

Collaboration of stakeholders for the provisioning of ECCE from the selected ECD Centres of the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality

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Abstract - This research investigates stakeholder collaboration in the provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from selected Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The provision of ECCE is critical in a child's life because a solid foundation is formed throughout the first 1000 days as a child matures throughout life. Young children require love, support, and care from their families to reach developmental milestones. Furthermore, ECCE providing provides economic, psychological, physical, and sociological benefits for both the developing child and society. Poverty and inequities may be decreased through ECCE provisioning because young children are given the opportunity to strive and realize their full potential. ECCE also provides an opportunity for young children to grow cognitively to improve schooling outcomes beyond the preschool years. Every country, including South Africa, is proud of its ECCE provisioning; so, policies have been devised. Despite the sector's transition to the Department of Basic Education, stakeholder interactions remain an essential component of effective ECCE provisioning. In practice, however, there is little stakeholder participation. This paper used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which views child development as a multidimensional framework of relationships extending from the children's local environment to the larger environment. For this article, qualitative interpretative approaches were used, and a sample of 9 participants was purposefully chosen from three preschools in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The data was triangulated using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations. The findings revealed that, despite the ECD sector's migration and the necessity of stakeholder collaboration for child development, there appear to be gaps because stakeholder engagement is not as envisioned. ECD educators revealed that the difficulty of getting services for children has an impact on ECCE provisioning, putting young children at risk. While the parents interviewed appear to be unaware of the role they should play in assisting their children, the lack of cooperation and support from supporting government departments becomes a threat to the child's development. As a result, this paper advocates for greater coordinated contact among stakeholders to ensure the effective delivery of services that assist children and their education. Support and monitoring of ECD educators should be addressed to improve service delivery to young children and bridge gaps between ECD centers to ensure equality and equity in funding allocation.

Keywords: Child development; ECCE provisioning; First 1000 days, Stakeholder collaboration, Well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) was conceived at the Jomtien Conference when participating member states agreed to support the goals of Education for All (EFA) based on the idea that "learning begins at birth" (UNESCO, 1990:28). Similarly, the Dakar World Education Forum Framework for Action (2000) which took place after the Jomtien Conference concurred that ECCE programmes are crucial in achieving Education for All goals (UNESCO, 2000). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) requires state parties to ensure that quality ECCE services are provided to the growing population of young children in Africa by putting in place relevant and adequate strategies, policies, and resources (Harrison, 2020). Moreover, under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), states were tasked to develop ECCE policies which were to become pillars in achieving Goal Number One, whose focus is to achieve universal education by 2015 (Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). The aim was to build a strong foundation for children's development and education as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Harrison, 2020). The frameworks, principles, and goals recognize that the age from birth to 8 years is a crucial time in children's development because it is the period when "the structure and basic functioning of the brain take form (Akkari, 2022;

Harrison, 2020). The first 1000 days of children's lives are often perceived as important because it is during this time that they start learning. Hence this is the most opportune period to start stimulating the brain by introducing them to ECCE. This paper investigated stakeholder collaboration in the provision of ECCE from selected Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality.

II. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ECCE

Early Childhood Care and Education is the development of health, learning, and behaviour from the prenatal period through the transition phase to primary schooling (UNICEF, 2017). It is a period starting from the time the mother conceives to when the child is eight years of age. ECCE programme refers to a broad range of support for young children and families and it includes health; early learning and education; family support and social protection; and child welfare (Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011). According to UNESCO (2012), ECCE refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support, and aid the holistic development of children from birth to eight years. The Department of Education (DoE) White Paper 5 views ECCE as an “umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially” (Department of Education, 2001, p.23). The above definitions support the view that ECCE relates to highly comprehensive programmes for young children and their families that seek to enhance the holistic development of children aged 0 to 8 years through the provision of a rich and stimulating environment that promotes and sustains all-round and creative development of these children and their families. The interaction of the nurturing and environmental processes shapes the child's readiness for school (UNESCO, 2021).

III. ECCE PROVISIONING

South African government recognized the need for broad-based early ECCE services that would be accessible to all children (Harrison, 2020). This began with putting in place policies that aimed to “redress the wrongs of the past and to uphold the rights of the child” (Harrison, 2020:3). ECCE has also been included in the National Development Plan of South Africa. The policies cover the period from conception until the year before children enter formal school or, in the case of children with special needs, until the year before they turn seven years (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2021; Harrison, 2020). The policies come from different sectors and departments as ECCE is multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary (Harrison, 2020; Venter, 2022). Among the policies that have been put in place are: White Paper 1 on Early Childhood Development (ECD) (Department of Education (DoE), 2001). It stipulates that all children aged four years and younger be supported by this policy which prioritizes the development of an inter-sectorial collaboration focusing on improving the quality of early learning programmes for children aged 4 years and younger. The National Health Act 60 of 2003 focuses on protecting the rights of vulnerable children by providing free health services for pregnant women and children under five years and basic nutrition thus preventing malnutrition (Venter, 2022; Harrison, 2020). The Children's Act 38 of 2005 provides a framework for norms and standards for care and education in early years with the aim of regulating the ECCE system. White Paper 6 Inclusive Education puts in place systems to address early identification of children with learning needs to provide interventions (DoE, 2001). Guidelines for ECD Service Standards set standards and norms to enhance quality ECCE services for children from birth to four years by conducting monitoring and evaluation (Department of Social Development, 2006). The National Integrated ECD Policy provides for equitable ECCE services, funding streams, workforce development, essential packages, and further quality assurance (Department of Social Development, 2015).

The above are some of the many policies put in place to enhance the provisioning of early childhood development services. They are supposed to enhance equitable access to ECCE services, coordinate a multisectoral approach to ECCE provisioning and ensure adequate budgeting and monitoring of ECCE services (Harrison, 2020;). In addition, they provide a coordination mechanism and define the role of parents, communities, various government ministries and departments, development partners, and other stakeholders in the provision of ECCE services. For example, the Departments of Social Development, Education, and Health are collaboratively involved in the provisioning of ECCE through the respective services rendered to young children who are still within their age. Moreover, municipalities have roles to play in the provisioning of ECCE (DBE, 2021). The Constitution also gives local governments authority over municipal planning which includes the regulation of land use for childcare facilities. Moreover, National Integrated ECD Policy states that local government is responsible for supporting childcare facilities necessary to meet minimum infrastructural health and safety standards for the development of new

infrastructure for ECCE services and for identification of available infrastructure that may be used for the expansion of early learning services and programmes in areas in need (Zulu, Aina & Bipath, 2022).

Putting in place proper infrastructure is crucial to carry out teaching and learning activities. It includes spacious and well-ventilated classrooms, playgrounds, equipment, basic utilities (for example water and electricity), proper sanitation facilities, and play and sports equipment. These are all essentials in a child's holistic growth and in terms of offering quality care and learning (Zulu, et al., 2022). National Norms and Standards outline that infrastructure resources at ECCE centres should enhance a comfortable environment inside and outside of the premises. There should be suitable equipment and sound physical structure of buildings. The design and layout of the spaces should be such that they allow young learners to explore their learning environment (Moses, 2021). There should be adequate space, light, ventilation, and demarcated places for different activities and functions, safe drinking water for all children, hygiene, and adequate sanitation facilities. It has been acknowledged that there has been improvement in terms of the increase of centres in formal structures, access to running water in premises, provision of hygiene and sanitation services, and provision of infrastructure (Zulu, et al., 2022; Heckman, 2022). However, issues and concerns regarding infrastructure provision especially in lower-income and poor communities continue to be an issue. According to National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to 4 years, quality ECCE curricula should be based on children's needs and inclusivity and rooted in children's rights, and address issues of sustainable development (Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2019). The implication is that curricula should allow flexibility so that teachers can tailor their approaches to the needs and circumstances of the learners and community. Training on high-quality practices should be specific to the needs and capabilities of the children targeted by ECCE programming (Moses, 2021). The curriculum should also emphasize verbal expression and should be based on play, interaction, exploration, and discovery using all five senses including learning through movement, use of culturally relevant materials, and respect for diversity and individuality. The curriculum should be a hive of ongoing assessment and evaluation programmes expected to be developed through observing and listening to each learner, to assist the teacher to build on the child's experiences and activities that nurture the child's development and education (Hannaway, Marais, Govender & Meier, 2018). Learning in ECCE settings is expected to be child-centred, and the teacher should be able to understand his/her children's learning needs. It is part of the ECCE curriculum that children are expected to construct their own knowledge (Harrison, 2020; Hannaway, et al., 2018). The implication is that the learning environment is expected to be a third teacher, which facilitates learning through indoor and outdoor learning environments. (Atmore, et al, 2011; Venter, 2022).

The ECCE curriculum in South Africa calls for the teacher to partner with parents to assist him/her in understanding children's experiences (Thornton & Brunton, 2007; Moses, 2021). Parent inclusion develops the livelihood of community members by providing work in an area that also directly benefits children, improves the parenting and care of those not directly served by raising awareness, and maximizes resources by leveraging social and material assets in support of programming. There is a feeling by many stakeholders that inequalities in provision have not been addressed as expected as centres in informal settlements, townships, and rural areas remain without proper facilities and infrastructure as opposed to those in urban areas where many parents can afford to pay adequate fees on top of the subsidy received from DSD as registered centres (Harrison, 2020). They also have inadequately trained teachers and inadequate or inappropriate learning materials and yet they must implement the same curriculum. Heckman (2022) gives a breakdown of teacher qualification as 48 percent having either no teaching qualification at all or having attended some skills training programme. According to Akkari (2022) the private sector is the main provider of ECCE in Africa before children join primary school. Consequently, UNESCO (2021) observed that 55 percent of children enrolled in pre-primary education in low-income countries are catered for by the private sector. However, although provisioning is done by public and private sectors and communities, the role of the collaborating ministries and the government remains vital in terms of developing legislation and rules, management, and monitoring of all ECCE activities. It includes financing and infrastructure, training and development of ECCE educators and other staff, and development of curriculum and materials for learning, playing, and so forth (Beckman, 2022; Moses, 2021). Although the provisioning of ECCE programme has improved over the years, studies have observed that in some low-income countries, ECCE programmes have been fragmented, poorly coordinated, and managed with inadequate resources, inadequately trained staff, poor and inadequate infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, and so forth (Beckman, 2022). In most countries, unequal provision to different groups has led to some children being denied their right to education. The role played by different stakeholders in the provisioning of ECCE and the challenges encountered were explored in this paper.

IV. ECCE STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

Stakeholders for this paper are the people or organizations that have bestowed interest in the provisioning of quality and sustainable education for young children (Maletse, 2013). While from South Africa's National Education Policy Act (1996), stakeholder means an organization or body with a direct and continuing interest in the education institution, programme, phase, or sector in question. Stakeholders are perceived to be very important role players in the effective provisioning of ECCE. However, some stakeholders have raised issues regarding monitoring and support by different actors (Harrison 2020). They feel that the role of providing support and monitoring by different structures is not done properly. Concerns have also been raised that even registered centres that receive subsidies from the Department of Social Development are not monitored properly. Monitoring is not really done properly because some registered centres are not in good shape. There are some among stakeholders who feel that there is no proper support and monitoring being done (Viviers, Biersterker, & Moruane, 2013). Hence the need to examine how stakeholders collaborate for the provisioning of ECCE and how monitoring and support are done and whether those charged with the responsibility do it. Consequently, it has been alleged by some providers that municipalities do not fulfill their role as provided by Schedule 4 Part B of the Constitution. They also think that many of the municipalities do not understand their roles because they do not include ECCE in their IDPs (Zulu, et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2021; Harrison 2020). Given the above issues raised by different stakeholders, it is not clear whether provisioning structures at national, provincial, and local government levels work together in harmony in managing and provisioning ECCE as provided in relevant policies. It is also not clear whether each actor or stakeholder involved in provisioning understands its roles and responsibilities and how it should provide the ECCE programme. Hence this study examines the collaboration of stakeholders as role players in the provisioning of ECCE from the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality of the Eastern Cape Province.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this paper is the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner (1979). This theory was chosen because of the role that social surrounding has on the developing child (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) and the role that social engagement plays in one's development and interaction. Hence, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory recognizes the importance of complex intersections that children have with their environment in terms of influencing their development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) views child development as being influenced by various layers of the environment. These multi-layers play an important role in ECCE provisioning through stakeholder collaborations. The first layer, the microsystem is the innermost circle or space for the child's initial learning, which includes family. The second layer is the mesosystem which involves systems interacting with people in the microsystem such as ECD centres in communities, schools, and playmate settings. The relationship will assist the child to feel safe as it bridges the gap between the home environment and the school environment. The exosystem as the third layer involves layers that do not work directly with children but have some impact on the child's development. These systems include parents' workplaces, family friends, the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Health, the Department of Education as well as institutions of Higher learning. Fourthly, the macrosystem is a societal blueprint of a particular culture or subculture and comprises values, laws, customs and resources, lifestyles, and opportunity structures (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The chronosystem is a level that refers to the way each level has an influence on the one before and after it in a back-and-forth motion. It also applies to the historical context relating to the time the child is raised. However, from the layers outlined above, this theory emphasizes the importance of family as the immediate child's environment that lays the solid foundation even before children enroll in early childhood education. It is for that reason that stakeholders are included in this paper as people with an important role to play in the ECCE provisioning.

VI. METHODOLOGY

For this paper, qualitative interpretive research was adopted as methods that inform the data collection process. The interpretive paradigm is founded on the principle that human beings create meaning in their worlds, because of communication with others (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research entails the way the selected research participants are studied in natural contexts without any experiments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As the participants are studied in their natural settings, a more comprehensive encounter with the participants is prioritized through interviews that allow people to express their views freely about the studied phenomenon (Babbie, 2015). This encourages a constructivist view that aligns with the chosen paradigm. Purposive sampling was used in selecting 20 students to be the research participants (Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher identifies information-rich participants because they are possibly knowledgeable about the phenomena under study (Kelly & Codeiro, 2020). The researcher will purposively select a sample of 9 participants, that is, three ECD educators, three parents from each of the three preschools, one DBE official, one DSD official, and one

Municipality official in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Data-gathering tools used to collect data from the selected sample were non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and the use of different data collection tools helped in triangulating the data collected. Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the collected data (Creswell, 2014). Trustworthiness was ensured as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were adhered to in ensuring that consistency and rigor are sustained (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This was ensured through participant validation and evidence from verbatim quotations. Informed consent was sought, and anonymity and confidentiality were preserved.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data that was collected revealed that, despite the ECD sector's migration and the necessity of stakeholder collaboration for child development, there appear to be gaps because stakeholder engagement is not as envisioned. It was evident from the data collected that the challenges that have been identified in provisioning in the ECCE sector by different actors and stakeholders existed even before the migration of ECD from DSD to DBE. In addition, the fragmented coordination of ECCD services existed while the sector was still under DSD, and this continued despite the integrated policy that aimed at ensuring that the key stakeholders collaborate for the effective provisioning of ECCE. In addition to the lack of sectoral collaboration and non-involvement of parents and other stakeholders, it emerged from the data that the professionalization of the sector, where practitioners are not qualified, the National Curriculum framework not used by many ECCE centres by practitioners, the '*schoolification*' of the sector were also the challenges confronting the provisioning of ECCE. Moreover, ECCE provisioning needs to be inclusive where children with special educational needs are accommodated, however, the challenge of exclusive ECCE provisioning remains the challenge, and children with special education needs were not attending preschool education (Atmore, et al., 2012).

The Curriculum and development of quality materials for learning and playing are very crucial in the provisioning of ECCE (UNESCO, 2021), this was also evident from the data collected through observations. The ECD educators also expressed their concerns about the support that they receive from stakeholders and how it impacts ECCD provisioning. For example, it is suggested by studies that the curriculum should integrate local culture and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, there is a need to have local content and cultural aspects reflected in the school curriculum and teaching materials (Atmore, et al., 2012). According to UNESCO (2021) in some African countries, there has been resistance by ECCE educators to look within their own societies and communities for materials to use in pre-primary schools. There is also an awareness that children come from those communities and have knowledge of traditional games. Another aspect of the ECCE curriculum is the issue of language. UNESCO (2021) advise that children should learn in their mother tongue until the end of the six years of primary education. South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four Years provides guidelines for ECCE stakeholders in key areas, namely well-being, creativity, identity and belonging, communication, mathematics, knowledge, and understanding of the world (Department of Social Development, 2015).

ECD educators revealed that the difficulty of getting services for children has an impact on ECCE provisioning, as this at times may put young children at risk when there is inadequate and inappropriate infrastructure. Although the environment should be suitable, clean, safe, healthy, and well-kept. However, it has been observed that there was overcrowding and a lack of adequate space from the selected pre-schools and this compromised the provisioning of ECCE and indoor and outdoor spaces were not conducive for children to learn through play. In some centres, necessary amenities were not available while in some they were not in good condition, and this was evident that stakeholders are not playing their part in ensuring that these are taken care of. It was evident from the data collected that stakeholders are not clued up about the respective roles that they can play in effective ECCE provisioning. This is because the ECD educators and parents revealed that the preschools do not get adequate support from the other stakeholders. This situation was exacerbated by the unavailability of funding for preschools, and this compromised the provisioning of ECCE. As mentioned in Bronfenbrenner's theory, broad stakeholder consultation and collaboration should be an ongoing process to design a coherent and rationalized sector programme at micro, meso, and macro level for the benefit of the developing child. Moreover, stakeholders must also be empowered with all the processes in the centres to positively influence and be actively involved in them (Viviers, et al., 2013). Despite the challenges mentioned during the data collection, parents applauded the child support grants have contributed significantly to alleviating child hunger in South Africa, although there are still challenges in accessing

them for other children. The ECD educators seemed to be positive with the migration of the ECD sector from DSD to DBE because some were not remunerated and hoped that this migration might recognize their role.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the provisioning of ECD services is curtailed by inadequacies in funding, infrastructure, learning, and teaching materials, and in some cases low levels of qualifications of practitioners, insufficient training, lack of professional support, and poor working conditions. From the data collected, it was evident that stakeholders' collaboration needs to be strengthened for effective ECCE provisioning to rectify the fragmented nature of the sector that sometimes leads to funding challenges and service provision where some deserving children are often left out. It is important to note that ECD is multi-sectoral; hence all the stakeholders need to be fully engaged in the ECCE provisioning for the benefit of young children and wider communities. Therefore, there is a need for more coordinated interaction among stakeholders to bring about collaborative provisioning. This implies that departments and organizations involved in providing ECCE services need to meet periodically to enhance synergy in their operations. Clear policies on stakeholder involvement should be crafted to guide the implementation of ECCE programmes. Moreover, there is a need to build the capacity of stakeholders in ECCE provisioning.

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