study seeks to better understand the consequences of the departmental function shift as perceived and experienced by ECD practitioners at Endumeni Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. The literature review of this study will start by providing an overview of the ECD sector in South Africa. It will go on to discuss factors that contribute to quality ECD programmes, followed by challenges encountered by ECD practitioners in providing quality ECD programmes.

2.2 The description of the South African ECD sector

The ECD sector in South Africa is described by Wills and Kika-Mistry (2020, p.2) as a quasi-market comprising a largely informal set of independent ECD providers, with ECD providers who operate as registered or unregistered ECD programmes. Registered ECD programmes registered who are also registered as NPOs can receive a subsidy that is means tested and is calculated per-child per day from the government. Metelerkamp, (2023) provided that, registration as an NPO is no longer a requirement to for a ECD programme to be eligible for funding under the DBE.

Wills, Kotzé, and Kika- Mistry (2021, p. 7) assert that ECD programme provision is largely driven by demand, where the emergence of ECD programmes is usually a response to the needs of the community. The majority of South African children who access the ECD programmes do so at ECD centres (Stats SA, 2022, p.31). ECD centres are facilities used to provide learning and support services that are developmentally appropriate for the child's age and development (Venter, 2022, p.3). An ECD centre should operate five days a week, from eight o'clock in the morning am until four o'clock in the afternoon pm (DBE, 2022, p.36).

The management committee is the highest authority in the ECD centre. The management committee is guided by the constitution of the ECD centre to execute its functions (DSD and Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), 2014, p.41). The management committee is made up of the chairperson, deputy chairperson, treasury, secretary, and additional members. Parents of children attending ECD centres are commonly elected as committee members (DSD and EPRI, 2014, p.41). The roles and responsibilities of the committee members include: ensuring that the ECD centre is effective, providing guidance and

oversight on how the ECD centre operates, ensuring accountability of the ECD supervisor through the committee, guiding and advising ECD centre staff during difficulties together with the ECD centre supervisor, assist in financial management which will promote the sustainability of the ECD centre, assist in the administrative task such as hiring staff, budgeting and drawing up policies, and monitor and evaluate the quality of the ECD regularly (Clampett, 2016, p. 48).

ECD centres can either operate as a public or private organisation. According to the national ECD audit DSD and EPRI (2014, p. 42), 82% of ECD centres are publicly owned, and 18 % are privately owned. Privately owned ECD centres are subject to fewer regulations, charge higher fees compared to publicly owned ones, and often service higher-income communities (DSD and EPRI, 2014, p. 42). They are also subject to less regulation because they do not receive subsidies from the government (DSD and EPRI, 2014, p. 42). In terms of the national ECD census conducted by the DBE (2022, p. 32):

- 68% of ECD programmes were reported to be registered as NPOs,
- 28% of ECD programmes were fully registered with the DSD,
- 41% were not registered with the DSD,
- 28% were either in the process of registration or were conditionally registered;
- 67% did not receive a government subsidy, and
- 33% received a subsidy from the DSD.

A relatively high percentage of ECD programmes were therefore either not registered or did not receive a subsidy from the government.

2.3 Factors contributing to quality early childhood programme in South Africa

There is a growing consensus that there is a need to provide quality ECD programmes. To provide quality ECD, one needs to understand what constitutes quality ECD programmes. Defining what constitutes quality ECD programmes is difficult because it is context-specific and multidimensional (O'Keeffe, Southwood, and Hayes, 2022, p. 3 and Excell, 2016, p. 2). In the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries quality ECD programmes constitute the quality of infrastructure teaching material, qualified teachers and educators, programme content and curricula, and systems for measuring and evaluating gains (UNESCO, 2010).

South African studies conducted by Excell (2016), van Heerden (2016), Aina and Bipath (2021), and O'Keeffe, Southwood, and Hayes (2021), have evaluated the different

factors that contribute to the provision of quality ECD programmes in South Africa. Some of these factors are similar to those identified by UNESCO. These factors are in the literature through the Guidelines for ECD services, as provided by the DSD and UNICEF (2006). These factors include the expertise and qualification of ECD practitioners, adequate and safe learning environment, interaction between child and ECD practitioners, and the management of ECD centres.

2.3.1 Staffing and qualifications of the ECD sector

The ECD sector provides job opportunities for 193 000 staff members of which 49% work as ECD practitioners, 28% are support staff (security, cleaners), and 21% are in managerial positions according to the DBE (2022, p. 46). ECD practitioners make up the higher percentage because they are responsible for providing education and care to children. Under the DSD, ECD practitioners were required in terms of regulation 27 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 to possess the following qualifications, skills, and training:

> a) (i) "The National Certificate in ECD at National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 1-6 of the South African Qualification Authority;
> ii) an appropriate early childhood development qualification; or
> iii) a minimum of three years' experience of working in the ECD field
>
> b. appropriate knowledge about ECD;
>
> c. an ability to identify, record, and report on the progress and developmental needs of the child from ECD opportunities and interventions;
>
> e. the ability to stimulate, extend, and promote all-round development through appropriate adult-child, adult-adult, and child-child interactions to enhance emotional, cognitive, spiritual, physical, and social development;
>
> f. the ability to create awareness of, promote, and ensure the all-round safety, protection, security, rights, and development of the child according to his or her needs in conjunction with community resources;
>
> g. the ability to provide ECD programmes that are appropriate to the needs of the children to whom the services are provided, including children with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or other special needs; and
>
> h. the ability to implement physical, financial and human resources." (Children's Act 35 of 2008).

The latest ECD census by the DBE (2022, p. 46), showed that (52%) of ECD practitioners have relevant ECD qualifications of which 42% with the minimum required NQF level four and five qualifications. Twenty-one percent have no qualification in ECD and 27 % have participated in an accredited skills programme. This means the majority of the staff members responsible for teaching and learning have relevant qualifications in ECD. However, the quality of training provided to ECD practitioners in South Africa remains of concern. Findings from Grossmark et al. (2021, p. 18), indicated that the majority of NPOs

responsible for training ECD practitioners provided courses that were outdated and not in line with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children between birth and four years of age.

2.3.2 The expertise and qualification level of ECD practitioners

In a study conducted by Van Heerden (2021, p. 6) on how quality ECD programmes are viewed by mothers and practitioners in ECD centres, the participants valued ECD practitioners who are qualified and dedicated to providing quality early childhood education. Similarly, Moyo, Wadesango, and Kurebwa's study (2012, p. 148) found that ECD practitioners who possess further qualifications and training in early childhood education can provide more quality learning than teachers who lack the qualification skills and expertise.

The importance of expertise and qualifications possessed by ECD practitioners providing ECD is also supported by law in South Africa. Regulation 27 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 regulates the minimum qualification, experience, and expertise for an applicant to register for an ECD programme. Regulation 27 (a)(i) and (ii) stipulates that the minimum qualification for a National Certificate in ECD should be at National Qualification Framework (NQF) level one to six and that the practitioner should possess an appropriate ECD qualification, (Children's Act: 2005).

The Guidelines for ECD Services by the DSD and UNICEF (2006, p.49), indicate that the minimum qualification for ECD practitioners is the registered Basic Certificate in ECD NQF level one of the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). This qualification equips the ECD practitioner with basic knowledge and skills about children's development from birth to six years (DSD and UNICEF, 2006, p. 49). In terms of the Guidelines of ECD services, ECD supervisors should have a minimum qualification of the National Certificate in ECD NQF Level by the SAQA. In addition to basic knowledge about child development from birth to six years, the NQF level four equips ECD supervisors with management skills and better communication skills with various stakeholders (DSD and UNICEF (2006, p. 49).

ECD practitioners are aware of the importance of obtaining relevant qualifications to be able to gain knowledge and skills in educating young children (Zulu, Alina, and Bipath, 2022, p.6). The results of the national ECD census report by the DBE (2022, p. 46), 52% of ECD practitioners have acquired ECD qualification in level NQF 4-9. This indicates over half the ECD practitioners have the required minimum qualification. However, the literature reviewed indicated that do not receive training that is of good quality.

Vorwerk (2020, p. 20) identified that ECD practitioners who have obtained their qualification in NQF Level four and five through NPOs and TVET Colleges are unable to progress beyond NQF level four and five qualifications because universities do not accept them. Visser et al. (2021, p. 18) identified that ECD practitioners in poor communities lack the skills to handle a large group of children, practise positive discipline in classrooms, of identifying children with developmental delays, and ability to implement theoretical training into practice.

2.3.3 Adequate and safe learning environment.

One of the national norms and standards for ECD programmes stipulated in section 94 (2)(c) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is to care for children in a constructive manner providing support and security. This norm entails that learning should take place in a safe environment that promotes the well-being of children.

Findings from Van Heerden's study (2016, p.5) demonstrated that both parents and ECD practitioners regarded safety and security play a pivotal role in providing quality early childhood education. The availability of adequate and safe infrastructure contributes to the quality of learning.

In terms of the Guidelines for ECD services, children should be taken care of in an adequate and safe environment that is safe, clean, and well-maintained (DSD and UNICEF 2006, p. 50). The floor space must be covered with material that is safe for children to play with; a play area should be at least $1.5m^2$ per child, all equipment used in the ECD centre must be kept clean and safe, and all dangerous objects be kept out of reach from children (DSD and UNICEF, 2006, p. 40).

It stands out that the availability of a safe and clean learning environment contributes to the implementation of quality early childhood education. Findings by the National Development Agency (NDA (2016, p.2) and van Heerden (2016, p. 6) found that in addition to a safe environment, access to adequate learning material was found to be an essential aspect in the provision of quality ECD programmes.

2.3.4 Interaction between the practitioner and children

The number of children per ECD practitioner (the ratio) has been found to contribute to the implementation of early childhood education at ECD centres in both the South African literature and in policy. In terms the National Guidelines of ECD Services drafted by in South Africa the ratio of children per teacher according to different age categories is as follows:

- 1:8 children aged 18 months to 3 years old,
- 1:20 or less for children aged three to four years;
- 1:30 or less for children aged five to six years old with at least one assistant for each age category. (DSD and UNICEF, 2006, pp. 48-49).

Moyo et al. (2012, p. 144) assert that large class numbers negatively impact the implementation of early childhood education because teachers are unable to provide children with individual attention. According to van Heerden's study (2016, p. 6) overcrowding in classrooms allow ECD practitioners the ability to be able to pay attention to children in a loving, caring, peaceful, friendly, and safe atmosphere contributed to quality implementation of early childhood education.

2.3.5 Active learning

The availability of a high-quality educational programmes that provides children with the opportunity to learn was identified as a factor contributing to quality ECD programmes in Van Heerden's study (2016, p. 5). Similarly, O'Keeffe et al. (2021, p. 18) identified that having a structured ECD programme that exposes children to different learning activities played an essential aspect in the quality of ECD programme provided to children. A structured learning programme with various activities aimed at stimulating the holistic development of the children in also stipulated in the Guidelines for ECD (DSD and UNICEF (2006, p.46).

The NIECD Policy 2015 assigned the DBE the responsibility to develop an early learning curriculum for children between birth and four years of age in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77). The National Early Learning Standards (NELDS) were first developed in 2009, and led to the finalisation of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children between birth and four years of age in 2015 (DBE, 2021). There is, however, insufficient literature that evaluates the implementation of the NCF for children between birth and four years of age.

The Thrive by Five Index Report (Index report) was the first national survey that evaluated the outcomes of the early learning, looking at the physical growth and social emotional functioning developmental domains of children age birth to five years old who are accessing ECD programmes at ECD centres (Giese et al., 2022, p. 1). The findings from the Index Report revealed that over 53% of children accessing ECD programmes in ECD centres do not have access to basic learning foundation with only 43 % of children thriving in the physically and early learning domain (Giese et al., 2022, p. 23). The poor learning outcome of children accessing the ECD programme as assessed by the Index Report may mean that the NCF and structured ECD programmes are poorly implemented.

There is a need to effectively monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the ECD programme (NDA, 2016, p. 3). Regulation 28 of the Children's Act makes it compulsory for ECD programmes to be monitored to determine compliance with the minimum norms and standards (Children's Act, 2005). The type of monitoring emphasised by the Children's Act does not entail monitoring the quality of the ECD programme provided to children. This could also have influenced the poor outcome of the ECD programme on children under the age of five years under the DSD as stated in the Index Report (Giese et al., 2022).

2.3.6 Management and leadership

The need to have effective management and leadership was identified as a factor that contributes to the quality provision of ECD programmes in ECD centres (the Guidelines for ECD Services 2006, Clampett, 2016, Excell, 2016, , and O'Keeffe et al. 2021). Clampett (2016, p.48) identified that the management committee is the highest authority in the ECD centres. The management committee plays a crucial role in ensuring that ECD centres have the necessary resources to provide quality ECD programmes, monitors the functionality of the ECD centres, and appoints a supervisor to manage the ECD centre (Clampett, 2016, p.48).

Study findings in Excell (2016, p. 8) illustrated that ECD supervisors should have management skills such as instructional leadership, and organisational management, be able to support junior staff, and have good ethical practices. Both these studies demonstrate both the management committee and ECD supervisors should have good management skills for ECD centres to be able to provide quality ECD programmes. Even though this study was not aimed at addressing gaps in the management and leadership of ECD centres, literature surveyed does demonstrate that having committee members and ECD supervisors with efficient management

and supervision skills, does contribute to the provision of quality ECD programme in ECD centres.

The above-mentioned factors represent what an ideal quality ECD programmes should contain. Some of these factors are prescribed by the Children's Act and the Guidelines for ECD services in South Africa. In the following section key challenges experienced by ECD practitioners in the quest to provide quality ECD programmes in South Africa are identified.

2.4 Challenges impeding ECD practitioners from implementing quality ECD programmes in ECD centres in South Africa

The ECD sector has the potential to make a positive impact on the lives of children and people working in the sector. However, some challenges still halt ECD practitioners from implementing quality ECD programmes in South Africa. These challenges include financial challenges, poor working conditions, lack of proper education and training, and other challenges.

2.4.1 Financial challenges

There are two main funding sources for the ECD programmes in South Africa namely, fees paid by parents and a subsidy from the government (Atmore et al. 2012, p. 36). Both these funding sources have their own challenges that halt ECD practitioners from providing quality ECD programmes. In terms of the national ECD census, 94% of ECD programmes charge a fee for children to access the ECD programmes, with an average of R509 a month (DBE, 2022, p. 43). This amount is almost equivalent to the child support grant and burden families financially, according Hall et. al (2024, p. 58). Hence parents and care-givers resort to keeping younger children below the age of three at home rather than accessing the ECD programme (Hall, Sambu, Almeleh, 2017, p. 36). This also shows inequality in the number of children who are accessing the ECD programme. In most cases parents and caregivers do not have the capacity to pay fees, which negatively affects the provision of quality ECD programmes (Aina and Bipath, 2022, p. 10). Challenges also exist with access to government subsidies.

The second source of income for ECD centres is through government subsidy to registered ECD centres, calculated per day a child attended an ECD programme for children whose parents earned below a set income (Atmore et al., 2012, p. 136). For ECD programmes to become eligible for the government subsidy, they have to meet the following be a registered ECD partial care facility, have a registered ECD programme and a valid NPO (Dulvy et al., 2023, p. 35). However, since the implementation of the function shift registration as an NPO

is no longer required (Metelerkamp, 2023). In addition, ECD practitioners also had to go through an onerous process to apply for funding under the DSD.

Registered ECD centres were also required to "claim the subsidy monthly based on the child's attendance and expenditure receipt, which leads potentially to inconsistent monthly funding" (Dulvy et al., 2023, p. 56). This process often resulted in ECD having to receive late payment of subsidy from the DSD (Baloyi and Makhubela, 2018, p. 10776). This is mainly because different individuals are involved in this processing the claim from the service office to the district office for each ECD centre (Ilifa Labantwana 2014a, p.5). Reviewed literature also indicate that the late payments of government subsidies is still prominent even after the function shift.

Githahu (2022) reported that ECD centres in the Western Cape experienced delays in the payment of subsidies to ECD centres due to the lack of submission of updated banking details. Similarly, in KwaZulu-Natal and the North West Province, ECD centres experienced delays in the payment of ECD subsidies for up to five months after the handover of the ECD function to the DBE with no clear reason provided for the delay in payments (Gumede, 2022 and Tshehle, 2023). The late payment of government subsidies and non-payment of school fees by parents often result in ECD practitioners being unable to provide nutritious meals for children and purchase learning materials, and having to use their own money (Visser et al., 2021, p, .20). In addition, available literature demonstrates the government investment in ECD programme is insufficient to assist ECD practitioners provided quality ECD programmes.

In terms of the 2018 Estimate of National Expenditure of the Republic of South Africa as provided by South Africa only spent between 1-2% of its education budget on ECD programmes as indicated by the Ilifa Labantwana and Kago Ya Bana (2018, p. 4). This confirms an argument been made by that there is poor funding commitment by the government towards ECD programmes, as current spending on the sector does not reflect its priority to ascribe to the constitutional rights for children or expanding ECD programmes for children as indicated by Bryer and Leeve (2022, p. 277).

The reviewed national legislation section 93 (1) of the Children's Act does not make it compulsory for the government to fund the ECD programmes. It states "the MEC for basic education may, from money appropriated the by the relevant provincial legislature, provide and fund ECD programme for that programme" (Children's Act 38 of 2005). The reviewed

literature indicate poor government investment in the ECD sector is due to a lack of a legal mandate compelling government to fund the ECD sector.

The financial challenges facing ECD centres were also exacerbated during the COVID-19 following the implementation of the lockdown restrictions (King et al, 2021, p. 129). Consequent to the lockdown restrictions, ECD centres experienced a loss of revenue. This was due to parents' inability to afford fees due to job losses and others refused to pay fees because centres were closed and children were not attending (Draper and Cook, 2022, p. 2). In addition, the government unlawfully stopped paying out subsidies to ECD centres during lockdown restriction, further causing more financial challenges (Ally, Parker and Peacock, 2022, p. 2).

In response to the loss of income by ECD centres due, the government introduced the ECD Stimulus Grant (Stimulus Grant) to compensate ECD personnel who had experienced a loss of income during the lockdown restrictions (Bayat and Madyibi, 2023, p. 13). The stimulus grant was targeted at registered and unregistered ECD centres. Coombes and Ehrenreich (2021) explain that the stimulus grant was only accessible to ECD centres who had a bank account on the name of the ECD centre or programme, unregistered ECD centres to be in the registration process with the DSD and the ECD centre to agree to reopen after sixty days of receiving the fund if they had closed due to the COVID-19 lock down restrictions.

Based on the reviewed literature implementation of the ECD stimulus grant was not a success. Bayat and Madyibi (2023, p. 14) identify that among other factors that lead to the ineffective management of the stimulus grant include, the overcomplicated registration process for the stimulus grant, the stimulus grant was launched after a year the first lock down restrictions, the DSD diverted that manner in which the stimulus grant would be utilised and it was unable to pay half of the distribute funds to ECD centres.

2.4.2 Inadequate infrastructure

The NDA (2016a, p. 5) argues that the availability of sufficient and adequate infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, outdoor playing environment and safety and security plays an important role in ensuring that children receive the best care and education. In South Africa, the Children's Act further stipulates that in order for a person to be able to provide ECD programmes to children below the age of five years old, the facility in which ECD programmes is provided needs to be registered after it has met the norms and standards provided in the said legislation section 80 of the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005).

The National ECD audit conducted by the DSD and EPRI (2014, p. 33), found that the majority of ECD centres were conditionally registered due to their inadequate infrastructure. This was also confirmed by Mbarathi et al. (2016, p. 26), that the majority of ECD centres located in informal settlement, were unable to be registered as ECD centres under the DSD because of poor infrastructure and did not have financial or adequate means to meet the prescribed norms and standards of the Children's Act.

The lack of legislation that clearly compels the state to fund ECD programmes was also seen as contributing to the inadequate infrastructure at ECD centres according to Bryer and van Leeve (2022, p. 263). The Children's Act in section 78 does not make it compulsory for government to fund ECD centres (Children's Act 38 of 2005). The NIECD Policy 2015 only makes provision for ECD infrastructure grant for ECD centres that are owned by the state and not operating in private premises Republic of South Africa (2015, p. 98). The inability of the DSD to provide funding for ECD infrastructure was also identified by Atmore et al. (2012, p. 129), as one of the causes that contributed to the inadequate infrastructure in ECD centres.

2.4.3 Poor working conditions

In terms of the national ECD census the ECD workforce is comprises of ECD practitioners, assistant practitioners, managerial and supporting staff DBE (2022, p. 45). The ECD workforce often work without formal job contract, face insecure work conditions and earn below the required minimum wage with no benefit (Ilifa Labantwana, 2020, p. 8). The Innovation Edge (2023) found that ECD practitioners are unable to take sick leave because the absence of one staff member makes it extremely challenging for the remaining staff members. In addition to the above challenges Zulu, Aina, and Bipath (2022, p. 8) assert that ECD practitioners worked under unfair working conditions as they worked long hours, did not rest during school holidays, took no tea or lunch breaks because they had to look after the children at all times, yet receive poor salaries.

Bryer and van Leeve (2022, p. 270) argue that the current frameworks regulating ECD programmes do not address the issues pertaining to improving the quality of ECD programmes, creating job opportunities and improving the working conditions for women employed in the ECD sector. Evidence presented by the literature indicates that, there is a need to ensure that legislation regulating ECD programme, should protect working conditions of those employed in the ECD sector.

2.4.4 Lack of proper training and education of ECD Practitioners

The need for professional development for ECD practitioners in South Africa is emphasised in by the South African legislation, policy and literature, as demonstrated in paragraph 2.3.2. Regulation 27 (a)(i) of the Children's Act, provide that the applicant of an ECD programme must be in possession of National Certificate in ECD at NQF level one to six. Likewise, Clampetts (2016, p 62) identified that the qualification and expertise of ECD practitioners are identified as an indicator for ECD centre to provide quality ECD programmes.

Many ECD practitioners, however encounter challenges when trying to further their education and training. Institutions responsible for providing training for ECD practitioners are not evenly distributed across South Africa (Harrison, 2020, p. 7) and progress beyond NQF Level four and five as provided in paragraph 2.3.2. This makes accessing further education and training difficult for ECD practitioners.

As stated earlier, 42% of ECD practitioners have NQF levels four and five. ECD practitioners often encounter challenges when trying to progress beyond NQF levels four and five. This is because many ECD practitioners working with children below five of years do not have a matric certificate, hence cannot be admitted into universities (Vorwerk, 2020, p. 20). The lack of implementation of recognition prior learning policy by different universities was identified as a factor that prevented ECD practitioners to improve their qualifications beyond NQF level four and five (Wood and Neethling, 2024, p.8). The quality of training provided to ECD practitioners in South Africa is an issue of concern as outlined by Vorwerk (2020) and Baloyi and Makhubela (2018).

Research findings show that many institutions who responsible for providing further education training to ECD practitioners do not meet the requirement to register with the Department of Education and Higher Training (Vorwerk, 2020, p. 21). A study by Baloyi and Makhubele (2018, p. 10778) also found that ECD practitioners felt that training provided to them was not in line with the specific conditions of ECD practice. Atmore et al (2012, p. 29) This may be due to lack of practical demonstration during training, lack of on-site support to assist with practical implementation and lack of follow-up after the completion of training to ensure proper implementation of theory into practice.

In Technical Vocational Education Training Colleges (TVET) early childhood care and education portfolios are often headed by multiple portfolios not related to ECD training and do not have training materials (Harrison, 2020, p. 6). Inadequate support in assisting ECD

practitioner obtain further training was indemnified to also contribute to the low qualification of ECD practitioners. For Bipath and Aina's (2021, p. 8), that ECD practitioners are not given quality training and support by the government. The high cost of accessing further education and training is also a barrier for ECD practitioners to receive adequate training (Vorwerk, 2020, p.23).

2.4.5 Compliance with legal regulatory frameworks

ECD practitioners responsible for providing ECD programmes need to comply with regulatory frameworks that regulate ECD programmes (Ally, 2023, p. 6). These frameworks include provisions relating to ECD in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Children's Act), the NPO Act of 1997, the National Guidelines of ECD services in South Africa, 2006, the National Integrated ECD Policy 2015 and the NCF for children from birth to four years.

The compliance with the legal regulation framework, is important for ECD centres because ECD centre have to undergo inspection to meet the stipulated standards and may be eligible for funding from the government (Sello et al, 2024, p. 2). Section 79 of the Children's Act provides the national norms and standards that ECD centres need to meet to have their registered ECD centre registered. In addition, ECD practitioners must register their ECD programmes in terms of section 95 of the Children's Act 28 of 2005. Section 94 of the Children's Act sets the national norms and standards for the ECD programme. This essence ECD practitioner have to undergo two registration process. This process is reported by Ally (2023, p. 8) to be burdensome for ECD centres, more especially for those situated in poor and rural communities. Mbarathi et al (2016, p. 9) identified poor infrastructure as a prevented measure for the registration of ECD centres in informal settlement because they cannot meet the prescribed norms and standards in the Children's Act.

Compliance with municipal bylaws were have also been recognised as obstacles that hinder the registration process of ECD centres (van Niekerk, 2014 and Metelerkamp, 2022). ECD centres in rural area face difficulties in obtaining title deeds as it is one of the required supporting documents for the registration of ECD centres. There is also limited liability from the state to provide funding for ECD infrastructure (Ilifa Labantwana, n.d). Vorwerk (2020, p. 29) explained that this registration process is tedious and ECD practitioners have to bear the cost incurred for the registration for the ECD centre and ECD programmes. The inability of ECD centres to meet the prescribed norms of standard for required for registration, minimises

their chances of receiving subsidy from the government. Ally (2023, p. 8) also demonstrated that the regulation of ECD centres under the Children's Act has created bureaucratic hurdles which makes regulation of ECD centres highly administrative.

Compliance with regulatory frameworks by ECD centres was further accelerated by the Covid-19. In March 2020, when South Africa went through level 5 lockdown, the ECD centres was also affected. This resulted in ECD centres having to close their doors for a period of six months (Draper and Cook, 2022, p.3). The reopening of ECD centres was accompanied by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which ECD centres needed to comply with various of safety requirements (Draper and Cook, 2022, p.3). Due to the requirement of the SOP many ECD centres could not re-open because, they could not afford to procure new health and hygiene equipment because they did not have the financial means to do so, Ebrahim, Martin, and Excell (2021, p. 205). This is an indication that ECD sector is overly regulated in South Africa with minimum support from the government.

2.4.6 Other challenges

Other challenges faced by ECD practitioners include the lack of proper management of ECD centres. The National Development Agency (NDA) (2016) asserts that ECD centres must have trained governing committees, for them to be able to lead and manage ECD centres effectively and efficiently. In a study conducted by Visser et al. (2021, p. 20) ECD practitioners encounter challenges where governing committees misuse funds due to a lack of transparency.

Monitoring and evaluation of the ECD programme under the DSD focused more on assessing ECD facilities than the implementation of the ECD programme (Baloyi and Makhubele, 2018, p. 10779). It cannot be denied that children need to learn and be cared for in a safe environment. However, monitoring the quality of the ECD programmes provided to them, also ensures they are adequately stimulated to develop holistically as the intention of providing ECD programmes to children is to ensure they develop holistically.

ECD centres are also faced with a challenge of being ill equipped to provide children with disabilities with quality learning experiences. ECD centres can play a pivotal role in the early identification of disabilities in children who are not reaching their developmental milestones (Law, 2017, p. 2). Similarly, Karisa (2022, p. 2) argues that a coordination between the Department of Health and ECD centres can play a critical role in providing early identification of disabilities by using assessment for disabilities. However, ECD practitioners in South Africa are insufficiently trained and do not have assessment tools they can use to

identify disabilities at an early stage. This consequently runs the risk of children with development disabilities not from receiving ECD programmes designed for their special needs.

According to Clark et al. (2024, p. 5) the lack of disability friendly facilities to accommodate children with disabilities makes accessibility of ECD centres to children with disabilities bleak. It is therefore important that the implementation of the function shift needs to also promote inclusive ECD programmes at ECD centres.

2.5 The impact of the function shift

There is insufficient literature that investigates the impact of the ECD programmes being administered by the DSD before the function shift. The last ECD audit conducted under the DSD was aimed at obtaining "comparative information on the nature and extent of ECD provisioning, services, resources and infrastructure from all nine provinces across registration statuses to inform and support ongoing policy and planning initiatives in the ECD sector" (DSD and EPRI, 2014:1). In the same vein, the DBE conducted the national ECD census with the aim of collecting accurate data on the formality of the ECD sector to enable the DBE to integrate ECD into the Education Information Management System (DBE, 2022, p. 9). It cannot be disputed that collecting accurate data about the nature of the ECD sector assists the government in allocating resources where they are needed the most.

There is, however a need to also evaluate the impact of decisions taken by government as they affect people who implement decisions taken from above. The announcement of the function shift was received with mixed reaction by different stakeholders in the sector. Dirk (2021, p. 9861), asserts that one educational specialist welcomed the ECD function shift providing that the function shift should bring up the professionalisation of the ECD sector, whereas some were concerned that unregistered ECD centres would be phased out. For ECD practitioners, their uncertainties around the function shift were centred over losing ownership of their ECD centres and the loss of employment (Vorwerk, 2020, p. 44). Therefore, the main aim of this study was to assess the consequences of the departmental shift of ECD programme functions as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners in the provision of quality ECD programmes.

2.6 Conclusion

Findings from the literature review indicate that the ECD sector is very diverse. The centre-based ECD programmes is the most commonly researched area, perhaps due to its setting being similar to the school setting. People responsible for providing ECD programmes for children aged birth to four years do so out of a passion for children, sometimes with very little educational and professional background. Despite this, ECD practitioners are aware they need to provide quality ECD programmes.

Literature has shown that ECD practitioners know that their qualifications and experience in the ECD sector, the availability of safe infrastructure, and good interaction between practitioner and child contribute to the provision of quality ECD programmes. These factors are also in line with the national norms and standards of ECD facilities and ECD programmes as prescribed by the Children's Act. They create an ideal picture of what constitutes quality ECD programmes. Different challenges as discussed above prevents children from accessing quality ECD programmes.

This was demonstrated by the findings in Thrive by Five Index Report. It was the first national study that evaluated the early learning outcomes of children aged 0-4 accessing ECD programmes, and which found that 57% of the children accessing the ECD programme are not adequately prepared for formal school (Giese et al., 2022, p. 13). This means more than half of children accessing ECD programme in ECD centres, receive substandard quality ECD programmes.

There is, however, a gap in the literature, in that the role of the government and other relevant stakeholders, was not identified as a factor that can contribute to quality ECD programmes. The challenges experienced by the ECD sector are the direct impact of systems put in place by the DSD. Therefore, this study aims to determine the consequences of the departmental shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners. The next chapter of this study will explain the research methodology utilised for this study.

Authors such as Wills, Kotzé, and Kika-Mistry (2021, p.7) identified that the majority of the ECD programmes are rendered by private providers, NPOs, subsistence entrepreneurs, or micro-social enterprises providing informal services. This further indicates that the provision of ECD programmes for children between birth and four years is community-driven rather than being driven by the state. However, both the national ECD census and the national census have

been unable to provide accurate data on the number of children with disabilities who have access to ECD programmes.

The lack of reliable data on the number of children with disabilities accessing the ECD programmes will not only affect the ability of the South African government to ensure children with disabilities are included in receiving quality ECD programmes (Nkgadima, 2020). The inability of children with disabilities to access the ECD programmes is also a breach of their right to equality (Fredman, Donati and Naicker, 2022, p. 183). Moving forward, the DBE needs to ensure that children with disabilities can access quality ECD programmes.

Despite the increase in the number of children who are between birth to four years old, who have access to ECD programme after 1994 as reflected in here. The quality of the ECD programmes provided to children in this age group remains a concern in South Africa. This is based on various studies conducted by Atmore et al. (2012), Baloyi and Makhubela (2018), Harrison (2020), and Bipath, Aina and Zulu (2022) on the challenges that have long persisted within the ECD sector that affect the provision of quality ECD programmes.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used to achieve the aims and objectives of the study. It will start by presenting the research design, research approach, methodology, and the study setting. The second section describes data collection tools used to construct data for this study. The third section of this chapter presents research processes followed such as sampling methods used to recruit and select study participants and the profile of the study participants. The last section presents the data collection process, data analysis, data management plan, the trustworthiness of the study, and relevant ethical principles considered for this study.

3.2 Research design and methodology

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. Qualitative research explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems, by gathering participants' experiences, perceptions, or behaviour (Teeny, Brannan, and Brannan, 2022, p. 1). This methodology is appropriate to assess the consequences of the departmental shift, as experienced and perceived in the implementation of quality ECD programmes as perceived and experienced by ECD practitioners.

This study was an empirical study that applied two types of research methods to collect data. Firstly, the empirical data collected in this study was collected from two focus group discussions with 15 ECD practitioners from different ECD centres. Secondly, the document analysis was used to analyse the different roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in the implementation of ECD programmes as embedded in different ECD legislation and policy.

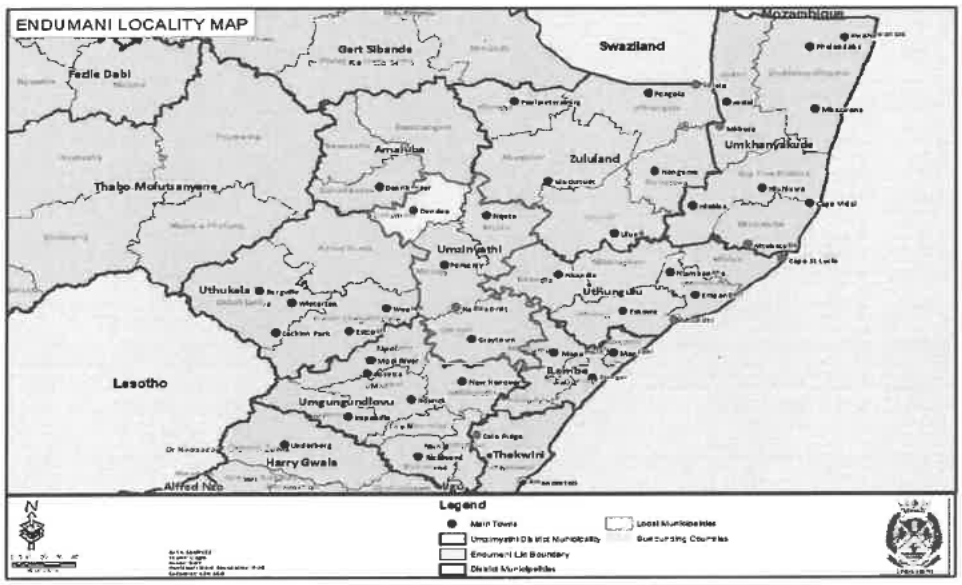
3.3 Study setting

The study was conducted at Endumeni Local Municipality with participants from fifteen different ECD centres located within the Endumeni Municipality. The Endumeni Municipality is located on the northern edge of the uMzinyathi District in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

Endumeni Municipality comprises three towns, namely, Dundee, Glencoe, and Wasbank, with surrounding commercial farmlands that are divided into seven wards. There are

no tribal authorities within Endumeni Municipality (Endumeni Local Municipality, 2021, p. 10). Endumeni Municipality is home to 100,085 people (Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 2022). Twenty percent of the total population is made up of children between birth to nine years of age (Endumeni Local Municipality, 2021).

Figure 1: Map of Endumeni Local Municipality



Source: (Endumeni Municipality, 2021, p.7)

In terms of the educational attainment of the population of Endumeni, 4% have no educational qualification, 8% have some primary education, 3% have primary education, 31% have some secondary education, 44% have secondary education and only 8% have either an undergraduate or postgraduate educational qualification (Endumeni Municipality, 2021, p. 86). Data on the number of children accessing the ECD programme aged between 0-4 years at Endumeni Municipality could not be attained. The Endumeni Municipality has ten primary schools and six high schools with various pre-primary schools (Endumeni Local Municipality, 2021, p. 85).

3.4 Sampling method

The sample of the study was purposefully selected as ECD practitioners who are employed in ECD centres situated within Endumeni Municipality. The researcher recruited study participants through her professional networks because she lives within Endumeni Municipality. The participants met the following set inclusion criteria:

- Work in an ECD centre that has been in operation for more than 2 years,
- Work in an ECD centre that is registered or unregistered with the relevant department,

- Work in an ECD centre that is funded or unfunded by the DBE, or functions as a private entity,
- Work in an ECD centre that is situated within the Endumeni Municipality,
- Selected participants should have more than 8 years of working experience in the ECD sector and had to be responsible for providing an ECD programme for children between the ages of birth to four years old as part of their job description, and
- Participants gave consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria

- Staff members employed as cooks, gardeners, and security guards.
- ECD centre employees who were unwilling or unable to give consent to participate in the study.

3.5 Sample size

Fifteen ECD practitioners from different ECD centres were purposively selected to form part of the study. In each ECD centre, one staff member who met the inclusion criteria was selected to be part of the study. In all of the fifteen (15) eligible ECD centres selected, the participants were ECD practitioners who were also responsible for performing supervisory functions at their respective ECD centres. They all met the above-stated inclusion criteria. Thereafter a list with demographic information and contact details of the participants was compiled. Once the list was completed, participants were telephonically contacted, and focus group discussions were scheduled. Each participant who agreed to be part of the study was given the study information sheet and consent form to read and sign, to give consent for taking part in the research study. Fifteen ECD practitioners participated in the focus group discussions.

Table 1: Profile of study participants

Number	Pseudonym Name	Gender	Years of Experience	Position held
1.	Nanazile	Female	40 years	ECD Supervisor
2.	Nomsa	Female	5 years	ECD Supervisor
3.	Joy	Female	30 years	ECD Supervisor
4.	Maleti	Female	5 years	ECD Supervisor
5.	Sibongile	Female	13 years	ECD Supervisor
6.	Zanele	Female	7 years	ECD Supervisor
7.	Londiwe	Female	36 years	ECD Supervisor
8.	Thokozile	Female	25 years	ECD Practitioner
9.	Zakhithi	Female	15 years	ECD Practitioner
10.	Nomi	Female	15 years	ECD Supervisor
11.	Thulisile	Female	12 years	ECD Supervisor
12.	Siziwe	Female	13 years	ECD Supervisor
13.	Zandile	Female	9 years	ECD Supervisor
14.	Sizakele	Female	20 years	ECD Supervisor
15.	Thandeka	Female	12 years	ECD Supervisor

3.6 Data collection tool and process

Dewi (2021, p. 24) mentions that, researchers conducting a qualitative research study can chose one or several data collection methods. The use of multiple data collection methods strengthens the trustworthiness of the data collected. To answer the research question required the use of different data collection tools. The document analysis and focus group discussion was used to collect data in this study.

3.6.1 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were used as a data collection tool for this study. van Eeuwijk and Angehrn (2017, p. 1) describe a focus group as "a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discuss a given topic or issue in-depth, facilitated by a professional, external moderator." The fifteen participants were divided into two focus groups with six to eight members in each group. One focus group had six participants and the other focus group had nine participants. The participants were grouped according to their geographical demarcation to reduce travelling time to the venue.

The focus group discussion with study participants from Dundee was held at a Drop-in-Centre and a focus group discussion in Glencoe was held at the boardroom of the local library. It was easy to encourage active participation from the group members because the group size was manageable. Focus group discussions allow the researcher to obtain more

knowledge, perspectives, and attitudes of people on a given topic that would not be accessible through one-on-one interviews (Wong, 2008, p. 156). Focus group discussion was a preferred data collection tool method compared to one-on-one interviews in order to obtain diverse responses in a given setting and was cost-effective.

A semi-structured scheduled interview guide was used to facilitate the focus group discussions to collect relevant information on the consequences of the departmental shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners. The interview guide made use of open-ended questions to obtain in-depth information about the consequences of the departmental shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners.

Making use of audio recordings, notetaking, and participant observation allows the research to capture accurate responses from the research participants (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook (2007) in Nyumba et al. (2017, p. 23). A digital audio recorder and field notes were used to capture the verbal and non-verbal responses from the study participants. Consent was sought from the participants before the digital audio recorder was used.

3.6.2 Document analysis

A document analysis as a data collection tool was also used in this study. Document analysis is described as "the review of by the researcher of written materials. These can include personal, non-personal documents such as archives, annual reports, guidelines policy documents, diaries or letters" (Busetto, Wick and Gumbinder, 2020, p. 2). The purpose of utilising the document analysis tool was to construct a comprehensive legislative framework that outlines key legislation provisions, policy directives, and their implication.

Primary sources included national legislation, policy documents, regulations, and government reports. Secondary resources, such as legal commentaries, academic analyses, and policy reviews, provide additional context and interpretation. Documents were selected based on their relevance, legal authority, applicability to the research focus. The legislation was critical evaluated. Assessing coherence, contradiction, and potential areas for legal and policy reform.

3.7 Data analysis

The data collected from the focus group discussions was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) six steps of thematic analysis.

Step 1: Familiarisation with the data.

Becoming familiar with the data collected is the most common practice in qualitative research. At the end of each focus group discussion, the researcher listened and re-listens to the audio recordings from the focus group discussions, and compared them with field notes taken. Once all focus group discussions were conducted audio recordings were transcribed and were read and re-read, to identify responses that could be grouped and given a theme.

Step 2: Coding

Coding entails organising data in a meaningful and systematic way (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355). All audio recordings were transcribed and printed out, and then data was coded by hand. The study was focused on answering sub-questions of the main research questions.

Step 3: Searching for themes

This phase of the data analysis "involves reviewing coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p. 63). When the researcher had completed coding data, she then moved on to identify similarities in the coded data which were then grouped according to themes. In search of themes, the researcher looked for common responses given by participants to particular refined questions and similar responses were grouped under given questions and sub-questions. During this phase, concepts and issues previously identified in the literature review can emerge and can be subsumed under them Diwadi (2021, p. 66). Challenges experienced by ECD practitioners also emerged as a theme during this phase of the data analysis.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Reviewing themes entails "checking that the themes 'work' about both the coded extracts and the full data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p. 63). After the coded data were further categorised according to themes, the researcher reviewed whether the identified themes fell under the correct research sub-question.

Step 5: Defining and naming the themes

This step requires the researcher to conduct and write a detailed analysis of each theme (Braun and Clarke 2012, p. 64). During this stage, the responses given under each sub-question were

analysed to check if there was no overlap of responses in each question and analyse whether the given response was able to obtain the objectives of the study.

Step 6: Producing the report

According to Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 66) this phase entails producing a report that provides a compelling story about the data that has been analysed. The authors also provide that the writing of the report is not only produced at the end, writing a report takes places informally through writing notes and formally which involves the analysis process and report writing (Braun and Clark, 2012, p. 66). A formal report on the data analysed will be presented in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

3.8 Data management

A data management plan helps the researcher to put into practice how data collected is organised, used, and looked after to achieve the highest quality and long-term sustainability (Corti et al., 2019). Data collected using audio recording was transcribed into a computer, and saved in an encrypted folder. Each focus group discussion was saved under a different folder and the name of the town where the focus group discussion was held. This assisted the researcher to refer back to the participants to clarify their responses. It also assisted in giving participants transcribed audio recordings to confirm their responses. The audio recordings and transcribed data were stored in a lockable cabinet and will be kept with the supervisor for five years. To ensure further security of the data, the researcher will also save the data on a cloud document with a password.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the data collected

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the four criteria used to assess the trustworthiness of the data. In ensuring credibility, the researcher checked whether the transcribed data did not contain any mistakes. Thereafter, the transcribed data was presented to participants to verify the accuracy and to consider their views. Peer debriefing was also conducted with the study's supervisors to discuss the process of the study and the analysis of the data to enhance the credibility of the study.

Field notes taken during the data collection process were used to enhance the confirmability of the study. The notes were used to capture all the events that took place during the data collection process with the participants. Confirmability in qualitative research can be

recognised by the researcher making use of the findings through detailed descriptions and the use of quotes (Stenfors, Kajamma and Bennet 2020, p. 598). Directly quoting a participant's response to support existing literature related to the study was also used to enhance the confirmability of the study.

To enhance the transferability of the study, the researcher purposefully selected the sample of the study. The researcher also made use of existing literature and open-ended questions to get a thick description to assess the consequences of the departmental shift. The researcher clarified all the research processes followed from data collection, study setting, and the write up of the study's final report.

The fourth criterion used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research was ensuring dependability. Stenfors et al. (2020, p. 598) refer to dependability as a criterion used to check whether the research can be replicated under similar conditions. A thorough research proposal of the study was prepared, and a detailed data collection process and data analysis process were thoroughly described to ensure the dependability of the study.

3.10 Limitations of the study

The research study adopted a qualitative research approach to determine the consequence of ECD migration from the DSD to the DBE in one Municipality. Therefore, the experience and perception of other ECD practitioners in other municipalities may differ.

The majority of the study participants came from ECD centres that mainly benefitted from the government subsidy under the DSD. Participants who operated ECD centres as private entities were not represented in this study. Generalisation of the study cannot be made, because the study findings are representative of a small sample of a given community.

Additionally, relying solely on focus group discussions without conducting site visits may limit the triangulation of results, as it reduces the opportunity to validate findings through multiple data sources and contextual observations.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Observing ethical considerations in research involving human beings is very important. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee with protocol number: HSSREC/0005761/2023. Written permission to conduct the study was granted by the management committee governing the ECD centres. The study participants were given additional information about the study through the information sheet. They were

also given a consent form to read and sign if they agreed to partake in the study. The information sheet and consent form were translated into isiZulu.

The researcher ensured that the report did not include any information that could identify participants. Study participants remained assigned pseudonyms during focus group discussions. Pseudonyms were used earlier in the chapter when the sample was described. The participants were informed they could withdraw at any time during the study and there would be no penalties. Permission to use an audio recorder during focus group discussions was sought from the participants. All audio recordings and transcribed data were kept in a safe place.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research methodology and data analysis process used in the study. It has also demonstrated the limitations of the study. The following chapter will present the critical analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the regulation of ECD and embedded in different legislative and policy framework.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ECD LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the empirical findings extracted using document analysis as a data collection tool. It will critically discuss the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in the regulation of the ECD sector as embedded in the different legislation and policies frameworks. The focus will be on the roles and responsibilities of the DSD and the DBE as provided in key legal provisions and policy directives.

This chapter begins by critically examining what constitutional duties the South African government has in the provision of quality ECD programmes. It will then identify the different roles and responsibilities assigned to the different stakeholders as provided in the South African Constitution, the Children's Act, and the White Paper on ECD 2001 to integrate it with provisions in the NIECD Policy. Following this, it will critically discuss how effective and efficient have the key role players been able to execute their roles and responsibilities as provided by the NIECD Policy and the mentioned legal and policy frameworks in assisting ECD centres to provide quality ECD programmes.

4.2 The constitutional duties of the South African government in the provision of quality ECD programmes

The South African Constitution is the supreme law of the country and contains special children's rights in section 28. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 was enacted to give effect to children's rights contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Charter). This section will critically engage with the right to equal access to education contained in the South African Constitution as it regulates access to equal and quality ECD programmes for all children.

4.3. The rights to equality and education as it regulates equal access to quality ECD programmes

This section will start by critically discussing how the right to equality can be used to address the disparities of the ECD programmes as provided in the South African Constitution and international and regional law. Section 9(1) of the South African Constitution stipulates that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit from the law.

Its further states in section 9(2) that equality includes full equal enjoyment of rights, and freedom. Section 9(3) prohibits any unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, or disability (the South African Constitution). Based on these constitutional rights early childhood education should be provided to children in a non-discriminatory manner as argued by Fredman et al., (2022, p. 16). The South African Constitution is interpreted as putting forward the notion of substantive equality in much of the jurisprudence (Albertyn, 2007, p. 258).

This notion involves a recognition that both social and economic change is needed to attend to the inequalities that are found in a variety of social and economic causes. Inadequate (lacking in quality) or inaccessible early childhood education has implications for both the social and economic standing of young children and inequalities in its provision must therefore be attended to for the requirements of substantive equality to be met. The right to education has been argued to extend to the right to early childhood education under international law (Fredman et al., 2022, p. 22). In South Africa, the right to basic education, encapsulated in section 29(1) (a) of the Constitution, is immediately realisable (*Governing Body of the Juma Musjid Primary School & Others v Essay N.O. and Others* 2011 (7) BCLR 651 (CC)).

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, it is clear that younger children do not have equal access to the right to basic education compared to older children. Access to ECD programmes for younger children is mainly dependent on the affordability of the fees paid by the parents or caregivers (Hall et al. 2019, p. 36). Secondly, the proximity of the ECD centres within the community also contributes to whether children will be physically able to access ECD programmes (Moses, 2021, p. 12). Both these factors can play a determining factor in whether children from poor communities have access to the ECD programme. This was also confirmed by Fredman et al. (2022). The authors argue that access to ECD programmes often excludes children living in poverty, in rural and informal areas because quality ECD programmes are provided for a fee and inadequate funding prevent NPOs from providing quality ECD programmes Fredman et al. (2022, p. 171).

Inadequate funding models used to fund ECD programmes further exclude children with disabilities from accessing quality ECD programmes (Clark et al., 2024, p. 8). Unlike children of school-going age in primary and secondary schools who have access to a no-fee subsidy, younger children have to pay a fee to access ECD programmes (Hall et al., 2019, p. 36). The partial subsidy, coupled with inadequate infrastructure encountered by ECD centres, prevents younger children from receiving quality ECD programmes that will yield positive

outcomes to adequately prepare them for school once they reach the school-going age (Hall et al., 2019, p. 38). The proper allocation of resources such as sufficient funding, human resources, infrastructure material, and support services was also identified to play a crucial role in providing quality ECD programmes as presented by Berry, Dawes, and Biersteker (2013, p. 3). However, based on the presented literature the ECD sector is inadequately provided with sufficient resources.

Kika-Mistry and Wills (2022b) and Dulvy et al. (2023, p. 55) have demonstrated that current funding models used to subsidise the ECD programmes are inadequate and the amount of R17 per child is insufficient to cover all operating costs of the ECD programme. Aina and Bipath (2022b, p. 122) have also alluded that ECD centres situated in poor communities have fewer infrastructural resources to enable them to provide quality ECD programmes. The following section will critically discuss the roles and responsibilities of different government departments as enshrined in different legislative and policy frameworks, to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of a multi-sectoral approach in ensuring the provision of quality ECD programmes.

4.4. The roles and responsibilities of different government departments

4.4.1 The regulation of ECD sector

Before the commencement of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, ECD programmes in South Africa were regulated by the Child Care Act of 1983 as places of care (Ally, 2023, p. 3). The lack of provisions in the Child Care Act 1983, which specifically related to the ECD programme, resulted in the ECD sector being faced with different challenges (South African Law and Reform Commission, 2002).

During the discussion of the reform of the Child Care Act, recommendations were made that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 should contain provisions that specifically regulate ECD centres and programmes in South Africa for children below the age of five years old (Ally, 2023, p.4). This then resulted in the insertion of Chapter 5 of the Children's Act which regulates the registration of partial care facilities, with ECD centres falling within this paradigm. The insertion of Chapter 6 of the Children's Act specifically is aimed at regulating the provision of ECD programmes. As the custodian of the Children's Act, the DSD had the legal duty to implement the provisions of the Children's Act through a multi-sectoral approach as provided in section 5 of the Children's Act.

In terms of the Children's Act, ECD centres are categorised as partial care facilities that must be registered in terms of section 80 of the Children's Act. In addition, section 95 calls for any person or organisation wishing to provide ECD programmes to do so on condition that it complies with regulating frameworks (Children's Act 38 of 2005). To give effect to the implementation of sections 80 and 95 of the Children's Act, the NIECD Policy also clearly states that the government department responsible for ECD, DSD (now the DBE) has to ensure universal availability and equitable access to inclusive ECD programmes through registration and quality improvement of ECD centres (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 76). The duty to register ECD centres and ECD programmes have since been migrated to the DBE. Furthermore, in terms of section 88 of the Children's Act, the DBE can assign the municipality the responsibility to register ECD centres (Children's Act 38 of 2005).

In essence, a person or organisation providing ECD programmes in ECD centres must meet the norms and standards provided in sections 79 and 94 of the Children's Act to be registered as a suitable ECD centre and with age and developmental-appropriate ECD programmes. These norms and standards aim to regulate the ECD programmes and ensure that children are cared for and taught in a safe environment (Biersteker, Berry, and Gwele, 2022, p. 232).

The dual registration process has not been without challenges for ECD centres as outlined in Chapter Two of this mini-thesis. One of the processes involved with the registration of ECD centres in terms of the ECD Guidelines, an official from the DSD has to in writing inform the Environmental Health Practitioner that a ECD need to be inspected (DSD and UNICEF, 2006, p 37). The South African literature has identified challenges with regard to this process. Ally (2023, p 11) identified that the norms and standards in the Children's Act and the provisions in the National Environmental Health Norms and Standards provided in section 21 of the National Health Act 61 of 2003 lack alignment which may cause stricter or additional requirements. Sello et al. (2024, p. 9) found that local municipalities are inexperienced in registering ECD centres and ECD practitioners preferred this to be the function of the DSD. Contrary to this Kika-Mistry and Wills (2022b, p. 15), also found that social workers from the DSD were inconsistent with the application of regulation frameworks.

The third challenge faced by ECD centres with the registration process is the lack of financial support from the government (Mbarathi, et al., 2016, p24). This is mainly because reviewed legislation demonstrated that there is no law enforcing the government to fund ECD

infrastructure (Madyibi and Bayat, 2021, p. 159). This is even though local municipalities have a constitutional duty towards the provisioning of ECD infrastructure as argued by Peacock (2022, p. 307). Fourthly, the assignment of inspection of ECD centres to the local municipalities and the DSD has resulted in the duplication of services which not only stretches the already scarce government resources but also creates confusion for ECD centres (Peacock, 2022. p. 298). The over-strict regulation of ECD centres was also evident during the COVID-19 pandemic after the introduction of the Standard Operating Procedure Health and Safety Guidelines for ECD as provided in Chapter 2 paragraph 2.4.6. Peacock (2022, p. 298) suggests that to address the difficulties involved with the registration process, there is a need to streamline the roles and responsibilities of the different spheres of government involved in assessing the health and safety standards of ECD centres through the Constitutional Court.

The views of Peacock (2022) are in line with those of the National Real Reform for ECD (2024). In a submission of the Children's Amendment Bill 2023 the National Real Reform for ECD supported the amendment made in section 91, which proposed a streamlined registration stating that is, would provide relief to ECD providers and government administrators who have to go through the burdensome double registration process.

The idea of streamlined registration has already been discussed above. The newly proposed Children's Amendment Bill 2023 (CAB 2023) seems to provide a possible solution to address the challenges of the strenuous dual registration process by insertion of section 91 (6)(a), which stipulates that, partial care facilities do not fall under the ECD programme. The insertion of section 91 (6)(a) proposed CAB 2023 will no longer require ECD centres to be registered as partial care facilities. This means ECD centres will no longer have to go through a bureaucratic registration process. These amendments were welcomed by the Real Reform for ECD Commission and the Equal Education Law Centres EELC (2024).

The EELC (2024, p. 5) commend the CAB 2023, for the proposal of the streamline registration as it will ease the pressure accompanied with the dual registration and will allow more children to have access to the government subsidy. The Real Reform Commission (2024) also welcomed the proposal of the one-step registration process proposed by the CAB 2023 stating that it will relieve administration pressure for ECD centres and government officials.

The proposed amendment in section 95 of the Children's Act with the insertion of section (d) states, that a person or organisation providing an ECD programme must "comply with the structural safety, environmental health and other requirements of the municipality

in the area, where ECD programme is situated." The proposed inserted section may still entail the ECD centre to comply with the measures of the Building Standards Act of 1977. To ensure that the proposed streamline registration process is implemented efficiently, there will need to be a close working relation with between the DBE and the municipalities in supporting ECD centres with the registration process.

The CAB 2023 cannot only be applauded for the proposal to streamline the registration process. It can also be applauded for the proposal of the broaden definitions of what are ECD programmes in the inserted section 91 (4) (a-g). The inserted section 91 (4) of CAB recognises different ECD programmes such as, toy libraries, parent support groups, child-minders, mobile programmes and play groups. Both the EELC (2024) and the Real ECD Reform Commission (2024) welcome come the expanded definition, stating that it will, non-centred based ECD centres will be allow children for poor and rural communities to have access to ECD programmes.

The expanded definition is welcomed because it brings an alignment of policy 2015 and the legislation. Before the proposal of the CAB 2023 non-centres ECD programmes were only described by the NIECD Policy 2015 as other means in which children can have access to early learning programmes as provided in paragraph 5.3.3 of the NIECD Policy. This was also reflected by Bryer and Leeve (2022, p. 269) that the Children's Act did not recognize non-centred-based ECD programmes.

4.4.2 Funding of early childhood development programmes

Significant evidence has demonstrated that investing in ECD yields noticeable returns on the individual child and society as a whole Dulvy et al. (2023, p. 115). The availability of adequate funding makes it possible for ECD centres to procure quality resources. However, the Children's Act in sections 78 and 98 do not make it compulsory for the government to fund ECD centres and ECD programmes (Children's Act 38 of 2005). Budlender et al. (2011, p. 1) explain that the use of the word "may" in the mentioned provisions, means that "provincial governments can decide not to provide these services at all or to fund them only partially." Despite compelling evidence from the South African literature on the financial challenges encountered by the ECD sector. Neither does the CAB 2023 in the amendment of section 93 (5) make it compulsory for the government to fund ECD programmes for younger children.

Due to the complexities of the ECD, the NIECD Policy 2015 recognises that the funding of different ECD services is not only the responsibility of one stakeholder (Republic

of South Africa, 2015, p. 96). Programme funding for ECD programmes in terms of the Children's Act lies with the DSD. However, this has become the responsibility of the DBE since the implementation of the function shift. In line with the Children's Act, the NIECD Policy 2015 also affords for the budget allocation for ECD programme funding to be allocated to the DBE (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 96).

The responsibility to allocate programme funding for the ECD programme was not properly implemented because only 33% of the ECD programme received funding under the DSD (DBE, 2022, p. 33). With a large majority of 94% of ECD programmes charging a fee for the programme, access to free quality early education is not equal for younger children compared to school-going age children. Based on the empirical findings of this study, however, there have been no additional ECD centres that have received government subsidy since the implementation of the function shift. In addition, government subsidy for the ECD programme is not easily accessible due to the regulation framework as provided in Chapter 2 paragraph 2.4.1.

ECD centres do not only require programme funding. They also need to be financially assisted with infrastructural funding. An argument has been made that in terms of the South African Constitution (1996) and the NIECD Policy, the municipality also has a role in ensuring that ECD centres are provided with adequate infrastructure. Peacock (2022, p. 295) argues that in terms of Schedule 4B of the Constitution read together with section 157, the municipalities have a constitutional duty to build and maintain ECD centres. The NIECD in line with the provision in the South African constitution asserts that:

> "The Department of Human Settlements and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs will give directives to municipalities that the following infrastructure funds may be used to develop and maintain municipal infrastructure in order to support early childhood development as nationwide priority" (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 98).

Based on the literature reviewed, it indicates that the provisions of the NIECD Policy, however, was not effectively as ECD centres were faced with challenges of poor infrastructure under the DSD for a long time. Therefore, the newly proposed streamlined registration process proposed by the amendment of the CAB 2023 on its own, will not be enough to address infrastructural challenges. The DBE as a leading department in the NIECD Policy needs to be able to effectively coordinate and hold municipality accountable to their constitutional duty to provide ECD infrastructure and also work closely with NPO and private-sectors to address issues of poor infrastructure.

Similarly, the National Planning Commission (2024), and the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2020) call for a collaboration of the different stakeholders in the provisioning of ECD programmes. The National Planning Commission (NPC) in the *Effective cross-departmental and inter-governmental coordination in ECD* report, calls upon the DBE to ensure that all role players involved in the registration of ECD centres are briefed about Red Tape Reduction in the registration of ECD centres NPC (2024, p. 58). It further advices the DBE to work in collaboration with the municipalities and ensure that the needs of ECD centres are included in the Integrated Development Plan of the local municipalities (National Planning Commission, 2024, p. 38). The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2020, p. 4) in the same vein recommends a close collaboration between the DBE and municipality to establish a municipal ECD multi-stakeholder committee, where a joint plan is made to oversee and coordinate effective ECD service delivery with a report back being provided to the provincial office.

The duty to provide ECD infrastructure in terms of the reviewed legislation and policy portrays that this duty does not only lie with one role player. However, this role has been poorly implemented high percentage of ECD centres remain unregistered as demonstrated in chapter two of this thesis. Ashley-Cooper, van Niekerk, and Atmore (2019, p. 100) argue that the lack of government support for ECD policy implementation, insufficient political will, and consequently insufficient funding contribute negatively affect the progress of achieving equal ECD programmes.

4.4.3 Development of a structured learning programmes

ECD centres in South Africa provide a dual role: they provide care and opportunities for early learning for children who access the services (Draper, 2022). Similarly, the NIECD Policy also recognizes that opportunities for early learning are pivotal in ECD programmes and they promote the holistic development of the child (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p.43). The South African law makes it illegal for a person or an organisation to run an ECD centre without a registered ECD programme, and they may be instructed to comply with section 93 of the Children's Act). ECD programmes in terms of section 91(3) of the Children's Act refers to "a structured programme within an ECD service to provide learning and support appropriate to the child's developmental age and stage". Having a structured learning programme is important, as reflected in South African literature and South African law and policy.

In the White Paper 5 of ECD 2001, the DBE had committed itself to prioritise the development of a curricular for children under the age of four years old DBE (2001, paragraph 1.4.6). The NIECD Policy also assigned the DBE as having the responsibility to develop an early learning curriculum for children aged birth to four years (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77). In 2009, the DBE formulated the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) and later in 2014 the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children between birth and four years old. NELDS and the NCF were curriculum-based policies aimed at the early learning needs of children aged birth to four years old (Kirsten, 2017, p. 35).

The vision of the NCF is to "work with and for all children in the early years in a respectful way to provide them with quality experiences and equality of opportunities to achieve their full potential" DBE (2015, p.2). It contains children's developmental guidelines, examples of teaching and learning activities, and guidelines to assess younger children (Zulu and Mashiya, 2022, p. 3). It is worth noting that the NCF is not a structured learning programme. It however provides guidelines that require ECD practitioners to apply their knowledge, skills, expertise, and working experience to develop an ECD programme that will meet the developmental and learning needs of the children, according to Zulu and Mashiya (2022, p. 3). However, there seems to be a contradiction between the literature, the Children's Act, and the NIECD Policy as to who is responsible for the development and registration of ECD programmes for children aged from birth to four years old.

Zulu and Mashiya (2022) explain that the NCF is a guideline to assist ECD practitioners in developing ECD programmes. Similarly, Innovation Edge (2023) identifies that ECD practitioners are expected to design ECD programmes from scratch with minimum resources at their disposal. However, the NIECD Policy assigned "the DSD will develop and register ECD programmes in collaboration with the DBE" (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 76), whereas the Children's Acts stipulates that a person or organisation providing an ECD programme must register the ECD programme with the provincial DSD, Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Section 95 (1)(a)). The Children's Act is not clear as to who is responsible for the development of the ECD programme, whereas the NIECD Policy stipulates that both the DSD and the DBE must develop and register ECD programmes. However, literature has demonstrated that ECD practitioners were responsible for developing ECD programmes and ECD practitioners have encountered challenges trying to implement the provisions of the NCF.

Authors such as Padayachee (2022, p. 49) and Innovation Edge (2023) argue that the NCF is demanding on the ECD developers (who are ECD practitioners in this study) and requires ECD practitioners to undergo professional development and be adequately capacitated on the implementation of the NCF.

It was much more difficult to cascade the information to the ECD practitioners, as training only occurred once. Similarly, Zama and Mashiya (2022, p. 8) and Umalusi (2020, p. 142) also indicated that ECD practitioners often rely on their colleagues to interpret the NCF content because training and support from the DBE are limited. Based on the analytical assessment the South African legislation should assign the duty to develop a standardized ECD programmes to the government.

4.3.4 Training and compensation for ECD practitioners

One of the mid-term goals of the NIECD Policy is to ensure that all children have access to comprehensive quality age and developmentally appropriate learning opportunities from birth until school-going age that lay a foundation for optimal learning (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 8). For children to be adequately prepared for school-going age, South African legislation, policy framework, and literature put great emphasis on the qualification and training of the ECD practitioners to be able to provide quality early education. It was provided in Chapter 2 paragraph 2.3.1 what the required qualification of ECD practitioners in terms of the Children's Act and the Guidelines for ECD services.

The responsibility to provide training to ECD practitioners lies with the DBE as mentioned in the NIECD Policy lies with the DSD and the DBE by the Republic of South Africa (2015). Before the function shift the DSD was assigned the responsibility to contract private providers to provide short training courses (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 75). The DBE was responsible for procuring and budgeting for the training of ECD practitioners (Republic South Africa, 2015, p. 77). The Department of Higher Education and Training had to ensure quality assurance of training provided by universities, TVET College and Sector Education and Training Authorities. The Quality Councils for Trades and Education ensure quality assurances for NPO providing training to ECD practitioners (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77). Despite the NIECD Policy having directed different stakeholders the responsibility to fund the training of ECD practitioners and ensure that ECD practitioners are provided with training opportunities of good quality. ECD practitioners expressed different

challenges encountered when trying to access to further training and education as outlined in Chapter 2 paragraph 2.4.4.

In addition, the high costs associated with accessing further education by the ECD workforce have been well cited in the South African literature. Vorwerk (2022, p. 24), asserts that ECD practitioners are of the view that the government should fund the training of ECD practitioners to promote equitable access and to address the challenge of high-cost fees associated with training that prevents them from acquiring further education and training. Similarly, Aploon-Zokufa and Needham (2023, p. 128) state that lack of access to funding limits access and participation in higher education. This is despite the NECD Policy indicating that the DBE is responsible for budgeting and procuring training for ECD practitioners (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77).

Another challenge encountered by ECD practitioners is the lack of recognition of prior training by universities. Vorwerk (2020, p. 20) asserts that ECD practitioners are faced with challenges with progress beyond NQF Level 4 and 5 at universities. This challenge was also confirmed by Aploon-Zokufa and Nadeem (2023, p. 138) who state that there is poor articulation in the South African education system, where TVET college training is not in line with the training of universities, making it difficult for ECD practitioners to progress to higher level of education at university after attaining further education and training at TVET colleges.

The inconsistency in the training provided by the different institutions was also raised by Mr Makhanga, a representative from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in parliament (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023). Issues of how credit transfers will be implemented for ECD practitioners will still need to be addressed by the DHET. Ashley-Cooper, van Niekerk, and Atmore (2019, p. 100) argue that there is an inconsistency in the quality of training provided to ECD practitioners for children below four years old confirming the lack of political will and government support ECD practitioner trainings. This is despite the NIECD Policy having assigned the DHET the responsibility to perform quality checks of the training programmes of the different institutions that provide training to ECD practitioners (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 177). Analytical findings demonstrate that this role has not been efficiently fulfilled by the DHET. Furthermore, ECD practitioners are also not adequately remuneration for the qualifications attained.

It was stated in Chapter Two paragraph 2.2 that the ECD sector is largely informal in South Africa, unlike educators who provide ECD programmes in public schools, who receive remuneration based on their qualification level. The same does not apply to ECD practitioners who have the same qualification. Nor does the Children's Act or the NIECD Policy adequately provide for ECD practitioners' job creation or security for their qualifications. The proposed CAB 2023 is also silent with issues regarding the remuneration and career path for ECD practitioners. Dulvy et al. (2023, p. 61) state that the DBE should look into providing ECD practitioners with better wages. Bryer and Leeve (2022, p. 270), however, argue that fruition without legal support cannot improve the working conditions of the ECD practitioners.

4.4.5 Provision of inclusive ECD programmes

To achieve universal access to ECD programmes for all children means that children with disabilities must not be excluded from accessing quality early childhood education. Different national legislative and policy frameworks prioritise the inclusion of children with disabilities to be included in mainstream ECD programmes. These include the South African Constitution, the Children's Act, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the White Paper on ECD 2001, and the NIECD Policy 2015. This section particularly focuses on analysing the role played by the government in ensuring that the provisions in the stated legal and policy framework are being implemented to give effect to an inclusive ECD programme.

The Children's Act directs the state to prioritise funding for ECD programmes situated in poor communities and requires that it is accessible to children with disabilities, in sections 93(4)(a) and (b) of the Children's Act. However, for the government to be able to prioritise funding targets for children with disabilities, there is a need to collate data on the number of children with disabilities and the types of disabilities that children have. The Children's Act and the proposed CAB 2023 do not explicitly indicate that the disabilities disaggregated data should be compiled. This makes it difficult to prioritize funding for ECD programmes accessible to children with disabilities. This submission is made on the basis that the R17 per child subsidy applies to all children accessing the ECD programmes regardless of their disability condition. Clark et al. (2024, p. 5) argue that there is currently no management system that gathers this kind of data, and they call for the amendment of clause 4 of the CAB 2023 section 92(2B) clearly include that profile of children demographics should also clearly indicate that disability disaggregated must be collated.

4.4.6 Monitoring and evaluation of ECD programmes

The NIECD Policy identified that a proper monitoring and evaluation system is necessary to track service delivery and the implementation of its provisions (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 114). In line with the NIECD Policy, the NCF also recognises that evaluation of the ECD programmes is important as it aims to assess if the ECD programmes meet the needs of the children, families, and funders of the programmes (DBE, 2015, p. 75). This is contrary to regulation 28 of Children's Act 38 of 2005, which provides monitoring, and assessment of ECD programmes should be aimed at determining compliance, and that a designated person should be assigned from the provincial DSD and the municipality to monitor the ECD programmes (Act 38 of 2005). Challenges associated with assigning the responsibility to monitor compliance by the two local municipalities and DBE have been outlined in this chapter in paragraph 4.4.1.

The NIECD Policy 2015 recognises that the registration status of an ECD centre and ECD programmes alone are insufficient to monitor the quality of the ECD programmes against the children's outcomes (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 114). In addition, the NIECD Policy assigned the responsibility to implement monitoring and quality control and improvement systems to different government departments that provide ECD services (Republic of South Africa, 2015, 144).

Previously, before April 2022, the provincial DSD in terms of the NIECD Policy 2015 was assigned the responsibility to monitor ECD programmes. Similarly, the provincial DBE was assigned with the responsibility to monitor the curriculum implementation relating to children between birth and four years of age (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77). The assignment of the monitoring function of the ECD programmes to both the DSD and the DBE has been found to be less effect in terms of the study findings. An argument has been made by Baloyi and Makhubele (2018, p. 10779) indicating the DSD did not have adequate skills to monitor the implementation of the ECD programmes. Parallel to this argument Matjokana and Bipath (2024, p.43) also confirmed that government officials from the DBE are not well-versed in the content of the ECD policy and are unable to effectively monitor the implementation of the NCF.

The argument made by these authors indicates the poor implementation of legislation and policy frameworks that regulate ECD programmes, by role players responsible for ensuring that children are provided with quality ECD programmes. Nonetheless, the Thrive by Five Index Report illustrated that children who are accessing ECD programmes are not well

prepared for school-going age with that 57% of children accessing ECD programmes in ECD centres were found to be failing to thrive, on the cognitive and physical development domain with only 43% of children accessing ECD programmes being developmentally in track. (Giese et al., 2021, p. 13). In essence, these children are not adequately prepared for school-going age and would require additional support, and children from poor communities are at the end of the spectrum to receive quality ECD programmes Giese et al (2021, p. 13). The Thrive by Five Index Report however does not give factors that have contributed to the poor quality of ECD programmes provided to younger children.

4.5 Conclusion

An argument has been made in this chapter that the South African government has a constitutional duty toward the provision of quality ECD programmes for younger children. However, based on the documentary analysis of the legislative and policy frameworks that regulate ECD programmes, evidence has shown that the government mainly played a significant role in regulating ECD programmes rather than rendering ECD programmes. The Children's Act regulates ECD programmes particularly provisions in Chapter Five and Six. It has been identified that the regulations in Chapters Five and Six of the Children's Act have created a bureaucratic hurdle in acquiring an operational licence allow access to the government subsidy. The regulation of ECD centres was further worsened during COVID-19 as more stringent regulating provisions were provided by the use of the SOP. The Children's Act has also identified the key stakeholders involved in the regulation of ECD programmes and has assigned them different roles and responsibilities.

The NIECD Policy 2015 goes on to identify more stakeholders and clearly outlines their duties needed to be executed to achieve its goals and objectives by placing a strong emphasis on a multi-sectoral approach. It has been demonstrated in this chapter, that the different stakeholders involved in the implementation of the ECD programme have not been able to adequately fulfil their duties in ensuring that younger children receive quality ECD programmes. Based on the documentary analysis of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders as assigned in the Children's Act and the NIECD policy 2015, it has been argued that the different stakeholders have not been able to effectively execute their duties in ensuring that children have access to quality ECD programme. Based on the documentary analysis four factors that have led to the poor fulfilment of the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders.

Firstly, the lack of leadership skills in the leading department to coordinate, collaborate, and hold different role players accountable for the lack of fulfilment of their expected duties. Secondly, the lack of an implementation plan for the implementation of the NIECD Policy also leads to derailing the provision of quality ECD programmes for all children. Thirdly, the lack of legal duty for the government to fund the ECD programme contributed to the poor quality of the ECD programme provided to children. Fourthly, the legislative and policy frameworks that regulate the ECD sector do not adequately address the needs of children with disabilities. Hence, role players involved in the implementation of quality ECD programmes overlook the needs of children with disabilities.

In conclusion, there is a need a to amend current legislative frameworks. It is therefore submitted that the integrated policy framework in the regulation of the ECD programme has not yielded positive results due to a lack of effective collaboration in the delivery of a quality ECD programme. Based on the findings of this study there is a need for a separate ECD legislation, to enhance the implementation of a quality ECD programme. The current legislative framework does not enable adequate provision of quality framework. ECD programme should be inserted under the Schools Act to ensure that younger children have equal right to access ECD programme like the six-year-old who access ECD programmes at primary school. The working conditions of ECD practitioners should be legislated to afford progression in career paths and better incentives.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to determine the impact of the ECD function shift from the DSD to the DBE as ECD practitioners perceive it in Endumeni Municipality. This chapter will present the findings of this study collected using focus group discussion and document analysis of relevant policies to answer the main research question: How has the function shift in the ECD responsibilities affected the provision of quality ECD programmes as perceived and experienced by ECD practitioners at ECD centres?

Four themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysed data and are presented in the three main themes, as follows:

1. The characteristics of the ECD system under the DSD;
2. The lived experiences of ECD practitioners since the implementation of the function shift;
3. The expectations of the function by ECD practitioners, and
4. The uncertainty among ECD practitioners about the implementation of the function shift.

Direct quotes from the study participants are presented using pseudonyms with the years of ECD experience indicated after direct quotes (*Pseudonym_years of experience)*. Each theme is discussed in turn.

5.2 Theme 1: Characteristics of the Early Childhood System

This theme contextualises how the study participants described as key aspects of the characteristics that are essential for in providing a quality ECD programme. The following sub-themes emerged: ensuring adherence to the regulatory framework, challenges accessing government subsidy, the low educational level required from ECD practitioners, provision of child protection services, and inadequate provision of inclusive ECD programme.

5.2.1 The importance of ensuring compliance with the regulatory framework

As discussed in Chapter Two, a person providing ECD programmes at an ECD centre needs to have the facilities where ECD programme is provided registered and had to register the ECD programme. All the respondents in this study indicated that their ECD centres were registered

as partial care facilities and were also a registered ECD programme before the implementation of the function shift. During the focus group discussion, some participants mentioned they were also registered NPOs.

Participants further indicated that having a registered ECD centre was an indication that they were operating legally, were known by the DSD, and increased their chances of receiving funding from the government. The views of the participants below indicate the importance of having an ECD centre registered with the DSD and the effort they put in to have their ECD centres registered;

> *The process I went through to have my ECD centre registered, assisted me a lot because I never had any background in ECD. I approached the Social Workers from DSD who taught me about all the things that my centre should and should not have. In that way, the department also got to know my crèche (Nomsa_5years).*

Nomsa's experience is an indication that the DSD was willing and able to assist her in the registration of her ECD centres. Sibongile had a similar view of why having an ECD centre registered under DSD was important.

> *I started my crèche with no knowledge of how to run an ECD centre. I ran my crèche in my way. One of my colleagues who was already running a crèche, told me I had to go to DSD to have my crèche registered so that I get permission from the government to take care of so many children at my home and I might get some help to provide food and a stipend (Sibongile_13years).*

The responses from the participants indicate, that they started operating ECD centres with no knowledge of the importance of complying with the provisions of the Children's Act that regulate ECD centres. The responses of the study participants also indicate that complying with the norms and standards meant ensuring that, ECD centres should provide a clean and safe environment for children.

The participants also indicated that it was challenging to meet the required norms and standards, which caused delays in the registration process. This was mainly because they operated from their private homes and did not have any financial support to upgrade their buildings to meet the required norms and standards. This resulted in them operating as unregistered ECD centres. Siziwe outlined the challenges she encountered during the registration process for her ECD centre:

> *I started running my ECD centre in 2012 but my ECD centre was only registered in 2015. It was very hard at the beginning because I never had a proper building structure. When I went to DSD to ask for assistance with my building, they told me that the government could only help me once I was registered.* (Siziwe_13years)

Sibongile and Nomsa had similar experiences, where the inadequacy of her ECD building delayed the registration of the ECD centre. This further indicates the circular nature of the registration process. ECD centres were required by law to be registered with the DSD before they could receive financial support from the DSD. At the same, ECD centres also need the DSD to help them with improving their ECD buildings.

> *I started operating my ECD centre in 2011. But my centre was registered in 2014. The DSD social workers came to monitor my crèche, they said they could not register my crèche because I was working in a shack and they said it was not safe for the children. (*Sibongile_13years*)*

> *I started running my ECD centre in 2018, but I got registered with the DSD in 2020. They said my house is too small to accommodate children. So, I had to build two backrooms in my house that I had to use for the ECD centre.* (Nomsa_5years)

The responses from Nomsa and Sibongile indicate that ECD centres with inadequate ECD facilities, experience challenges in getting the ECD centre registered with the DSD because their building did not meet the prescribed norms and standards, during the registration process. Despite these ECD centres not being granted authority by the DSD to operate as legal ECD centres due to the physical structures, they continued to operate as unregistered ECD centres until the registration was finalised and they were conditionally registered.

This indicates the need for ECD centres in the community because the DSD did not instruct the ECD centres to close their doors until their building met the prescribed norms and standards. They continued to operate and were only registered after the ECD centres met all the prescribed norms and standards. It also became apparent that the participants bore the financial cost of upgrading their premises to meet the required norms and standards.

5.2.2 Difficulties accessing government subsidy

Fourteen out of the 15 study participants indicated that their ECD centres were receiving government subsidies before the function shift for the implementation of the ECD programmes. However, they had experienced challenges when they were applying for the subsidy. This was mainly because they needed to have a valid NPO certificate and an active bank account. The study participants indicated that applying for the NPO certificate was difficult because the registration of the NPO certificate was not the responsibility of the social workers within the DSD, but of community development practitioners, from the community development and research components of the DSD. One of the requirements of being registered at NPO is that a management committee must be elected. The committee was elected by

parents who have children accessing the ECD programme at the ECD centre. In turn, the management committee became the employer of the ECD staff members including the ECD supervisor and they were responsible for the financial management. This is even though that the ECD supervisor, is the person who initially establishes an ECD centre.

ECD centres were also required by the DSD to have a business bank account in the name of the ECD centres. Participants indicated that business accounts were not only expensive to open but often the ECD supervisor used her own money or the fees paid by parents. These requirements were put in place by the DSD and were aimed at mitigating the risk of fraud and mismanagement of funds intended for ECD programmes. It, however, transpired that once ECD centres were awarded financial support from the DSD, it was difficult to access the awarded funds. Zanele provides the challenges she experienced with the DSD to receive the government subsidy after her ECD centre had met all the required documentation:

> *My centre was registered as an ECD centre in 2017 and I got my NPO certificate in 2018, after I applied for it in 2015. When I asked the social workers from DSD when would my crèche start receiving the department government subsidy, because I now had my NPO, partial and programme certificates, she told me the government does not have the money to fund new crèches as yet. I have to rely on parent-school fees which are also difficult to collect* (Zanele_7years).

Nanazile, who has 40 years of experience in the sector, also encountered a similar challenge:

> *I have established five other centres, all of them did not receive funding from the DSD but they have NPO certificates and partial care registration certificates. They told me they would get funding once the department had money available. These centres have been operating for over 5 years under DSD but have not received funding.* (Nanazile_40years)

The responses from the study participants demonstrate that adhering to all the ECD regulatory frameworks under the DSD did not guarantee funding from the DSD. The lack of legally mandatory provisions had an impact on the DSD being unable to guarantee funding to registered ECD centres. This is due to regulatory frameworks that make provisions for the funding of the implementation of the ECD programme. Difficulties in accessing the government subsidy were not only experienced by unfunded ECD centres, but that was also encountered by ECD centres that had already been registered and awarded the subsidy by the DSD.

Those participants who were receiving a subsidy from the DSD reported that they, often experienced delays in the payments of government subsidies into the ECD centre's bank accounts. This was mainly due to the administrative process involved, in accessing the subsidy

once awarded by the DSD. Nanazile described the administrative process involved in accessing the already awarded subsidy from the DSD:

> *DSD required us to submit minutes, children's attendance register, receipts of groceries purchased, and a bank statement every month. If we did not submit on time the subsidy was not paid into crèche's bank account. Every year we had to renew our NPO certificate, that too was much work to do and cost us money* (Nanazile_40years).

The sentiments expressed by the participants indicate that the methods used by the DSD to ensure compliance with the agreed-upon contract made it difficult for the study participants to utilise the already awarded subsidy. Similarly, Zandile and Nomi illustrated the challenges they encountered in accessing the awarded subsidy from the DSD:

> *Every month I had to plead with my committee to go and withdraw the money from the bank so we could buy food for the children and pay staff salaries, as ECD supervisors we cannot access our subsidy without the committee. We also used to submit all this paperwork every month for the subsidy to be paid into our accounts* (Zandile_9years).

So too did Nomi indicate the challenges with accessing the already awarded subsidy from the DSD:

> *Whenever we need to do maintenance of the facilities ...we did this to get authority from the social workers. Then we must collect three different quotations. Thereafter, submit those quotations and attach minutes of the meeting with the committee and only to get the social workers to approve the submission after a month* (Nomi_15years).

The responses from Nanazile, Zandile, and Nomi indicate that these mechanisms utilised by the DSD to monitor compliance with the signed contract was administratively burdensome for the study participants. In addition to the difficulties encountered by ECD practitioners in accessing government, the funding provided by the government was insufficient and inadequate for the operational cost of the ECD programme. Joy expressed her dissatisfaction about the lack of an increase in the government subsidy for the ECD programme:

> *We were being paid R17 a day per child for a very long time under the DSD. This money was not enough to cover the cost of the centre, because we had to buy food, pay salaries, buy learning material, transport costs to attend meetings and submit claims every month* (Joy_30years).

Nomsa also emphasised that the subsidy received from the DSD was inadequate and insufficient:

> *DSD paid us very little money; we had to use fees paid by parents to buy educational material, and top-up stipends for our staff members. It was not easy to collect crèche*

fees from parents, because we knew most of them could not afford it (Nomsa_5years_20children)

The responses from Joy and Nomsa indicate that ECD centres were not adequately funded under the DSD. It also indicates that the study participants relied on the government subsidy and fees paid by parents. Both these sources of income were difficult to access and were inadequate for the provision of quality ECD programmes.

5.2.3 Low education qualifications required for ECD practitioners

Nine of the study participants during the introductory phase in the focus group discussion indicated they had acquired an NQF Level four qualification, four participants had obtained Level five qualifications, one participant indicated that she was still in the process of obtaining her NQF Level four, and one participant was awarded an honorary PhD from the Training and Resource in Early Education (TREE), because of her contribution in the ECD sector. She had reported that her highest level of educational qualification was NQF level six. TREE is an NPO that specialises in ECD resources and training. TREE provides education and training programmes to ECD practitioners, these courses include accredited training in NQF level four, accredited short courses, and skills training programmes (TREE, n.d).

All the participants indicated that they had obtained their qualifications when they had already started working within the ECD sector. Based on these findings, the majority of the study participants had obtained the minimum required qualification for the ECD programme by the Guidelines for ECD services, despite its provision not being legally binding.

There is, however, a disjuncture between the ECD Guidelines 2006 and the Children's Act, as far as the qualification of ECD practitioners is concerned. Regulation 27 of the Children's Act only provides the required qualifications and skills for the person who is applying for the ECD programme. It does not refer to those who will be responsible for providing the ECD programme to children, whereas the ECD Guidelines are specific that ECD practitioners must have NQF level four and supervisors NQF level five (DSD and UNICEF, 2006, p. 49). Despite the study participants having acquired their minimum qualification, study participants indicated obtaining qualification beyond NQF level five was difficult for most study participants due to financial constraints. Sizakele, who has 20 years of ECD experience, speaks to the lack of financial means to further their studies:

If only I was paid a decent salary I would have attained my diploma a long time ago. How was I going, to pay for my studies when I was being paid R800? (Sizakele_20years)

Thandeka also emphasised that she could not study beyond NQF Level 4 because she did not have the financial means to do so:

> *I was able to obtain my NQF Level 4 because I got a learnership from the DBE in 2010. Until now I have not been able to further my studies because I cannot afford to pay for myself.* (Thandeka_12years).

Three other participants, Thulisile, Zakhithi, and Nomi, also indicated that they were awarded a learnership programme for NQF level four from the DBE before the function shift. The finding indicates that firstly, ECD centres were not earning a decent wage that could help them further their studies. Secondly, ECD centres also did not make enough money to draw from the fees paid by parents and subsidies paid by the DSD to assist their staff members in furthering their studies. These findings also indicate that regardless of the study participants having obtained the minimum required qualification, they were not referred to as teachers but practitioners and they were not provided with decent wages.

5.2.4 Provision of child protection services

One of the objectives in section 2 (e) of the Children's Act is to strengthen and develop community structures that can assist in providing care and protection for children (Act 38 of 2005). The DSD as the custodian of the Children's Act has the responsibility to ensure that its provisions are implemented. Although the DSD was not directly responsible for developing ECD centres. The working relationship between the DSD and ECD centres made it possible to strengthen ECD centres in providing care and protection for children.

Thandeka, who has 12 years of experience in taking care and teaching children, explains how ECD centres were able to refer cases of children in need of protection services to the DSD:

> *We were able to identify orphaned or neglected children within our centre, and we would refer those cases to DSD social workers, they were able to intervene and place those children into foster care placement* (Thandeka_12years).

Zandile also emphasised the referral function provided by ECD services in ensuring vulnerable children access ECD centres and receive child protection services:

> *We were also able to refer suspected child abuse cases to DSD, and social workers would even conduct home visits to assess the living conditions of children. As practitioners, it is not easy for us to intervene in family matters. Social workers easily intervene in child abuse cases reported by ECD practitioners* (Zandile_9years).

The responses from the study participants also indicate that ECD centres fulfilled an important referral function for children who required care and protection from the DSD.

5.2.5 Inability to accommodate and include children with disabilities

Access to quality ECD programmes remains illusionary for many children with disabilities in South Africa, as discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this study. This was confirmed in this study. Six out of the 15 participants indicated they had admitted children with disabilities at their ECD centres before the implementation of the function shift. However, the admission rate of children with disabilities was generally low, as explained by Joy:

> *In the previous years, I used to admit children with disabilities; this year I did not admit any, but it was usually one or two children* (Joy_30years).

The responses from the study participant indicate the low admission rate of children with disabilities accessing ECD programmes. All the study participants stated that the low non-admission of children with disabilities at ECD centres was mainly due to the no applications received for children with disabilities. Participants indicated that they lacked support from the DSD to assist them to be able to accommodate children with disabilities. Nomsa said the following regarding the role of the DSD in the provision of the ECD programme to children with disabilities:

> *They used to only ask us every year how many children with disabilities we have at our ECD centres; after that they did nothing about it. I think they wanted to know if we had children with disabilities so they could provide relevant support* (Nomsa_5years).

Zakhithi also emphasised that the DSD used to only request the total number of children with disabilities and no further assistance was provided:

> *The social workers only asked us how many children with disabilities we have and that was it* (Zakhithi_15years).

Joy provided a different reason why they were unable to accommodate children with disabilities in ECD centres while with the DSD:

> *Before we moved to education, I used to have children with disabilities. Social Development did not provide us with teaching aids to be able to accommodate children with disabilities, they did not even fund children with a special amount all the children were subsidised with the R17* (Joy_30years).

Two participants indicated that the DSD once organised workshops for ECD practitioners to train them on how to work with children with disabilities.

> *My supervisor once went for a training with DSD, to be taught on how to work with children with disabilities. But she struggles like the rest of us to be able to teach them (*Zakhithi _15 years*).*

Thulisile provided a similar response:

> *I was also part of that training. DSD organised a service provider to train us on how to work with children with disabilities. But it was only for one day. I would say that training was not enough to equip us on how to work with children with disabilities. It rather enlightens us that we should admit children with disabilities in our centre* (Thulisile_12years).

These experiences indicate the many barriers that prevented ECD practitioners from being able to accommodate children with disabilities before the function shift. These include parents who fear the stigma associated with having a child with disabilities. ECD centres did not have adequate physical facilities, teaching and learning material, and ECD practitioners were not confident in rendering ECD programmes to children with disabilities, due to the lack of specialised training from the DSD and the lack of additional funding allocated for children with disabilities from the government. The R17 applied to all children including those with disabilities.

5.3 Theme 2: The lived experiences of the ECD practitioners in providing ECD programmes under the DBE

The second theme describes the implementation of the ECD function under the DBE experienced by ECD practitioners from ECD centres. The sub-themes that emerged are: (1) the administration of the government subsidy by the DBE, (2) parents and caregivers becoming more reluctant to pay fees charged at ECD centres, (3) the irregular visits to ECD centres by the DBE in the provision of quality ECD programmes, and (4) the feelings of uncertainty about the future of ECD practitioners with no or low educational qualifications.

5.3.1 The inadequate administration of the government subsidy by the DBE

The study participants indicated that since the implementation of the function shift, some ECD centres reported that they have been experiencing delays in the payment of government subsidies and a decrease in the subsidy payment by the DBE. This has resulted in many ECD centres being in a worse financial standing than before the functional shift. Maleti described the delay in the payment of government subsidy by the DBE and its consequences:

> *Currently, the DBE is delaying the payment of monthly claims. An ECD centre cannot function without receiving the subsidy for three months and most of its six months without receiving a subsidy. We never get an explanation why the payments are late, they tell us to go look for donations, and ask us if we do not have a vegetable garden at our centres."* (Maleti_5years)

Nanazile, whose centres provide services to 140 children, described a similar experience:

> *We are currently running ECD centres from our own pockets. We go months and months without receiving our subsidy from the DBE. We miss Egypt.* (Nanazile_40years).

The responses from the study participants indicate that the ECD is in a worse position financially than before the implementation of the function shift (referring to the Israelites longing for Egypt after the exodus in the Bible), due to the late payment of government subsidies. This has also resulted in many ECD centres running ECD centres from their pocket and their grocery cupboards.

Financial challenges experienced by the ECD sector have been documented in the South African literature and by this study. The delay in paying government subsidy adds to the financial challenges associated with inadequate funding to provide quality ECD programme. The inadequate financial support to ECD programmes was also attested to. *The Public Review of the ECD Expenditure 2022*. Dulvy et al (2022, p. 60) provided that the subsidies awarded to ECD centres are insufficient to cover operational costs and often ECD centre charge fees to supplement their income.

The consequences associated with fee payment prevent children from poor households from accessing ECD programmes (Dulvy et al., 2022, p. 60). Similarly, Makhubele and Baloyi (2018, p. 10780) explain that the inadequate financial support to ECD centres makes it challenging to provide quality ECD programmes. Despite these known challenges, ECD centres have also experienced budget cuts from the DBE, as provided by Londiwe and Nomi:

> *They are no longer calculating the subsidy according to the number of children enrolled at the ECD centres. We are all receiving the same amount, whether you have 40 children and the other ECD centres have 80 children, we all receive the same amount.* (Londiwe_36years)

Similarly, Nomi emphasised that there has been a change in how the DBE is calculating the government subsidy:

> *We do not know how the subsidy is being calculated now. As the ECD centre will not receive a subsidy for three months, when you eventually receive the subsidy, we receive far less than what we are expecting to receive when we calculate according to the R17 a day per child.* (Nomi_15years)

The poor administration of the government subsidy also indicates a lack of dissemination of information by the DBE to the ECD centres. The DBE in KwaZulu-Natal had recently developed *the Draft for Guidelines for the Administration of Government ECD Subsidy* (Kwa-

Zulu Natal DBE, 2023). In terms of the *Guidelines for the Administration of the Government ECD Subsidy* the subsidy for the ECD programme is calculated per capita-programme. This means that ECD programme support "is paid to eligible providers based on the size of their programme and is not variable or linked to per child. Programme funding remains constant so long as the number of children receiving the services remains constant, even if the children served changed" (DBE, 2023a, p. 6). The responses from the study participants are an indication that the DBE has started with the implementation changes in the calculation of the subsidy without informing ECD practitioners.

The *Guidelines* also indicate that subsidy payments will be done every quarter (DBE, 2023a. p. 22). This finding demonstrates that there is an inadequate distribution of information to ECD practitioners from the DBE. Based on the responses from the study participants and the provisions in the *Draft Guidelines on the Administration of ECD Government Subsidy.*

5.3.2 Parents have become more reluctant to pay ECD centre fees

Participants of this study reported that since the implementation of the function shift it has been more difficult to collect fees from parents and caregivers, especially in ECD centres that are situated near no-fee schools pay school fees. Thandeka said the following about the impact of charging parents' fees since the implementation of the function shift:

> *Since moving to the DBE, parents are very reluctant to pay crèche fees, some even expect us to decrease the money we already charge. I charge R100 for a toddler, but there was a parent who asked me to decrease the money, stating that we are now under the DBE."* (Thandeka_12years)

Sizakele also experienced a similar problem:

> *Parents argue a lot with us when they have to pay crèche fees. They ask us why we charge a fee for children who attend grade R at an ECD centre when children doing grade R in primary schools do not pay.* (Sizakele_20years)

These findings indicate that parents of children between birth to four years of age, had the perception the implementation of the function shift would automatically bring a stop in paying fees. This however has not been the case, because while ECD centres have been shifted under the administration of the DBE. They do not fall within the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the funding norms and standards applied to schools.

This finding indicates, that the misconception held by parents' care caregivers, that the functional shift would bring about the implementation of no fee has led to stagnation in the

payment of fees. This finding further demonstrates parents from poor households cannot afford to pay fees associated with accessing ECD programmes. Despite the reviewed literature, empirical findings from this study through focus group discussion and document analysis. However, the Children's Amendment Bill 2023 in section 93 (1), does not make it mandatory for the government to fund the ECD programme.

5.3.3 Irregular DBE support and oversight visits to ECD centres

During the focus group discussion, the participants were asked, what can the DBE learn from the DSD? The common sentiment shared by the participants was that the DBE needs to conduct regular oversight visits to ECD centres. Only 6 out of the 15 study participants had been inspected and monitored by the DBE since the departmental change. The study participants emphasised that the lack of irregular inspection by the DBE negatively impacts the productivity of ECD practitioners which in turn affects the quality of ECD programmes provided.

Nomsa and Londiwe described the impact of the lack of oversight on the functioning of their ECD centres as follows:

> *The DBE has not been to my centre to inspect us like the DSD used to do. We do not even know who is directly responsible for the inspection of our centres. Even ECD practitioners have become very lazy because they know social workers no longer come for inspection, they are always on their phones.* (Nomsa_5years)

Londiwe described the impact of the inspection of ECD centres:

> *I love receiving positive criticism it encourages me to do better. Whenever DSD social workers visited our centres, they would provide us with verbal feedback on how we were doing. But since moving to the DBE, we have not seen anybody coming to inspect and monitor our ECD centres. This discourages me. (*Londiwe_36years)

Zanele also emphasised that the DBE has not inspected unfunded ECD centres:

> *I think it is even worse for us who are unfunded, I do not see them coming anytime soon to our ECD centres, because even in their meetings, they do not even mention anything about the unfunded ECD centres, it is like we do not exist.* (Zanele_7years)

The responses provided by the study participants, demonstrate that the inspection previously conducted by the DSD played an important role in motivating the study participants. It also helped in the strengthening working relationship between government officials and the ECD practitioners. Since the implementation of the function shift, the majority of the study participants, who had not been inspected by the DBE, felt undervalued, and unnoticed, and decreased their work ethic and productivity.

In ECD centres where inspection had taken place, some participants had a negative experience. As Thokozile and Sizakele recounted:

> *We are currently working from a community hall because our centre is under construction and we lost the sponsor who was building our crèche. Every time that lady comes and visits us, she is rude to my supervisor and tells her she wants us out of the community hall.* (Thokozile_25years)

Sizakele had a similar encounter as Thokozile:

> *You see, if there is something wrong with your building structure, you are in trouble, they even threaten to close the crèche.* (Sizakele_20years)

The responses from the study participants demonstrate during the inspection of the ECD centre by the DBE that the DBE is strict with enforcing the prescribed norms and standards of the Children's Act. This finding also illustrates that the DBE is policing the ECD centres, rather than empowering and providing support The responses of the participants further illustrate that the site visit conducted by the DBE focuses on assessing ECD building structure, and focuses less on the implementation of ECD programmes. The results of the irregular and inadequate oversite visits by the DBE led to ECD practitioners in this study being uncertain and lacking clear directions and guidance under the DBE.

5.4 Theme 3: Expectations of the function shift by ECD practitioners

Evidence presented in this study showed that the participants expected the function shift to come with certain changes. These changes include the reformation of the current funding model and the adoption of a collaborative approach in providing the ECD programme by the DBE and ECD centres.

5.4.1 Reformation of the current funding model

The Study participants explained that the subsidy received from the government is used to pay staff salaries, provide nutritious meals to children, purchase educational equipment, maintenance, and transport. The participants in this study stated that, they are expecting the DBE to reform this funding model.

> *I think they should also provide fixed and better stipends for ECD staff. This must be separated from the subsidy. The subsidy must only be used to buy food and teaching equipment. In that way, teachers working in ECD centres will be able to earn a decent living. We will also be able to buy sufficient food for the children.* (Maleti_5years)

Joy shared the same sentiment as Maleti:

The Department of Education must provide stipends for ECD staff, separate from the subsidy used to buy food for the children and other things needed for crèche. (Joy_30years)

The responses from the participants indicate that the study participants were not satisfied with the current model that is used to fund the ECD centres to implement ECD programmes and wish the DBE to implement possible changes. It also transpired that the DBE had started to implement changes in how the subsidy was calculated. Earlier in this chapter, Londiwe described the method that is being used by the DBE to calculate the subsidy.

We did not receive the same monthly subsidy every month. This shows that DSD was funding us according to the number of children who attend the programme a month. We never used to run out of funds under DSD, because the payment was paid on time, and we would be double paid the following month if you never received your payment the previous month. (Nomi_15years)

The responses from the respondents indicate that there has been a change in how government subsidies are calculated and it is not the advantage of ECD practitioners. Therefore, the result presented indicates that, the study participants want the DBE to change the current funding model. However, more emphasis was placed on the DBE to provide ECD practitioners with decent wages. The study participants were of the view that the government subsidy should be utilised to provide children with nutritional meals and cover other operating costs.

5.4.2 Adoption of a collaborative approach

Participants in this study indicated that the DBE has been very distant from them without any collaboration. This is how Nomsa and Maleti described the current working relationship between the DBE and ECD centres:

We do not even know who is responsible for the ECD programme from the DBE. We have never been introduced to the person responsible for the ECD programme under the Department of Education, we do not even know what her name is, and they have not even called a meeting to welcome us into the department. (Nomsa_5years)

Maleti emphasised her concerns about the lack of a collaborative approach from the DBE:

I would say they (DBE) are very distant from us. Maybe they are still learning about ECD centres. But we do not know where they are learning, because they are not asking for our opinions and they cannot address our concerns. (Maleti_5years)

The responses from the participants demonstrate there is a lack of collaboration between the DBE and ECD centres. Despite the DBE being distant from the ECD practitioner, however, study participants emphasised that moving forward the DBE needs to adopt a collaborative approach in working with ECD centres to strengthen their working relationship. This is what some of the study participants said:

> *The DBE needs to revive the ECD forums that we previously had under the DSD. These forums assisted us in terms of networking, capacity building, and information sharing.* (Londiwe_36years)

Nanazile also shared the same sentiment by stating:

> *I think ECD supervisors must first meet on their own, then write a submission to the DBE informing them about all our concerns about the way they are doing things. In the submission, we must also inform the DBE to revive ECD forums so we can strengthen our working relationship.* (Nanazile_40years).

The responses from Nanazile demonstrate that ECD centres have unaddressed issues that need the intervention of the DBE. It further demonstrates that the ECD forum can provided an opportunity for the DBE and ECD centres to work together. The for an inter-sectoral collaborative approach in the implementation of ECD services in South Africa is also outlined in the NIECD Policy 2015 (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 84).

Based on the participants' responses, it is argued that the DBE has been unable to implement the provision in the NIECD Policy, that call for an inter-sectoral collaboration with civil society. The NIECD Policy 2015 specifically calls for the establishment of a South African Inter-Sectoral Forum for ECD made up of various stakeholders from the national level to the district level, which must at least meet twice a year. In terms of the NIECD Policy 2015, the DBE at the district, local, and municipal levels have been allocated the responsibility to ensure that the Inter-sectoral Forum for ECD is functional and they need to work in coordination with the office of the municipal manager (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 90). Findings from the focus group and document analysis demonstrate that the adoption of a collaborative approach in the implementation of ECD programme is essential.

5.5 Theme 4: Uncertainty among ECD practitioners about the implementation of the function shift

The main purpose of the function shift was to improve the quality of the ECD programme and to be in line with other countries, who view the ECD programme as less of a childcare and more of an education programme (DBE, 2022a). However, findings from this study have illustrated that the implementation of the function shift has brought about uncertainties among

the study participants. This is what some of the study participants had to say about the implementation of the function shift:

> *I think ECD centres operating in private homes are at risk of losing funding under the DBE. When they visited my centre, they told me you cannot use government money to fix the private property.* (Nanazile _40years).
>
> *It is even worse for us unfunded centres, nothing is being said about us, and nobody even wants to address issues of unfunded ECD centres.* (Zanele_7years)
>
> *The DBE keeps insisting that we must acquire diploma and degree qualifications. We would love to study further but we do not have the means to do so. We are afraid that one day we will lose our livelihoods.* (Sizakele_20years).

Nomi also emphasised that the majority of ECD practitioners do not have the qualifications required by the DBE:

> *They expect us to further our studies but they exclude us from the learnership programmes because we are over 35 years old. It means we will be the first to leave once they ask for qualifications we cannot produce.* (Nomi_15years).

The responses from the study participants demonstrates a great deal of uncertainty among the study participants. It is asserted that the uncertainties among the ECD practitioners arise from the lack of direct communication from the DBE to the ECD practitioners. These uncertainties are mainly based on hearsay. Based on the results of this study, the DBE needs to work in close collaboration with the ECD centres and practitioners by reviving the ECD forum in to order address any misconceptions and uncertainties held by ECD practitioners about the function shift this in turn strengthen their working relationship.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the study findings concerning the direct quotes of the study participants and the provisions in the legislation, policies, and guidelines regulating ECD centres and programmes. The findings from this study demonstrated that there is a difference in how the DSD and the DBE enforce the provisions of legislation, policy, and guidelines on ECD centres. These findings centred on adherence to regulatory frameworks, administration of government subsidies, and the working relationship between the two respective departments and the ECD centres. In general, study participants thought the administration of the ECD programme was better stationed under the DSD.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This study was aimed at assessing the impact of the ECD function shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners in and around Endumeni Municipality following its implementation on the 1st of April 2022. The first three chapters of this chapter outlined the introduction and background of the study, a literature review, and the research design and method used to conduct this study. A qualitative study, with data gathered through two focus group discussions with fifteen participants from different ECD centres around Endumeni Municipality and an in-depth comprehensive documentary analysis of the legislation, policies, and government reports relevant to ECE centres.

The previous chapter presented the study findings using direct quotes from the study participants to ensure the authenticity of the study. This chapter will present the study findings obtained through focus group discussion and document analysis and integrate the findings with the relevant literature to triangulate the findings of the study.

6.2.1 Complicated registration process.

The Children's Act is a legal regulating framework that required any person operating a ECD centres and providing a ECD programmes to have it registered in terms of section 80 and section of the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005). The duty to ensure that all ECD centres and ECD programmes are register lies with the provincial head of the department of the DBE in terms of sections 82 and 96 of the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005). Findings from this study demonstrated that this duty was delegated to social workers from the DSD before the function shift

The data collected in this study demonstrated that all the study participants had ECD centres and ECD programmes that were registered in terms of the Children's Act before the implementation of the function shift. The study participants indicated that the importance of having a registered ECD centre and ECD programme including an NPO registration increased the likelihood of receiving government subsidy. It also served as a confirmation that the ECD centre is operating legal and is known by the government. Ilifa Labantwana (2014a, p. 3) confirmed that ECD centres registered as NPOs and as partial care facilities qualified to apply for a government subsidy under the DSD. In addition, the Children's Act makes it illegal for

somebody to operate ECD centres without being registered (Ilifa Labantwana, 2014a, p. 3). Similarly, Clampetts (2016, p. 144 & 145) also confirmed that registration of an ECD centre under the DSD requires meeting the stipulated norms and standards which enable the centre to operate effectively and be eligible for the government subsidy. However, the findings of this study showed that the registration process was burdensome.

Having inadequate infrastructure, lack of financial support, and highly burdensome administrative processes involved in the registration of ECD centres, were some of the challenges reported to have been encountered by the respondents. Five out of the 16 study participants indicated that the operated ECD centres operated from their homes and this made it difficult it was difficult to meet the required norms and standards provided in section 79 of the Children's Act. Inadequate access to infrastructure was also confirmed by the national ECD audit by the DSD and PIER (2014), Mbarathi et al. (2016), and Bipath (2021) to be the main factor that prevented ECD centres from being registered.

According to the findings of the national ECD audit conducted by the DSD and PIER (2014, p. 33), the majority of the ECD centres that did not have adequate infrastructure under the DSD were conditionally registered. Similarly, Mbarathi et al. (2016, p. 26) found ECD centres situated in informal settlements had poor infrastructure which prevented them from being registered under the DSD because they do not meet the standards set by the Children's Act. However, this study indicates that ECD centres did not receive any financial support or infrastructure upgrading. The respondents often bore the financial cost of upgrade their ECD facilities to meet the required norms and standards.

A comprehensive analysis of the Children's Act showed that section 78 of the Children's Act, which gives consensus for only registered ECD centres may be considered for funding, however in does not make it mandatory for government to do so. Findings from the documents analysis of this study, however demonstrated that local municipalities have a constitutional duty to provide infrastructure for ECD centres as described in paragraph 4.4.2. The inability of the DSD and the municipality to provide financial support or support with infrastructure upgrade to unregistered ECD resulted in the study participants bearing the financial cost for upgrading their ECD centres to acquire operating licence and be eligible for funding. Madyibi and Bayat (2021, p. 166) confirmed that the inability of the government to provide financial support for ECD centre infrastructure upgrade, leaves ECD owners, parents, and the community with no choice but to fund the infrastructure upgrade of their ECD centres.

This was the case for some of the respondents in this study. Despite findings in this study and the reviewed literature, the Children's Amendment Bill 2023 has not made any proposal in section 93 (1) to make it a legal duty of the government to fund ECD programmes.

This state of affairs indicates that the South African government is not in tune with the realities of the ECD sector. The latest ECD census by the DBE (2022, p. 52), indicated that 42% of ECD facilities are owned by ECD managers, with 38% of that land owned by the ECD manager. This means ECD centres will continue to fund infrastructure upgrades for their ECD facilities from their pocket or increase fees charged to upgrade their ECD facilities when deemed by assessing officials during the renewal of the ECD centre registration process. The reviewed literature, for this has demonstrates the government has introduced conditional grants to assist ECD centres with infrastructure upgrades but regulatory red tape also determined who can access this grant as described in paragraph 2.4.2.

6.2.2 Inadequate funding model for the implementation of ECD programmes

The Children's Act only authorised the government to provide funding to registered ECD centres in section 78(3) and registered ECD programmes as provided in section 98(3). The Children's Act, however, did not make it mandatory for the government to fund ECD centres and the ECD programme. ECD practitioners who participated in this study reported that they acquired the funding from fees charged to parents and subsidies from the government. Government subsidies and fees paid by parents have also been confirmed. Fees charged to parents as a primary source of income for ECD centres were also confirmed by Aina and Bipath (2022, p. 117). Similarly, Atmore (Atmore et al., 2012, p. 136) provided that the government subsidy is the second primary source of income.

The findings in this study also demonstrated that the ECD centres only received government subsidies from the DSD. However, the NIECD Policy identified different stakeholders responsible for funding different aspects of the implementation of the ECD programmes (Republic of South Africa, p. 92). Based on this finding, it is evidence that the NIECD Policy was not adequately implemented. The findings in this study also showed that accessing government subsidies was reported to be administratively burdensome by the study participants. The study participants who were already awarded the government subsidy indicated that every month they had to go through an administrative claim process to receive their monthly subsidy under the DSD. Labantwana (2014a, p. 5) provided that ECD centres need to complete a requisition form to receive their monthly subsidy. In addition, empirical

findings from the focus group discussed demonstrated that the R17 subsidy allocated to each child was insufficient to cover the operational cost of the ECD programme.

This finding was also confirmed in the latest *Public Expenditure and Institutional Review for E*CD 2022, that the R17 subsidy has depreciated, making it insufficient to cover the operational cost for the implementation of the ECD programme (Dulvy et al., 2023, p. 77). In addition, findings in this study indicated that the amount allocated to for ECD programme has remained constant for many years under the DSD making it difficult for ECD centres to provide quality ECD programmes. Ilifa Labantwana (2024c, p. 1) also confirmed that the ECD subsidy has remained at R17 per child subsidy has remained constant in the past six years, despite the rise in the inflation rate. This finding indicates that ECD programmes for children between birth and four years of age are chronically funded in South Africa.

In terms of the study findings access to government subsidy is not guaranteed respective of the ECD centres complying with all the regulating frameworks. This finding was also confirmed in the national legislation. Section 9 (1) of the Children's Act does not make it mandatory for the MEC of the DSD may from funds appropriated from provincial legislature subsidies ECD programme. The use of the word "may" does not guarantee registered ECD programme that they would be awarded government funding. Similarly, recent research reports from the National ECD Census 2021 confirmed that the registration status of an ECD programme did not guarantee subsidisation by the government (DBE. 2022). Findings presented in the national ECD census indicated that 25 % of registered ECD programmes did not receive the government subsidy under the DSD (DBE, 2022, p. 13). This confirms that the funding model used to fund the ECD programme is inadequate. Not all children who access ECD programmes for ECD centres have an equal chance of receiving subsidy from the government as presented in this study, in literature and the national legislation.

6.2.3 Inadequate implementation of the inclusive ECD programme

Only 6 study participants in this study reported having admitted children with disabilities in their ECD programme with an average of two children in each ECD centre. The national ECD census conducted by the DBE was not able to present an exact number of children with disabilities accessing the ECD programme. It only stated that a fraction of children with disabilities who are of school-going age were enrolled in ECD programmes without clearly disseminating the type of disabilities children have DBE (2022, p. 41). The lack of data a

management system that collates data on children with disabilities was also confirmed by Clark et al (2024).

An argument made by these authors is that current legislation is silent with regards to collating the disability status and the type of disabilities children have which make it difficult to trace the number of children with disabilities access ECD programmes (Clark et al., 224. p.5. Four factors were cited by the study participants that contributed to the low admission of children with disabilities in ECD centres.

The first factor is that parents and caregivers of children with disabilities were reluctant to admit their children into ECD programmes due to stigma and lack of knowledge about the importance of accessing ECD programmes for children with disabilities. This finding was also confirmed by Philpott and Zuma (2015) and Hirpa (2021). According to Philpott and Zuma (2015, p.20), societal attitudes and beliefs about having a child with disabilities often leave the mothers of the child with disabilities isolated and reluctant to seek help for their children consequently not enrolling their children into an ECD programme.

Similarly, Hirpa (2021, p. 13) explains that some parents of children with disabilities are not educated and are not aware of the importance of ECD on children with disabilities as a result keep their children from accessing the ECD programme. Secondly, the insufficient support from government to ensure children with disabilities are enrolled in ECD centres. This is despite the long-term goal of the NIECD Policy 2015 to ensure that all children from birth until seven years old with developmental delays or disabilities have access to different services of sufficiently high quality (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 66). However, based on the study findings and reviewed literature children with disabilities are largely excluded from accessing ECD programmes.

Thirdly, the findings in this study demonstrated that ECD practitioners lacked the skills and infrastructure to accommodate children with disabilities. The lack of adequate skills by ECD practitioner to implement inclusive ECD programmes was confirmed by Visser et al (2021). According to Visser et al. (2021, p. 19) ECD practitioners generally do not have adequate skills to assess, identify, refer, and adjust early learning activities to meet the needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities. Inadequate infrastructure was also cited as a contributing factor to the inadequate implementation of inclusive ECD programme as a finding in this study.

The respondents in the study also stated that their classroom sizes were unable to accommodate wheelchairs and did not have disability-friendly toilets. Similarly, an analysis of the national ECD audit of the DSD by Clark et al. (2024, p. 5), indicated that less than 50% of registered ECD centres had toilets accessible to children with disabilities, 17% had wheelchair ramps and 9% had handrails.

Fourthly inadequate funding was found to have also contributed to the poor implementation of inclusive ECD programmes. Findings from this study demonstrated that the R 17 per child per day subsidy allocated by the DSD to subsidy registered ECD programme applied to children without disabilities and children with disabilities. For the respondents in this study, the amount allocated to children with disabilities was inadequate because children with disabilities require more care. The NIECD Policy further confirms that the allocation of funding for children with disabilities needs to be higher compared to children with non-disabilities to enable the provision of appropriate support required by children with disabilities Republic of South Africa (2015, p. 97). The Children's Act provides that funding for ECD programmes with children with disabilities must be prioritised funding to make ECD programmes accessible to children with disabilities (Section 94 (4)(b)). However, based on the study findings higher subsidies for children with disabilities have not been implemented. Analytical findings from this study also illustrated, the lack of data management system for children with disabilities makes it difficult to prioritize funding for ECD programmes accessible to children with disabilities.

6.2.4 Inadequate assessment of the implementation of quality ECD programmes

The inspection of ECD centres and ECD programme is legislated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and the NIECD Policy of South Africa. Evidence collected from this study, however, demonstrated that monitoring of ECD centres focused more on the inspection of ECD centre facilities and overlooked the implementation of quality ECD programmes. Ilifa Labantwana (2014a, p. 7) argued that "the monitoring and evaluation systems that are in place focus primarily on funded centres with an emphasis on monitoring governance and administration and funds usage, as opposed to ECD quality and outcome".

Makhubela and Baloyi (2018, p. 10781) also indicated that government officials from DSD could not effectively monitor the implementation of quality ECD programme. Likewise, Vorwerk (2020, p. 39) established that ECD practitioners perceived government officials responsible for conducting monitoring ECD programme did not have adequate skills to do so,

nor did they have sufficient knowledge of early childhood education. Findings from this study also indicate the responsibility to monitor ECD programmed only laid with one only department. Based on the findings of document analysis the NIECD Policy 2015, however assigned the DSD the duty to monitor, improve, and evaluate the ECD programme (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 76). It also assigned the provincial DBE the responsibility to monitor the implementation of the national curriculum framework for children below the age of five years old (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 77). Given that both the DSD and the DBE had the responsibility to monitor the implementation of ECD programmes. The findings in this study illustrated provisions of the NIECD Policy were not adequately implemented.

6.2.4 Increased financial crisis faced by ECD centres

Findings from this study have demonstrated since the implementation of the function shift, they have experience increased financial challenges due to late payment of government subsidies. Consequently, ECD supervisors have to run ECD centres from their own pockets and there are experiencing a high staff turnover, due to decreases and non-payment of stipends to their personnel. The late payment of the ECD subsidy by the DBE since the implementation of the function shift in different areas of South h Africa was also confirmed by Gumede (2022), and Tshehle (2023).

In KwaZulu-Natal and the North West Province, ECD centres experienced delays in the payment of ECD subsidies for up to five months after the handover of the ECD function to the DBE with no clear reason provided for the delay in payments (Gumede, 2022 and Tshehle, 2023). The result of the delay in the government subsidy by the DBE was reported to have led to many of the study participants running ECD centres from their pocket and through debt as corroborated by Joy, Maleti, and Nanazile during the focus group discussions.

6.2.5. Impact of the function shift on ECD practitioners

Evidence presented in this study has shown that the early phases on the implementation of the function shift have been accompanied by uncertainties. The results presented in this study demonstrated that participants with no qualification in ECD and does operate in their private homes were uncertain if they would still be able to operate in the future. However, these uncertainties were held due to hearsay of certain changes that would be implemented by the DBE. The reviewed literature also showed that uncertainties about the implementation of the function among ECD practitioners were present before the initial implementation. Vorwerk (2020, p. 46) noted that their uncertainties were centred around whether ECD owners would

lose ownership of their ECD centres and the possible loss of employment. These study findings indicate that ECD practitioners were not involved or regularly updating about during the planning phase of the function shift and they want to be consulted regularly during the progress of the function shift.

6.3 Recommendations

The recommendations presented here are related to the findings discussed in this study:

- The DBE should finalise the ECD provisions in the Children's Amendment Bill 2023 within the next fiscal year and establish a phased implementation plan with quarterly progress reviews.
- The DBE should develop a standardised ECD programme, monitored by trained specialists, with annual quality assessments to evaluate implementation effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement.
- The DBE should establish formal collaboration agreements with municipalities and provide periodic infrastructure progress reports to ECD centres for transparency and accountability.
- The DBE should ensure that children with disabilities receive higher subsidies than their non-disabled peers to facilitate inclusive education. Additionally, ECD practitioners should receive extra incentives and specialised training for delivering inclusive ECD programmes.
- The DBE should establish measures to provide job security and set a minimum working wage for ECD practitioners, ensuring fair compensation and retention of skilled professionals in the sector.
- The DBE should review and adjust the current funding model to ensure timely subsidy payments, increased financial support, and improved access to essential teaching resources, within the constraints of the national budget.
- The DBE should establish measures to provide job security and set a minimum working wage for ECD practitioners, ensuring fair compensation and retention of skilled professionals in the sector.
- The DBE should establish structured ECD forums where practitioners engage quarterly with DBE representatives to discuss sector challenges, propose solutions, and track policy implementation progress.

- The DBE should collaborate with ECD centres to promote, raise awareness, and disseminate information about the importance of access to inclusive ECD programmes for children with disabilities. This initiative should target broader communities to foster understanding and acceptance.
- The DBE should implement a structured professional development programme, offering certified training for ECD practitioners in inclusive education, early childhood pedagogy, and classroom management.

6.4 Further research

The sample of this study was small; therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised. This research can be duplicated on a large scale in order to understand how effectively the DBE has been able to assist ECD centres to improve the quality of ECD programmes they provide to their beneficiaries.

Ethnographical research can be conducted to explore how ECD practitioners implement ECD programme on children and with children with disabilities.

Further research can be conducted on the effective use of the government subsidy by ECD centres to provide adequate nutritional programme to their beneficiaries.

6.5 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to determine the consequences of the departmental shift in the provision of quality early childhood development programmes, from the experiences and perceptions of ECD practitioners at Endumeni Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. To determine the consequences of the departmental function shift in the provision of a quality ECD programme, there is a need to understand the meaning of a quality ECD programme.

Available literature demonstrated that there is a lack of a rigid definition of what constitutes a quality ECD programme. However, previous studies conducted in South Africa and Africa as outlined in Chapter Two, were able to assist in determining what constitutes a quality ECD programme. Empirical research was conducted, using a qualitative research design and focus group discussion and document analysis as a data collection tool to assess the consequences of the ECD function shift as experienced and perceived by ECD practitioners around Endumeni Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Based on the findings of the study, the conclusion was reached that:

The administration of the ECD programmes under the DSD encountered many challenges as identified both in Chapters One and Four of this study. These challenges include stringent regulatory frameworks; lack of adequate resources to implement quality ECD programmes; lack of monitoring of the implementation of ECD on the early learning outcomes of children; financial constraints and lack of sufficient skills and expertise of the ECD practitioners to be able to provide inclusive quality ECD programmes.

The second objective of this study was to assess the quality of the early childhood development system under the DBE in comparison with the DSD. It is worth noting that the study participants welcomed the announced of the departmental shift announced in 2019 by the State President, as they had hoped that this change will bring be able to address their challenges. However, findings from this study have demonstrated that the implementation of the ECD function shift has left a bitter taste in the mouths of the study participants.

This was mainly because since the implementation of the function shift, the DBE has been unable to properly administer the payment of government subsidy. The ECD subsidy has remained constant at R17 for a long period of time and the DBE has been unable to increase the amount of the subsidy paid for the implementation of the function shift. There is an inadequately communication and lack of proper dissemination of information by the DBE. This has left many of the study participant in limbo about the actual purpose of the function shift. Consequently, increasing anxiety and uncertainties among the study participants about their future in the ECD centres.

In conclusion, children below the age of five continue to receive subpar ECD programmes due to inadequate funding; lack of adequate teaching and learning resources, and inadequate monitoring of the implementation of ECD programme. ECD practitioners continue to receive poor remuneration for the services them provide. Access to inclusive ECD programme still remains a dream for many children with disabilities. Most of the study participants expressed their lacked confidence in providing such services because they are ill-equipped and not adequately trained to do so.

References

Chapters in Books

Bayat, A. and Madyibi, S., 2023. Impact of COVID-19 on South Africa's Early Childhood Education and the Sustainable Development Goals. In *SDGs in Africa and the Middle East Region* (pp. 1-27). Cham: Springer International Publishing. Available at: https://www.digiface.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2sdgbayatandmadyibi1.pdf. Accessed on 27 July 2024.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association.

Corti, L., Van den Eynden, V., Bishop, L. and Woollard, M., 2019. *Managing and sharing research data: A guide to good practice.* Sage. Available at: https://dam.ukdataservice.ac.uk/media/455308/managing_data_26nov2014.pdf Accessed??

Hennink, M.H. and Hutter, I., 2011. I. and Bailey. *A. Qualitative research methods. London: SAGE Publications Ltd*, *70*, pp.71-72. Available at: https://books.google.co.za/books?hl=en&lr=&id=5DLLAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=focus+group+discussions+understanding+qualitative+methods+&ots=hnPNBrY7ZM&sig=0de8QNcDp8FIkTVCloVqviEesZ8#v=onepage&q=focus%20group%20discussions%20understanding%20qualitative%20methods&f=false. Accessed on 04 May 2023.

Rossi, P.H., Lipsey, M.W. and Henry, G.T., 2018. *Evaluation: A systematic approach.* Sage publications. Available at: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/vkyla5u6aj13ucos5wv29/dokumen.pub_evaluation-a-systematic-approach-8nbsped-1506307884-9781506307886.pdf?rlkey=t7npgsos97m12hdd0tqkzdo5q&dl=0. Accessed on: 21 August 2022.

Tenny S, Brannan JM, Brannan GD. Qualitative Study. 2022 In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing.

Van Eeuwijk, P. and Angehrn, Z., 2017. How to Conduct a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Methodological Manual. Available at: https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/150640/1/Focus_Group_Discussion_Manual_van_Eeuwijk_Angehrn_Swiss_TPH_2017.pdf. Accessed on 15 August 2023.

Journal articles

Aina, A.Y. and Bipath, K., 2022. Availability and use of infrastructural resources in promoting quality early childhood care and education in registered early childhood development centres. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), p.980. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/ sajce.v12i1.980. Accessed on: 23 October 2023

Aina, A.Y. and Bipath, K., 2022a. Accessing resources that promote quality education for young children: Experience of early childhood development centres' principals. *Perspectives in Education, 40(2),* p.113-128. Available at: **DOI:** https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v40i2.5906. Accessed on 18 October 2023

Akkari, A., 2022. Early childhood education in Africa: Between overambitious global objectives, the need to reflect local interests and educational choices. *Prospects*, pp.1-13. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-022-09608-7. Accessed on 25 February 2023.

Albertyn. C., 2007. Substantive equality and transformation in South Africa. *South African Journal on Human Rights* 23(2), pp. 253-276. Available at: https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/25317/Cathi%20Albertyn%20-%20SAJHR%202007%20part%202.pdf?sequence=1. Accessed on 18 March 2023

Ally, N., Parker, R. and Peacock, T.N., 2022. Litigation and social mobilisation for early childhood development during COVID-19 and beyond. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), pp1-12. Available at https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1054.Accessed on: 18 September 2024

Aploon-Zokufa, K. and Needham, S., 2023. Pathways of Early Childhood Development practitioners into higher education: A capabilities approach. *Journal of Vocational, Adult and Continuing Education and Training*, *6*(1), pp.127-144. Available at: https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jovacet_v6_n1_a8. Accessed on 23 September 2023

Atmore, E., 2013. Early childhood development in South Africa–progress since the end of apartheid. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *21*(2-3), pp.152-162.

Atmore, Eric, Lauren-Jayne Van Niekerk, and Michaela Ashley-Cooper. 2012 "Challenges facing the early childhood development sector in South Africa." *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 2, 1, pp. 120-139. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1187223.pdf. Accessed on 22 January 2023.

Auriacombe, C.J., 2011. Role of theories of change and programme logic models in policy evaluation. *African Journal of Public Affairs* 4(2), pp.36-53. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christelle-Auriacombe/publication/325780513_Role_of_Theories_of_Change_and_Programme_Logic_Models_in_Policy_Evaluation/links/5b2378cb458515270fcf852e/Role-of-Theories-of-Change-and-Programme-Logic-Models-in-Policy-Evaluation.pdf. Accessed on: 15 August 2023

Bipath, K. and Aina, A.Y., 2021. Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre leadership during COVID-19 in urban and rural areas in South Africa. *Alternation Journal* 28(1), 429-460. Available at: https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2021/v8n1a16. Accessed on 01 March 2025.

Biersteker, L., Dawes, A., Hendricks, L. and Tredoux, C., 2016. Centre-based early childhood care and education program quality: A South African study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *36*, pp.334-344. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2016.01.004. Accessed o 20 March 2023

Bowen, G.A., 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal*, *9*(2), pp.27-40. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027. Accessed on 03 March 2025.

Bryer, M.R. and van Leeve, Y., 2022. Early childhood development and decent jobs for women: Planting two trees from one seed? *South African Journal on Human Rights*, *38*(3-4), pp.261-284. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2023.2214371. Accessed on: 17 September 2024

Busetto, L., Wick, W. and Gumbinger, C., 2020. How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and practice*, *2*(1), p.1-10. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

Clark, B.J., Holness, W.A., Nyamadzawo, R.T. and Moogi, D., 2024. Implementing early childhood education for children with disabilities in South Africa and Kenya. *African Journal of Disability*, *13*, p.1326. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v13i0.1326. Accessed on: 11 July 2024

Dawadi, S., 2021. Thematic analysis approach: A step-by-step guide for ELT research practitioners. *Journal of NELTA*, *25*(1-2), pp.62-71. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612353.pdf. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

Dewi, I.G.A.A.O., 2021. Understanding data collection methods in qualitative research: The perspective of interpretive accounting research. *Journal of Tourism Economics and Policy*, *1*(1), pp.23-34. Available at: https://journalkeberlanjutan.com/index.php/jtep. Access on 03 March 2025.

Dirks, J., 2021. A Departmental Shift in Early Education: Tracking the ECD Migration Process. In *ICERI2021 Proceedings* (pp. 9857-9863). IATED.). Available at: doi: 10.21125/iceri.2021.2319. Accessed on 23 March 2023

Ebrahim, H.B., Martin, C. and Excell, L., 2021. Early childhood teachers' and managers' lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (84), pp.204-221. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i84a11. Accessed on 18 April 2023.

Excell, L., 2016. Interrogating quality in early childhood development: Working towards a South African perspective. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *6*(1), pp.1-9. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i1.406. Accessed on 31 July 2023

Fredman, S., Donati, G., Richter, L.M., Naicker, S.N., Behrman, J.R., Lu, C., Cohrssen, C., Lopez Boo, F., Raghavan, C., Devercelli, A. and Heymann, J., 2022. Recognizing early childhood education as a human right in international law. *Human Rights Law Review*, *22*(4), pp.1-20 https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngac024. Accessed on 11 July 2024

Harrison, G.D., 2020. A snapshot of early childhood care and education in South Africa: Institutional offerings, challenges and recommendations. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *10*(1), pp.1-10. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.797. Accessed on: 31 August 2023.

Hirpa, D.A. 2021. Exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education. Including approaches for social exclusion. *Cogent Education, 8(1)*, p. 1952824.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1952824. Accessed on 20 April 2023

Karisa, A., Samuels, C., Watermeyer, B., McKenzie, J. and Vergunst, R., 2022. Priorities for access to early childhood development services for children with disabilities in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), p.1119. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1119. Assessed on 18 April 2023

Madyibi, S. and Bayat, A., 2021. A case study of early childhood development facility infrastructure in Philippi, South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, *39*(4), pp.156-171. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i4.11. Accessed on: 01 March 2023

Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B., 2017. Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, *9*(3). Available at: https://doi.org/10.62707/aishej.v9i3.335. Accessed on 04 May 2023

Makhubele, J.C. and Baloyi, T.V., 2018. Challenges impeding the successful implementation of early childhood development programmes in South Africa: Implications for practice. *Gender and Behaviour*, *16*(1), pp.10773-10783. Available at: https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC-fcc75c618. Accessed on 09 February 2023

Matjokana, T.N. and 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), pp.32-51. Available at: https://www.repamjournal.org/index.php/REPAM/article/download/175/79. Accessed on 25 May 2024

Moyo, J., Wadesango, N. and Kurebwa, M., 2012. Factors that affect the implementation of early childhood development programmes in Zimbabwe. *Studies of Tribes and Tribals*, *10*(2), pp.141-149. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0972639X.2012.11886652. Accessed on 15 March 2023

O'Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C.J. and Mukherjee, N., 2018. The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and evolution*, *9*(1), pp.20-32. Available at:

https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111%2F2041-210X.12860. Accessed on 03 May 2023

Peacock, T.N., 2022. Advancing early childhood development: The role of local government. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, *38*(3-4), pp.285-308. https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2023.2221451. Accessed on 24 September 2024

Rudolph, N., Millei, Z. and Alasuutari, M., 2019. Data practices and inequality in South African early childhood development policy: Technocratic management versus social transformation. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *9*(1), pp.1-11. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.756. Accessed on 19 March 2023

Sello, M.V., De Wet-Billings, N., Mabetha, K. and Makuapane, L., 2024. Removing Barriers to Registration for Early Childhood Development Centres. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *14*(1), pp.1-2.Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1519.

Stenfors, T., Kajamaa, A. and Bennett, D., 2020. How to assess the quality of qualitative research. *The clinical teacher*, *17*(6), pp.596-599. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tct.13242. Accessed on 02 May 2023.

Van Heerden, J., 2016. Quality in South African early learning centres: Mothers' and teachers' views and understanding. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *6*(1), pp.1-11. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i1x.423. Accessed on 10 April 2023.

Venter, L., 2022. A systems perspective on early childhood development education in South Africa. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, *16*(1), pp.1-25. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-022-00100-5. Accessed on 16 August 2023

Visser, M., Grossmark, J., Krüger, S., Smith, C., van Zyl, M., Willemse, Z. and 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), pp.14-24. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n3a3. Accessed on 10 April 2023.

Wood, L. and Neethling, M., *2024.* Professionalising ECCE in South Africa is not child's play! Determining skills gaps and implications for future sector development. *European*

Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 32(1), pp.86-100. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2023.224111. Accessed on 07 March 2025.

Zama, C.Z. and Mashiya, N., 2022. Early Childhood Care and Education teachers' experiences of integrating the activities of the national curriculum framework into themes. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), p.1089. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1089. Accessed on 12 August 2023

Zulu, P.P., Aina, A.Y. and Bipath, K., 2022. Education and training experiences of early childhood care and education practitioners in rural and urban settings of Durban, South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), p.1167. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1167. Accessed on 18 October 2023

Theses

Clampett, B., 2016. *Quality Early Childhood Development centres: An exploratory study of stakeholder views* (Master's thesis, University of Cape Town). Available at: https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/20702/thesis_hum_2016_clampett_bridget.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Padayachee, K., 2022. *Integral education for early childhood development: Building values through indigenous knowledge* (Doctoral dissertation). Available at: https://openscholar.dut.ac.za/handle/10321/4753. Accessed on 23 July 2024.

Policies and legislation

Department of Basic Education 2015. National Curriculum Framework for children age birth to four years old. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/911/file/SAF-national-curriculum-framework-0-4-En.pdf. Accessed on 25 May 2024.

Department of Basic Education. (South Africa). 2023. National Education Policy Act 1996 (Act No.27 of 1996) and The Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005). Call for written submission on the amendment of the Children's Act, 1996 (Act of No. 27 of 1996) on early childhood education in order to streamline regulation for ECD sector. Notice (2493). *Government Gazette, 50648*: 2943, 14 May.

Department of Social Development. (South Africa). 2020. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Act No 38 of 2005. As introduced in the Nationally Assembly (proposed section 76),

explanatory summary of Bill and prior notice of its introduction published and gazetted. *Government Gazette, 43655.* 26 August 2020.

Department of Social Development and UNICEF. 2006. The National Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/childhooddev0.pdf. Accessed on 31 August 2023.

Department of Social Development. Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers. n.d. Available at: https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/about/legislative-mandate. Accessed on 4 April 2024.

Republic of South Africa. 2015. National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy. Pretoria. Government Printers. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/reports/national-integrated-early-childhood-development-policy. Accessed on 23 June 2024.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005.

The White Paper on Social Welfare Service. 1997. Available at:https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/whitepaperonsocialwelfare0.pdf. Accessed on 9 June 2023.

Case law

Governing Body of the Juma Musjid Primary School & Others v Essay N.O. and Others 2011 (7) BCLR 651 (CC).

Internet publications

Banda, M. (2022). Early Childhood Development moves from social development to education- but concerns remain. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-03-29-early-childhood-development-moves-from-social-development-to-education-but-concerns-remain/. Accessed on 26 May 2023.

Beere. R., and Kazim, T. 2023. "Inclusion means actual inclusion." Towards inclusive services for young children with disabilities in South Africa. Available at: https://eelawcentre.org.za. Accessed on 15 July 2024.

Berry L, Biersteker L & Rantsi T. ECD programmes: A case for investment in times of crisis. In: Lake L, Shung-King M, Delany A & Hendricks M (eds) Children and COVID-19 advocacy brief series. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. 2021. Available at: https://ci.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/health_uct_ac_za/533/files/Advocacy%2520Brief_ECD_02_08.pdf. Accessed on 27 July 2024.

Clark, B., Holness, W., and Nyamadzawo, R., 2024. Children's Amendment Bill 2023. (Department of Basic Education). Public submission.

Coombes, A., and Eherenreich, Y. 2021. Pleas for extension. Most workers in early childhood development will not benefit from government relief fund. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-17-plea-for-extension-most-workers-in-early-childhood-development-will-not-benefit-from-government-relief-fund/. Accessed on 10 September 2024.

Cambridge Dictionary. Available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/special-needs. Accessed on 23 May 2024.

Centre for Early Childhood Development. Frequently asked questions ECD functional Shift. Available at: https://cecd.org.za>uploads. Accessed 27 January 2023.

Department of Social Development and Economic Policy Research Institute. 2014. *Audit of early childhood development (ECD)centres: National Report.* Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ECDAuditNationalReport20140731ReviewedFINALVersionES11.pdf. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa. 2015. The South African National Curriculum Framework from birth to four years. Available at: https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/NationalCurriculumFrameworkforChildrenfromBirthtoFour.aspx. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

Department of Social Development. 2017. Presentation on conditional grant to the select committee. Power Point Presentation. Available at: https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/24426/. Accessed on 19 May 2024.

Department of Social Development and United Nations Children's Fund. 2006. *Guidelines for Early Childhood Services. Every child has the right to the best possible in life. Available at:* https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/childhooddev0.p. Accessed on 02 October 2023.

Department of Basic Education and Department of Social Development. 2021. Joint Press Statement: Early Childhood Development (ECD) Function Shift. Available at: https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/joint-press-statement-early-childhood-development-ecd-function-shift-16-mar#:~:text=The%20first%20Proclamation%20relates%20to,Basic%20Education%20in%20each%20Province. Accessed on 13 May 2024.

Department of Basic Education and Department of Social Development. 2021a. An update on the migration of early childhood development from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education. Available at: https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/32578/. Accessed on 13 May 2024

Department of Basic Education. 2022. *ECD Census 2021: Report.* Pretoria. Department of Basic Education. Available at: https://datadrive2030.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ecdc-2021-report.pdf. Accessed on 16 February 2023.

Department of Statistics South Africa. 2022. Census 2022. Statistical Release. Available at: https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=16711. Accessed on 12 October 2023.

Draper, C. and Cook, C. 2022. The impact of the Covid19 pandemic: Perspectives of ECD Centre principals. Available at: https://www.fcw.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/COVID-ECD-report.pdf. Accessed on 19 September 2024.

Dulvy, E.N., Devercelli, A.E., Van Der Berg, S., Gustafsson, M., Pettersson Gelander, G., Kika-Mistry, J. and Beaton-Day, F.M., 2023. South Africa public expenditure and institutional review for early childhood development. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367476707_South_Africa_Public_Expenditure_and_Institutional_Review_for_Early_Childhood_Development_2022. Accessed on 10 October 2023

Equal Education Law Centre. 2024. Children's Amendment Bill 2023. (Department of Basic Education). Submission of the Equal Education Law Centre. Available at: https://eelawcentre.org.za/childrens-amendment-bill-2023-department-of-basic-

education-submission-of-the-equal-education-law-centre/. Accessed on 12 November 2024.

Endumeni Local Municipality. 2021. Draft 2022/2023. Integrated Development Plan Review. Available at: https://endumeni.gov.za/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/Endumeni%20Local%20Municipality%20Draft%202022-2023%20IDP.pdf. Accessed on 18 October 2023

ETDP SETA. Early Childhood Development Subsector Skills Plans 2020-2021. Available at: https://www.etdpseta.org.za/education/sites/default/files/2020-06/ECD-subsector-skills-plan-2020-2021.pdf. Accessed on 27 March 2023.

Giese, S., Dawes, A., Tredoux, C., Mattes, F., Bridgman, G., Van Der Berg, S., Schenk, J. and Kotze, J., 2022. Thrive by five index report. *Innovation Edge.* Available at: www.thrivebyfive.co.za. Accessed on 19 July 2023

Githahu, M. (2022). Lack of updated bank details holding back payments to 104 ECD Centres. at: https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/lack-of-updated-bank-details-holding-back-payments-to-104-ecd-centres-0b5b9e09-3a4b-4019-97d2-ba961e6d3fb2. Accessed on 25 May 2023.

Hall, K, Sambu, W., Almeleh. C., Mabaso, K., Giese, S and Proudlock, P. 2019. South African Early Childhood Review 2019. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/project/south-african-early-childhood-review-2019-resource/#:~:text=The%20South%20African%20Early%20Childhood%20Review%202019%20is%20a%20joint,Great%20Campaign%2C%20and%20Innovation%20Edge. Accessed on 25 August 2023.

Hall. K., Almeleh. C., Giese S, Mphaphuli E, Slemming W, Mathys R, Droomer L, Proudlock P, Kotze J, and Sadan M. South African Early Childhood Review 2024. Cape Town: Children's Institute University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/SA-early-childhood-review-2024-FINAL.pdf. Accessed on 01 March 2025.

Ilifa Labantwana, no date. ECD infrastructure support. Systematically improving ECD infrastructure. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/project/ecd-infrastructure-support-system/. Accessed on 25 April 2024.

Ilifa Labantwana. 2014a. Key finding from a review in ECD centre Registration and Funding system in KZN. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Key-findings-from-a-review-of-ECD-centre-registration-and-funding-systems-in-Kwazulu-Natal.pdf. Accessed on 25 May 2024.

Ilifa Labantwana 2016b. A guide to Early Childhood Development in South Africa. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-Guide-to-ECD-Programmes-in-South-Africa-1.pdf. Accessed on 25 May 2024.

Ilifa Labantwana. 2024c. ECD Budget Review 2024 budget. Available at: https://ilifialabantwana.co.za. Accessed on 25 May 2024.

Ilifa Labantwana and Kago Ya Bana. 2018. A plan to achieve universal coverage of early childhood development services by 2030. Available at: https://dgmt.co.za/wp-content/uplaods/2018/08/ECD-Visison-2018-digital.pdf.

Impande and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. 2020. Profiling process report. Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in Mbizana Local Municipality. Available at: https://www.impande.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Mbizina-ECD-Profiling-Process.pdf. Accessed on 08 April 2023.

King, M.S., Lake, L., Hendricks, M., Delany, A., Baker, Y., Berry, L., Biersteker, L., Goeiman, H., Mathews, S., Morden, E. and Murray, J., 2021. The impact of COVID-19 on children: Insights from the Western Cape experience. *South African Health Review, 2021*(1), pp.121-133. Available at: https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/ejc-healthr-v2021-n1-a14. Accessed on 01 March 2025.

Lake, L., Berry, L., Biersteker, L., Dawes, A. and Smith, C., 2013. Steeping up to the challenges. Prioritising essential services for young children. Available at: https://opem.uct.ac.za/bitstreams/8acc2498-7ba6-4147d-d6d36df20af/download. Accessed on 15 August 2024.

Makhanya, L. (2022). Protest outside Education Department offices by ECD employees. Available at: https://www.citizen.co.za/witness/news/protest-outside-education-department-offices-by-ecd-employees/. Accessed on 26 May 2023.

Mbarathi, N., Mthembu, M.E. and Diga, K., 2016. Early childhood development and South Africa: a literature review. SARChI Technical Paper #6. DST/NRF SARChI in Applied

Poverty Reduction Assessment. University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban. Available on: https://ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/13338/Early%20Childhood%20Development_2016.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y. Accessed on 03 June 2023.

Metelerkamp, T. 2023. Early Childhood development programmes no longer require non-profit organisation registration to access ECD subsidy. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-01-30-early-childhood-development-programmes-no-longer-require-nonprofit-registration-to-access-state-subsidy/. Accessed on 25 October 2023.

Moses, E., 2021. Enrolment in early childhood care and education programmes in South Africa: challenges and opportunities. Ilifa Labatntwana and Resep ECD Working Paper ECD WP 002/2021 Series Available at: https://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Enrolment-in-early-childhood-care-and-education-programmes-in-South-Africa-challenges-and-opportunities-V05.pdf. Accessed on 18 August 2023.

National Development Agency. 2016. *Management of leadership in ECD.* Available at: https://www.nda.org.za/assets/resources/CF824421-4FA0-41EE-AB69-4DB10CD0384A/Management_and_Leadership_in_ECD.pdf. Accessed on 15 October 2023.

National Development Agency. 2016a. Effective ECD programmes. Available at: Available at: https://www.google.com/url?client=internal-element-cse&cx=e644b33a7719ef93e&q=https://www.nda.org.za/assets/resources/CF824421-4FA0-41EE-AB69-4DB10CD0384A/Policy_Brief-Effective_ECD_Programmes.pdf&sa=U&ved=2ahUKEwiy3NTR-_SJAxUNTqQEHfdCCWsQFnoECA0QAQ&usg=AOvVaw0mJPeV74JJB5rylW9SW1Ww. Accessed on 15 June 2023.Nelson Mandela Foundation. 2020 Barriers to registration of early childhood development. Available at: https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/barriers-to-registration-in-early-childhood-development. Accessed on 25 April 2024.

Nkgadima, R. 2020. Children with disabilities cannot access ECD. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/education/early-learning/children-with-disabilities-cannot-access-ecd-84464679-5084-42c4-ad72-d59563c63ea2. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

Meterlekamp, T. 2022. Early childhood centres in SA continue to struggle with registration and access to subsidies. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-09-27-early-childhood-development-centres-in-sa-continue-to-struggle-with-registration-and-access-to-subsidies/. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

Meterlekamp, T. 2023b. Early childhood development programmes no longer require nonprofit registration to access state subsidy. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-01-30-early-childhood-development-programmes-no-longer-require-nonprofit-registration-to-access-state-subsidy/. Accessed on 27 July 2024.

Philpott, S., and Zuma, B. 2015. Inclusive ECD for parents of children with disabilities. Available at: https://ilifalantwana.co.za. Accessed on 25 May 2024.

Portfolio Committee of the Department of Basic Education. 2023. Comprehensive progress report on ECD function shift: DBE briefing; with Deputy Minister. Available at: https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/37162/. Accessed on 25 April 2024.

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 2012. National Plan of Action for Children in South Africa. Pretoria: Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/1301/file/ZAF-national-plan-of-action-for-children-in-South-Africa-2012-2017.pdf. Accessed on 24 April 2024.

South African Law and Reform Commission. 2002. Review of the Child Care Act. Discussion Paper Project 110. Available at: https://ci.uct.ac.za/salrc-documents. Accessed on 15 May 2024.

The Real Reform for ECD. 2024. The Children's Amendment Bill 2023. Submission (Department of Education). Available at: https://www.ecdreform.org.za/. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

Umalusi. 2021. Practitioners' perceptions and understanding of the approaches underpinning curriculum and pedagogy in an early childhood classroom. Available at: https://www.umalusi.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Umalusi-ECD-Study-Final-Edited.pdf. Accessed on 12 August 2024

United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2005. Policy Review: Early Childhood Care and Education in Kenya. Available at:

https://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID2905&URL_DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION-465.HTML. Accessed on 13 March 2023.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2010. Early Childhood Care and Education Regional Report. Africa Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00018942.

United Nations Development Programme. 2015. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? Available at: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-developmentgoals?gclid=Cj0KCQjwhL6pBhDjARIsAGx8D584ZfNdqgatGauuzehYVZziF7UPrh5GjKgoXs-WCOPWT_xK8fp0VNYaArGaEALw_wcB. Accessed on 18 October 2023. Van Niekerk, S. 2014. ECD centres discuss registration challenges. Available at : https://www.citizen.co.za/alberton-record/news-headlines/2014/11/12/ecd-centers-discuss-registration-challenges/. Accessed on 25 April 2024.

Vorwerk, M. 2020. *Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN): Provincial Dialogues on the ECD Function Shift. Collective ECD Civil Society Responses.* Available at: https://www.ecdalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Collective-ECD-Civil-Society-Response-on-Function-Shift.pdf. Accessed on: 21 January 2023.

Wills, G., Kotzé, J. and Kika-Mistry, J., 2021. A sector hanging in the balance: Early childhood development and lockdown in South Africa. *University of Oxford, working paper*, *30*. Available at: https://riseprogramme.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/RISE_WP-055_Wills_Kotze_Kika-Mistry.pdf. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Wills, G. and Kika Mistry, J., 2021. Supply-side and demand-side approaches to financing early childhood care and education in South Africa. *Ilifa Labantwana & Resep ECD Working Paper Series*. Available at: https://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Supply-side-and-demand-side-approaches-to-financing-early-childhood-care-and-education-in-South-Africa-V09.pdf.

Wills, G. and Kika-Mistry, J., 2022a. Early childhood care and education access in South Africa during COVID-19: Evidence from NIDS-CRAM. *Development Southern Africa*, *39*(5), pp.781-799. Available at:

https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/61727/1/9781000878158.pdf#page=218. Accessed on 25 July 2023.

Kika-Mistry, J. and Wills, G., 2022b. Compliance, cost and user fees in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in South Africa. *Gabrielle, Compliance, Cost and User Fees in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in South Africa (August 1, 2022)*. Available at: https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Working-Paper-Compliance-Cost-User-Fees-V06.pdf. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

Williams, T., Samuels, M.L., Mouton, J., Ratele, K., Shabalala, N., Shefer, T. and Strebel, A., 2001. The nationwide audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa. Department of Education, Directorate. Available at:https://www.westerncape.gov.za/sites/www.westerncape.gov.za/files/documents/2003/national_audit_ecd.pdf. Accessed on 20 March 2023.

Wills, G., Kotze, J. and Kika-Mistry, J., 2022. A Sector Hanging in the Balance: Early Childhood Development and Lockdown in South Africa. Available at: https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/15.-Wills-G.-Kotze-J.-Kika-Mistry-J.-2020-A-Sector-Hanging-in-the-Balance_ECD-and-Lockdown-in-South-Africa-1.pdf. Accessed on 3 June 2024.

Appendixes

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

15 November 2023

Thobeka Ntombeningi Mbatha (208515270)
School Of Law
Howard College Campus

Dear TN Mbatha,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005761/2023
Project title: An implementation evaluation of the departmental function shift in the provision of early childhood development programmes from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education in the Endumeni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 21 June 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 15 November 2024.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction of the exercise

Greetings, everybody. I would like to welcome and thank everyone agreed to participate in this research study. My name is Thobeka Mbatha and I am a student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am studying towards a Master's degree in Child Care and Protection under the School of Law and Management at the University of KwaZulu Natal. This research is a major requirement for me to complete my master's degree. My chosen research topic is:

"The perspective of early childhood development practitioners on the impact of early childhood development function shift on the provision of quality centred-based early childhood development programme at Endumeni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa."

I would like to once again inform participants that participation in this research study is voluntary and anyone is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

Introductory guide for the participants

Without mentioning your name or the name of your ECD centre please provide the following information.

1. For how long they have been working in the ECD sector?
2. For how low have you been employed at your ECD centre?
3. What qualifications do you have related to ECD?
4. How many children are enrolled at your centre?
5. Do you have any children with disabilities enrolled in your ECD centre? If so, how (and by whom) were such disabilities identified and at what stage in the children's lives? (screening, identification and assessment). How would you categorise these disabilities? (i.e., severe physical disabilities or less severe mental impairments?). Are children with disabilities able to meaningfully participate in your programmes and what, if any, support or accommodations, do you provide to assist them? If you have no children with any disabilities, what is the reason for this absence of such children?
6. Is your ECD centre registered as a partial care facility with the DBE?
7. Is your ECD centre registered as an ECD programme with the DBE?
8. What is your understanding of 'quality ECD services'?

Sub question 1: How did the DSD influence the way in which ECD practitioners provided ECD services?

- How would you describe the working relationship between the DSD and ECD practitioners prior to the function shift?

- In your own opinion, what was the most significant role played by the DSD in assisting ECD centres to provide quality ECD programmes?
- In your opinion do you think the ECD programme function was well situated within the DSD? Motivate your answer.

Sub question 2:
What support measures, if any, were provided by DSD to assist ECD practitioners to improve the quality ECD programme provided for their beneficiaries?

- How and what support services did the DSD provide to ECD centres to assist them to render quality ECD programmes?
- What interventions, supports or training or measures did DSD offer in relation to admission of and care and teaching of children with disabilities, including support or accommodations?

Sub question 3:
What support measures, if any, are provided by the DBE to assist ECD centres to function at their optimal level?

- What interventions, supports or training or measures does DBE offer in relation to admission of and care and teaching of children with disabilities, including support or accommodations?
- What input has the DBE been able to provide to assist ECD centres in improving their ECD programmes?
- What changes would you like the DBE to implement in order to assist ECD practitioners to improve on their ECD service delivery?
- In your own opinion, what can the DBE learn from the DSD?
- In your own opinion, is the ECD programme well situated within the Department of Basic Education?
- What changes do you foresee the DBE introducing within the ECD sector?

Sub question 4:

From the perspective of ECD practitioners, how efficiently does the DBE provide adequate support to ECD practitioners to assist them to provide improved quality ECD programmes?

- How easily can ECD practitioners access support from the DBE to offer quality programmes?
- What interventions, supports or training or measures, in your opinion, should DBE offer in relation to admission of and care and teaching of children with disabilities at your ECD centre?
- Since the DBE has taken over the ECD functions how has it been able to efficiently provide support services to ECD centres?
- What changes if any has the DBE introduced to support ECD practitioners to provide quality ECD programmes?

- What in your own opinion can the DBE improve on to assist ECD practitioners to provide quality ECD services to all children?

END.

INFORMED CONSENT

I .....(Name) have been informed about the study entitled:

The implementation evaluation of the departmental function shifts in early childhood development programme in the Endumeni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.
- I have been allowed to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.
- I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any penalties.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at **Cell** [redacted] **or Email address:** [redacted] or 208515270@stu.ukzn.ac.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

The UKZN Humanities and Social Science Ethic Administration at:

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4001
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____

Signature of Witness **Date**

(Where applicable)

_____ _____

Signature of Translator **Date**

(Where applicable)