

## ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality child care: A case study of two selected private day care settings in Zimbabwe

**Lekani Dube** (1<sup>st</sup> Author & corresponding author)

Department of Educational Foundations, Great Zimbabwe University, P O Box 1235, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.  
Contact No: +263 773 891 903  
[lekanidube@yahoo.com](mailto:lekanidube@yahoo.com)

**Vesta Dzviti** (2<sup>nd</sup> Author)

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Department of Early Childhood Development, Reformed Church University, P O Box 80, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.  
[dzviti@rcu.ac.zw](mailto:dzviti@rcu.ac.zw)

### Abstract

*This article explored ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality child care at two privately owned day care settings in one selected district in Zimbabwe. The case study design embedded in the qualitative paradigm was employed in the research. The two day care centres were purposively selected because they enrol toddlers. Study participants were made up of two day care proprietors, four centre caregivers and 20 parents of children enrolled at the centres. The observation, questionnaire and interview were used as data collection methods. Major findings of the study were: ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality child care was rather narrow, and this resultantly negatively impacted on the quality of childcare at day care settings. The researchers concluded that childcare in day care settings falls far short of the expectations of ECD experts. The study therefore, recommended that responsible authorities conscientise day care proprietors, centre caregivers and parents on quality childcare indicators so that they develop an informed understanding which should improve their day care service delivery. The researchers also recommend that responsible authorities implement and enforce state ECD licensing regulations as way of ensuring that day care environments promote child growth and development to their fullest potential.*

### Key terms

toddlers, quality childcare, day care centres, early childhood development, proprietors, caregivers, stakeholders.

## 1.0 Introduction and background to the study

This study explored early childhood development (ECD) stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare at two privately owned day care settings that enrol toddlers. The two day care centres are located in a selected district in Zimbabwe. The present researchers found it justifiable to investigate stakeholders' conceptualisations as these influence the state of quality childcare in day care settings. Research has revealed that most ECD settings the world over, provide childcare services far below the expectations of ECD experts. For example, the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centres (CQO) study, conducted in 1993-94, examined 401 centres in California, Colorado, Connecticut and North Carolina (Helburn, 1995). One of the study's major findings was that about 86% of the centres in the study provided mediocre or poor-quality services. Hayes, Palmer and Zaslow (1990) opine that the quality of childcare is important because it is closely linked with children's social, cognitive and language development. Hence, the current study explored stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality child care in day care settings and the extent which their perceptions impacted on service delivery.

Quality child care in ECD settings has been studied from a long time by researchers focusing on varied perspectives, for example, the role of programme quality in producing early childhood benefits (Fred, 1995), child care cost and quality (Helburn & Howes, 1996), child care centre quality and child development (Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010) and, child care directors' perceptions of continuity of care as determinant of quality childcare (2012). The current study's major focus was on ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare in toddler day care programmes. The stakeholders considered were day care proprietors, centre caregivers and parents of toddlers enrolled in day care settings. The researchers found

it necessary to explore ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare since it influences day care service provision.

The key motivations for conducting the study were threefold. Firstly, privately owned day care centres are mushrooming at an alarming rate in Zimbabwe's urban areas. The majority of day care centres are operating as private enterprises as day care has become a lucrative business in Zimbabwean cities like in other parts of the world. However, most of these centres are not registered with relevant authorities (Nziramanga, 1999; Dyanda, Mudukuti, Makoni and Kuyayama, 2006), and there also seems to be a casual attitude toward enforcement of licensing regulations by authorities. Licensing provides basic standards for day care centres to legally care for children (Elicker, Langhill, Ruprecht & Kwon, 2007). Hence, this study sought to find out if ECD stakeholders were aware of licensing regulations and their stipulations on quality childcare in ECD settings.

DeBord (2007) postulate that licensing of day care settings is an important determinant of quality childcare because it means that the day care centre meets the minimum standards for health, safety, and teacher qualifications. According to Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes and Cryer (1997) day care centres in countries with stricter licensing regulations provide better caregiver-ratios, employ caregivers with more education specific to early childhood, employ more experienced directors, and have fewer poor quality centres. In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education houses the National ECD Programme and through its Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 regulates the operation of ECD programmes. The Statutory Instruments outlines licensing requirements for ECD centres such as staff qualifications, curriculum, caregiver-child ratios and the physical environment. When day care centres operate without a license the question that comes to one's mind is: "Are ECD stakeholders

*aware of licensing regulations and the extent to which they determine quality child care?”*

Thus, the present researchers found it valid to seek stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare in day care settings when most centre operate unlicensed.

The second motivating factor for conducting the study was that most day care settings in Zimbabwe operate in buildings which were not initially meant for day care purposes. According to Nziramasanga (1999) and Dyanda et al (2006), ECD programmes are housed in buildings that range from classrooms, community halls, houses, open shades to open air space. Most urban day care settings operate from infrastructures which were initially residential buildings whose facilities are often inadequate for day care use. Over-populated environments have been known to trigger stress in young children (Colbert, 2002). Elements of physical environments such as amount of space, access to the outdoors, arrangement of rooms, availability of a variety of materials, air quality, equipment and lighting play a role not only in safety and health but in children's well-being, happiness and creativity, their learning to live in and with the natural environment and their cognitive and social development (Friendly & Beach, 2006). The physical environment is an important indicator of quality childcare. Thus, the researchers were justified to find out how ECD stakeholders conceptualised quality child care.

Lastly, the researchers were motivated to conduct the study by the fact that Zimbabwe has a shortage of qualified ECD personnel, paraprofessionals man most of the ECD centres (Nziramasanga, 1999; Dyanda et al, 2006). Staff qualifications are an important indicator of quality child care in day care settings just like in other sectors of education. Education and training provide caregivers with knowledge and skills required to care for young children (Elicker et al, 2007). The Cost and Quality Team (1995) reports that many studies have found

that caregivers with more formal schooling and specialised training are more attentive and nurturing in their behaviour toward children. The present researchers therefore found it suitable to find out how ECD stakeholders conceptualise quality childcare in the view that some staff were not qualified.

## **1.1 Literature review**

### **1.1.1 The concept quality childcare**

Quality childcare may be defined as childcare services that provide a responsive, developmentally appropriate environment for young children (DeBord, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the major preschool accrediting body in the United States, declares that a high quality early childhood programme provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development while responding to the needs of families (Child Care Aware, 2011). Quality childcare in settings for young children is an important issue because what happens to children in their first three years of life shapes every year after (Michigan State Board of Education, 2013). Illinois Action for Children (2012) points out that when development is occurring early in life, a child's experiences and environments have powerful influences on both their immediate development and subsequent functioning. Hence, the need for high quality childcare in day care settings.

Quality childcare has been repeatedly linked to positive developmental traits in children, including cognitive, social, and emotional development (Karjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010:1). Quality indicators measure the conditions that generally promote a safe, nurturing and interesting environment for children. American Academy of Paediatrics (2005) points out that indicators of high quality childcare have been studied and are available in many formats.

NAEYC indicators of quality childcare in ECD include: small group size, low teacher-child ratios, licensing compliance, developmentally appropriate curriculum, adequate teacher training, parent-teacher communication, and an environment that is safe and clean (DeBord, 2007). In addition to the NAEYC list of indicators, Korjenevitch and Dunifon (2010) suggest the following: minimal staff turnover, child assessment, warm and caring centre caregivers and teachers' salary. However, the current study focused on the NAEYC list as these are the basic and also that the study was small-scale. A discussion of each of the indicators is presented in the next sub-section.

### **1.1.2 Caregiver-child ratios**

High child-caregiver ratios and large groups normally pose problems for responsive care giving (Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010). When the ratios are high, the more difficult it may be for the caregiver to respond to each child's needs appropriately. Schweinhart (1988) states that when the number of children is high the caregiver has less time to provide the nurturing and attentive care which young children require and is less able to supervise effectively and this increases safety risks. Large numbers of toddlers per caregiver have negative effects for young children's development.

There are positive developmental outcomes for children if the groups are smaller because caregivers can provide the individualized care and one-on-one time for interactions and routines that infants and toddlers need (Lally, 2012). Smaller groups mean fewer disruptions and children's activities that are more purposeful. In small groups, very young children are able to make connections with caregivers and learn to understand other children (Lieberman, 1993). It is therefore essential to maintain favourable child-caregiver ratios in order to meet the recommendations of high quality childcare.

### **1.1.3 Caregiver qualifications**

Caregiver specialised training and experience in childcare is a predictor of high quality childcare (Click, 1996; Bredekamp, 1997). Several studies have established the value of trained staff by comparing programmes with qualified staff with programmes with unqualified staff. In comparison of programmes with trained staff, children had a better relationship with the lead caregiver, initiated more conversations and showed significant improvement in knowledge and skills (Travers and Godson, 1984 in Schweinhart, 1988). Without appropriately qualified staff, responsive care giving that young children heavily depend on may be minimal. Child Care Resource and Referral (2014) states that caregivers who are trained in ECD are more likely to organise appropriate activities which allow children to grow and learn. Caregiver education and training is important in the care of young children if they are to achieve their highest potential.

#### **1.1.4 Age Appropriate Environments**

The toddler environment should offer distinct areas for the various activities that take place (Click, 1996). Room arrangement should support the holistic nature of child development, and it is important to keep in mind that not all children will be involved in the same activity at any one time. Toddlers learn through continuously exploring and interacting with their environment, which includes the emotional climate of a child care setting as well as the physical space (NYS Child Care Coordinating Council, undated).

Small rooms hinder children's exploratory behaviours and this has negative outcomes for their development. Crowding and restricting children's movement is known to trigger stress and aggression in young children (Wilson et al, 1995). Since the motive to explore is deep rooted, the day care environment should be safe while allowing the greatest possibility for



exploration (Lieberman, 1993). Play materials should cater for both group and individual interests of the toddlers.

The toddler environment should also be extended to outdoors. It is common practice in most day care centres to have toddlers share playground space with preschool children. In such cases, the playground equipment and materials are largely developmentally appropriate for preschool children, and not suitable for toddlers (Click, 1996). It is ideal to have developmentally appropriate materials and equipment for toddlers. Playgrounds for toddlers should be planned in ways that consider children's safety and competences.

### 1.1.5 Communication with the Family

High quality infant-toddler programmes place an emphasis on day care caregivers working with parents and families for the children's benefit. Research has revealed that connections with children's home experiences are critically important for their all-round development (Lally, 2012). Both parents and day care caregivers contribute immensely to the child's development, so communication between the two parties is critical.

Communicating with the parents gives caregivers insight into the child's personal life. Caregivers can openly share information about the child's day with the parent, and the parent can share preferences, new milestones, "what works at home" tips, and so on with caregivers (Wilson et al, 1995). This nature of communication supports continuity of experiences between home and day care settings for the children. Continuity of experiences makes children's world more predictable and dependable (Lieberman, 1993). Contradictions in care giving may also be shown, for example, if the parent talks about smacking a child as a discipline strategy. ECD caregivers can then take the opportunity to advise parents of



appropriate strategies for disciplining young children. Likewise, day caregivers can share children's accomplishments and weaknesses with parents. This way, parents can continue to encourage their children and provide support outside the day care setting. Day caregivers and parents must work together in a spirit of cooperation for the optimal development of children.

### 1.1.6 Curriculum

Care giving routines are a main component of the toddler curriculum should be conducted in a way that benefit children's development. These routines are the basis for a significant part of the learning and development that occurs from birth to 3 years and provide opportunities for observing and supporting development across all domains (Bredekamp, 1997). Caregivers can slot in learning opportunities into the everyday routines of arrivals, departures, mealtimes, naptimes, and hand-washing. Daily routines provide natural opportunities for children to apply emerging knowledge and skills (Centre on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2007). For example, a toddler making a choice between two different coloured cups at snack time is learning to see differences and making choices.

There is no one curriculum for toddlers. The toddler curriculum activities emerge from the individual child's interests and abilities (Bredekamp, 1997). Early Childhood Infant-Toddler Newsletter Curriculum Edition (2013) assert that day care caregivers have a special responsibility to design each child's curriculum by observing, thinking, planning, and putting many different skills and information together using the developmental areas. Curriculum activities offered should promote development in the physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains. The domains represent crucial areas of early learning and development that contribute to young children's readiness for school (Wilson et al, 1995). Therefore, an

overemphasis in one domain or limited involvement in another may create unnecessary stress or may delay development.

The toddlerhood period is centred on exploration of the environment. Exploration for toddlers is a deep-rooted motive (Lieberman, 1993), and for this reason playrooms should be set up to encourage exploration and discovery. Examples of materials to provide are: a large variety of toys, various textured materials, sand and water play activities, shapes, art materials, things that open and close, mirrors, and push-and pull toys to explore should be provided (Wilson et al, 1995). Through interacting with these materials toddlers practise newly acquired skills, such as walking and talking.

#### **1.1.7 Licensing compliance**

The major advantage from licensing of child care institutions is its help in ensuring children's rights to care settings that protect them from harm and promote their healthy development (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2005). Helburn (1995) states research documents that countries with more effective regulatory structures have a greater supply of higher quality programmes. A day care centre licensed with state standards for ECD institutions provides assurance that the centre is meeting the minimal levels of safety, teaching standards, and proper curricula (Click, 1996).

State licensing standards are important for health, safety, and teacher qualifications, but they set a minimum standard, typically considerably below the recommendations of health and safety experts (Lally, 1995). When day care centres operate unlicensed it implies that the quality of childcare standards is most likely to be far below the expectations of childcare professionals. Children cared for in such environments are being exposed to several risks that are likely to impede their development.

## 1.2 Research questions

- 1.2.1 What is quality childcare in day care settings?
- 1.2.2 How do ECD stakeholders conceptualise quality childcare?
- 1.2.3 What is the impact of stakeholders' conceptualisations on quality childcare delivery in day care settings?

## 1.3 Statement of the problem

Quality childcare in toddler day care settings is an important subject because the nature of quality provided to a large extent determines the present and future growth and development of young children. Several studies have revealed that most day care settings the world over provide quality that is far below indicators of high quality childcare. Yet again, most day care centres fail to meet state ECD regulatory frameworks which often require minimum standards as compared to high quality childcare criterion. Amidst such research reports, it was crucial to find out how ECD stakeholders conceptualised quality childcare and the extent to which their understanding of the concept impacted on service delivery in day care settings.

## 1.4 Methodology

The present study was largely qualitative, and employed the observation, questionnaire and interview as data collection methods. Multi-data collection methods were used in order to enhance triangulation. Two privately owned day care centres which enrol toddlers were purposively selected and used as case studies. In the study the two day care centres were referred to as centre A and B respectively. Two day care proprietors (who also served as centre directors), eight caregivers and 20 parents participated in the study. Half of participants in different categories were chosen from each of the day care centres.

The data collection process commenced with the administration of questionnaires to caregivers and parents, and was followed by observations of day care facilities and activities. Two-hour observations conducted over 15 days were done at each day care centre to examine quality of child care vis-à-vis indicators of quality child care. An observation checklist developed by the researchers was used to check on the following aspects of quality childcare: caregiver-child ratios and group size, licensing compliance, curriculum, parent-caregiver communication, and the environment. Observations were important in that they yielded data on how stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality child care impacted on its provision. Lastly, separate individual interviews were conducted with the two day care proprietors.

### **1.5 Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings**

Data was presented according to topics formulated from the sub-research questions. After presenting each set of data, findings were drawn and discussed subsequently.

#### **1.5.1 Stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare**

An analysis of data gathered through the questionnaire and interview revealed that caregivers, parents and day care proprietors had a limited conceptualisation of quality childcare. The participants gave varying definitions of quality childcare and described aspects they thought constituted quality child care. Some of the features used to define quality childcare were: good caregivers, nice food, clean place, child activities such as counting songs, rhymes, drawings; using English as medium for instruction etc. Probing did not yield much data as

most participants maintained their responses. Even though some of these features are subsumed under certain quality childcare indicators, the participants' descriptions were rather simplistic.

The narrow conceptualisation of quality child care by day care caregivers and proprietors could have been as a result of their lack of training in ECD. Most ECD centres in Zimbabwe are manned by paraprofessionals or untrained teachers (Nziramasanga, 1999; Dyanda et al, 2006). Issues to do with quality childcare can only be attained through a comprehensive college training in ECD. Caregivers with special training in ECD are better able to help young children learn and develop (Fiene, 2002). The California Childcare Health Programme (2006) point out that in addition to training, gaining continuing education through workshops and courses is important to help caregivers to keep up-to-date on developments in the ECD field. For day care proprietors, managing a childcare programme is a challenging task that requires both early childhood and business management knowledge (Child Care Aware, 2011).

The National Day Care Study of 1979 established that day care staff need to have courses and practicum in day care, early childhood education, child development, and child psychology (Schweinhart, 1988). In another study, children with appropriately qualified caregivers showed improved standardised cognitive tests scores, language and emotional skills (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). It is only through specialisation that both day care proprietors and caregivers are able to conceptualise issues to do with quality childcare.

Even if parents were influential stakeholders in day care programmes, they could not articulate quality childcare issues comprehensively. Most parents said that they had opted to

enrol their children at the two day care centres after having been referred by friends or relatives. The remaining few parents said that they opted for the day care centres because the buildings looked attractive and the care givers were welcoming. When selecting childcare for their child, some studies suggest that parents place cost and convenience above warm interactions with caregivers, while others endorse the importance of the nature of the interactions between the child and caregiver (Helburn & Howes, 1996).

Parents wanted their children to be engaged in academic work from an early age and this they affirmed, had helped their friends' or relatives' children to obtain grade one places at elite schools. The parents' argument was also confirmed by observations of the two day centres activities, the toddler curriculum was inclined toward academic work. During observations researchers noted that most of the activities done involved the whole class, with the caregivers taking the lead. The children were rarely engaged in individual activities.

Engaging toddlers in early academics is not consistent with how toddlers grow and develop. According Lally (2000) cited in National Infant-Toddler Initiative (2010), in high quality infant-toddler programmes, the interests of the child and the belief that each child has a curriculum are what drive practice. The caregiver's role is not to teach, but to observe and reflect on what toddlers are experiencing and then to support the process through interactions in an environment that contributes to the child's success (Early Childhood Infant-Toddler Newsletter Curriculum Edition, 2013). The implementation of a well-planned, individualised curriculum is a hallmark of high-quality programmes for infants and toddlers (National Infant-Toddler Initiative, 2010). Toddlers learn through exploring of their environment. Within the environment they need toys and activities selected primarily for individual

interests and abilities rather than one-size-fits-all group play (NYS Child Care Coordinating Council, undated, p.2).

Routine activities such as toileting, eating and rest periods were mostly done without being utilised as learning moments for children. Routines are an important aspect of the toddler curriculum because they help children learn to predict what will happen next and this helps them feel secure and prepared (Wilson et al, 1995). Poorly managed routines can have negative effects on young children's development. The California Childcare Health Programme (2006) posit that routines provide the base upon which to explore and develop the social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical skills toddlers need. Children who are familiar with day care routines are more likely to be engaged, attentive, and learn new knowledge (Centre for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2007). Understanding the developmental benefits of routines for toddlers requires centre caregivers with adequate education and training in ECD.

### **1.5.2 Stakeholders lacked awareness of regulations on quality childcare**

Day care proprietors, caregivers and parents revealed ignorance of ECD regulations that stipulate quality childcare in Zimbabwean day care settings. They were not aware of the regulations probably because they had not gone through the licensing process as it emerged that both day care centres were not registered. Day care staff however, stated that they knew that day care centres should be registered with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. They said that education and health officials who occasionally visited their day care settings talked about the issue of licensing in a casual manner and did not avail any policy documents.



Parents said that they thought the centres were licensed and had not bothered to check because they were satisfied of the day care services provided. Studies have established that parents seem to pay little attention to issues such as licensing and staff qualifications. For example, an Illinois study indicated that more than 40% of the low-income parents surveyed did not consider it important if their child's provider were licensed, and the Study of Family Child Care and Relative Care found that, when asked about their reasons for selecting their current provider, mothers almost never mentioned formal credentials such as education and licensing (Siegel & Howes, 1989 in Helburn & Howes, 1996).

In Zimbabwe, quality childcare specifications are outlined in Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005: Early Childhood Development Regulations. According to the instrument no centre should proceed to operate without having satisfied the licensing requirements and received written approval from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. DeBord (2007) states that licensing of centres is important because it means that the facility has met the child care regulations set by the state. State licensing standards are important for health, safety, and teacher qualifications, but they set a minimum standard, typically considerably below the recommendations of health and safety experts (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2005). Children cared for in unlicensed settings face many risks which may hinder them from reaching their full potential in terms of development.

### **1.5.3 Stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare impacted on quality childcare provision**

Data from all the instruments and mainly the observation, indicated that stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare impacted negatively on service delivery at the two daycares. Data is presented under different quality childcare indicators. Licensing

compliance, staff qualifications and curriculum have already been discussed and will therefore not be presented in the section.

### **1.5.3.1 Caregiver-child ratios group size**

In both day care centres caregiver-child ratios were high. Day care centre A and B had 15 and 20 toddlers respectively, each group under the care of one adult. Although there was a helper for each class, the aides would only come during meal and toilet routines, and then got back to their usual kitchen duties. High quality childcare recommends a ratio of 1:5 to 1:6 with not more than 12 toddlers in a group (Wilson et, 1995). When the number of children is high, the more difficult it is for the caregiver to respond to each child's individual needs. Liberman (1993) opines that at any one particular time, in group care, different children seek immediate gratification, keep on demanding attention, can be negative, ask questions and expect answers. Providing responsive care in such situations is unrealistic for one adult.

Research on brain development indicates that the quantity of responsive care giving that young children get positively affects the connections between neurons in the brain (Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007). Child Care Aware (2011) asserts that small group sizes are particularly important for young who children need more individual attention and can become overwhelmed large groups. In addition, Fiene (2002) states that small group size reduces the risk of infection in toddler programmes. So large numbers of children in a group has detrimental effects on the child's overall development.

### **1.5.3.2 Day care environments**

The playrooms for toddlers in the two day care centres were small and served multi-purpose functions of playing, eating and resting. The day care infrastructures were residential

buildings which had been changed to day care use without much renovations. On the whole, most of facilities were not proportionate to the centres' enrolment. The environments were clean though crowded. Cramped playrooms expose children to the risk of infection (Fiene, 2002). Environments for young children need to be safe and clean in order for children to develop well.

Day care centres need to have child-centred areas with accessible child-sized equipment and space to rest, space to be alone, and to mix in a group (Click, 1996). The California Childcare Health Programme (2006) maintains that the physical environments in high-quality toddlers programmes should be designed to enable toddlers to experience: well-being; a sense of belonging; confidence in exploration; growing skill in communication; and the opportunity to contribute. Such opportunities are only achievable in facilities that have been built for day care purposes and in which equipment and materials have been arranged to meet the toddlers' needs and interests. The type, quality and amount of facilities, furnishings, equipment and other learning materials in the day care centre play a crucial role in advancing the development of toddlers. Click (1996) suggests that play materials and other facilities such as bathrooms should be sufficient and suitable to children's age, developmental skills, culture and relate to what toddlers are learning.

High-quality toddler environments should facilitate active play and exploration for children. Harper-Browne and Raikes (2012) say that day care environments should offer choices for safe exploration with appropriately challenging materials. Group activities led by the caregiver are inappropriate for toddlers who are still in the exploratory phase. Harper-Browne and Raikes further mention that attentive caregivers are present to read individual children's cues and offer materials as toddlers indicate interest.

#### 1.5.3.4 Parent-caregiver communication

Data gathered at the two day care centres showed that there was some communication going on between parents and centre caregivers. The researchers observed parents and caregivers sharing information about children's experiences both at home and at the day care centre during drop-off and pick-up periods. Communication books between parents and centre caregivers about on issues to do to with children were available. However, we noted that most of the communication was more of reminders to parents of items required at the centre, child developmental issues were rarely part of the communication.

Parents and home environments have the greatest impact on a child's developmental outcomes and consistency in care giving is also a critical factor in supporting a child's development (National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative, 2010 p. 33). For these reasons there is need for a strong parent-caregiver partnership if toddlers are to grow and develop well. The communication from one to the other enables sharing information about the child that facilitates the other's ability to maintain continuities in children's experiences and be attuned to the child's health, states and learning (Harper-Browne and Raikes, 2012 p.23).

On-going communication between the home and centre caregivers promotes consistency and security in the lives of toddlers. When centre caregivers are trained, they are more able to provide appropriate advice to young parents and to those that have unrealistic expectations on their child through the daily communications. Daniels (1995) is of the view that quality parent-caregiver relationships in ECD programmes is associated with other quality indicators. On-going communication between home and day care centre may reveal family interaction practices that do not support the young child's development (National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative, 2010). In such circumstances, ECD caregivers can take the opportunity to

educate parents on ways to help the child grow and develop. However, caregivers need to do this in a subtly way without making parents feel inadequate.

## 1.6 Conclusions and recommendations

Basing on the findings of study, the researchers concluded that ECD stakeholders' conceptualisation of quality childcare contributed to poor quality provision at day care settings. Day care proprietors and centre caregivers had a limited understanding of the concept quality childcare and resultantly failed to provide it. Likewise, parents seemed not conversant with quality childcare issues and therefore chose day care centre options for their children basing on minor features of indicators of quality childcare. The study also concluded that care giving for toddlers in day care settings was below the expected standards.

The study therefore made the following recommendations:

- Authorities responsible for the ECD regulatory framework conscientise ECD stakeholders on childcare quality matters so that they have an informed conceptualisation of the issue and improve quality in day care settings.
- ECD stakeholders seek information on quality childcare in day care settings from government ministries and departments responsible for regulating day care programmes in order to provide quality services to children and their families.
- Government departments responsible for monitoring ECD programmes ensure that all day care centres are licensed and continually supervise these as a way of observing and safeguarding children's rights.

The present study's findings are not conclusive on quality childcare matters in day care settings. Further research on conceptualisation of quality childcare by those responsible for enforcing ECD regulations and, why they seem reluctant in enforcing regulations needs to be explored. The findings of such a research will inform policy makers on how the issue of quality childcare in day care settings can be tackled so that young children's lives are not endangered.



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