

# Early Childhood Care and Transition in South Africa and Ethiopia: A quest for quality education

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## Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) has a crucial contribution to the future life of children, and overall quality of learning and development of a country. Even though there are no well-established international criteria to evaluate the quality of ECCE programmes because of the variability in nations' economic, workforces, political regimes and cultures, there are some common standards. Early childhood is a time of remarkable physical, cognitive, social and emotional development which is crucial in preparing children for school. An appropriate investment in early childhood development can positively impact on national health, education and socio-economic outcomes. The importance of investment in early childhood development (ECD) is well documented (Camilli, Barnett, Ryan & Vargas, 2010; Diale, 2019; Van der Gaag, 2002, WHO, 2020). Diale and Sewagegn (2021) explore crucial status of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia and its contribution to quality education. Diale (2019) further refers to the four key aspects for equipping children with skills necessary for transitioning based on the South African National Development Policy (2015) namely:

- Development of emotional wellbeing, social interaction and sensorimotor development, preparing the ground for early learning;
- Language development and story-telling
- Play, creativity, critical thinking and exploration; and
- Development of concepts of early literacy and numbers.

There is an existing gap in early childhood development in South Africa and Ethiopia. While both countries have shown growing efforts and interest in improving the quality of ECCE/ECD, there is still need for the career development needs of practitioners in both countries. To show some statistics, South Africa's ECD Census 2021 sheds light on what preschools and education centres are like at the moment.

### South Africa has

- 42 420 Early Learning Programmes (about 60% are urban, 40% are rural)
- Employing 198 361 staff members
- 1.6million children enrolled at ELPs

### Registration status with the Department of Social Development

- 40% are fully or conditionally registered as a partial care facility, an early learning programme or both
- 16% are in the process of registering
- 42% of programmes are not registered
- 33% receive a subsidy from DSD

### ECD Centre Staff qualifications:

- 22% have no teaching qualification at all
- 26% have attended a skills training programme
- 52% have a relevant qualification

### Facts about ECD Centre infrastructure:

- 86% are in a formal structure, 14% are not
- 40% do not have a flush toilet
- 55% have access to running water inside the premises
- 22% exclusively use a bowl or bucket to wash their hands

### Facts about ECD Centre materials for learning and playing:

- 34% do not have an outdoor play area with suitable equipment
- 44% do not have access to age-appropriate books
- 50% do have materials for counting (50% do not)
- 41% do have theme tables (59% do not)
- 52% do have play dough or similar (48% do not)
- 37% do have instruments for rhythm (63% do not)

For Practitioners in rural and township areas - professional career development remains a big challenge. To comprehensively address this challenge, there is need to understand and identify professional career development needs of ECD practitioners.

## Theoretical Framework

The Bio-Ecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was used as a theoretical framework that grounded the study. The theory indicates the interaction between individual ECD practitioners' development and the systems within the social context that play an important role in determining the kind of support they need.

While the study engaged in a review based on document analysis from different sources in Ethiopia to determine common quality dimensions for ECCE, and challenges Ethiopia faces in ECCE, within the South African context, a qualitative study was undertaken as understanding ECD practitioner career development cannot be separated from the broader social context within which the ECD practitioner live and work.

## Methodology

A qualitative research approach with a Generic qualitative research design. Data was collected through Document analysis from different sources (Ethiopia and South Africa) and open-ended questionnaires and semistructured, face-to-face interviews (South Africa). Descriptive narrative analysis was used to analyse documents both in Ethiopia and South Africa.

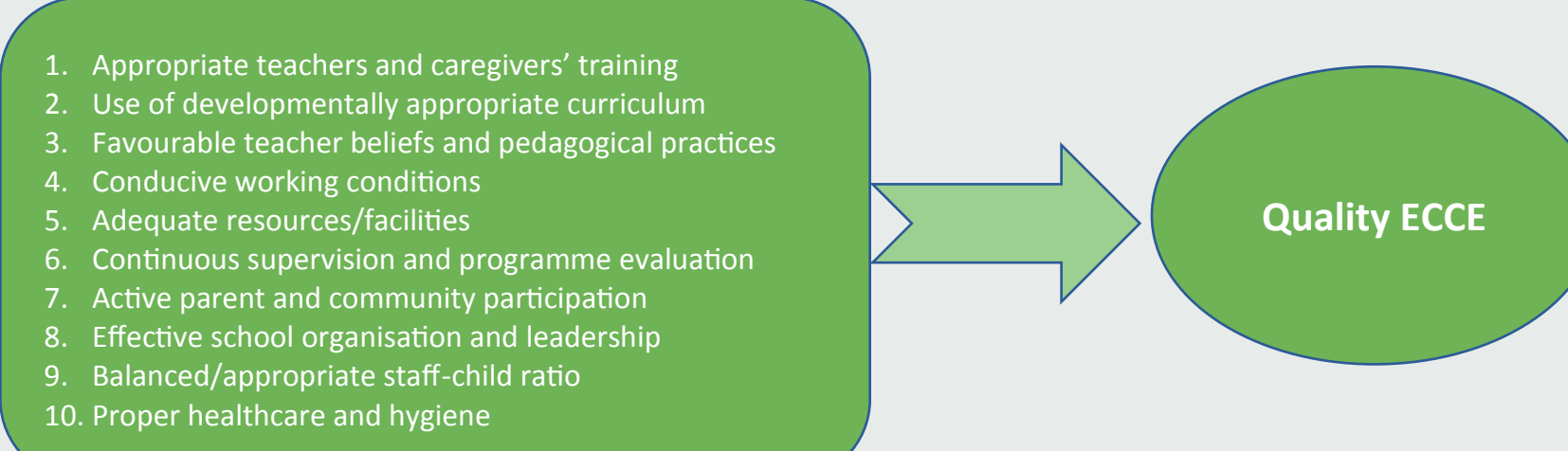
This was followed by a Thematic data analysis of interviews from South African participants. Participants were ECD practitioners in a township setting

## Ethical clearance

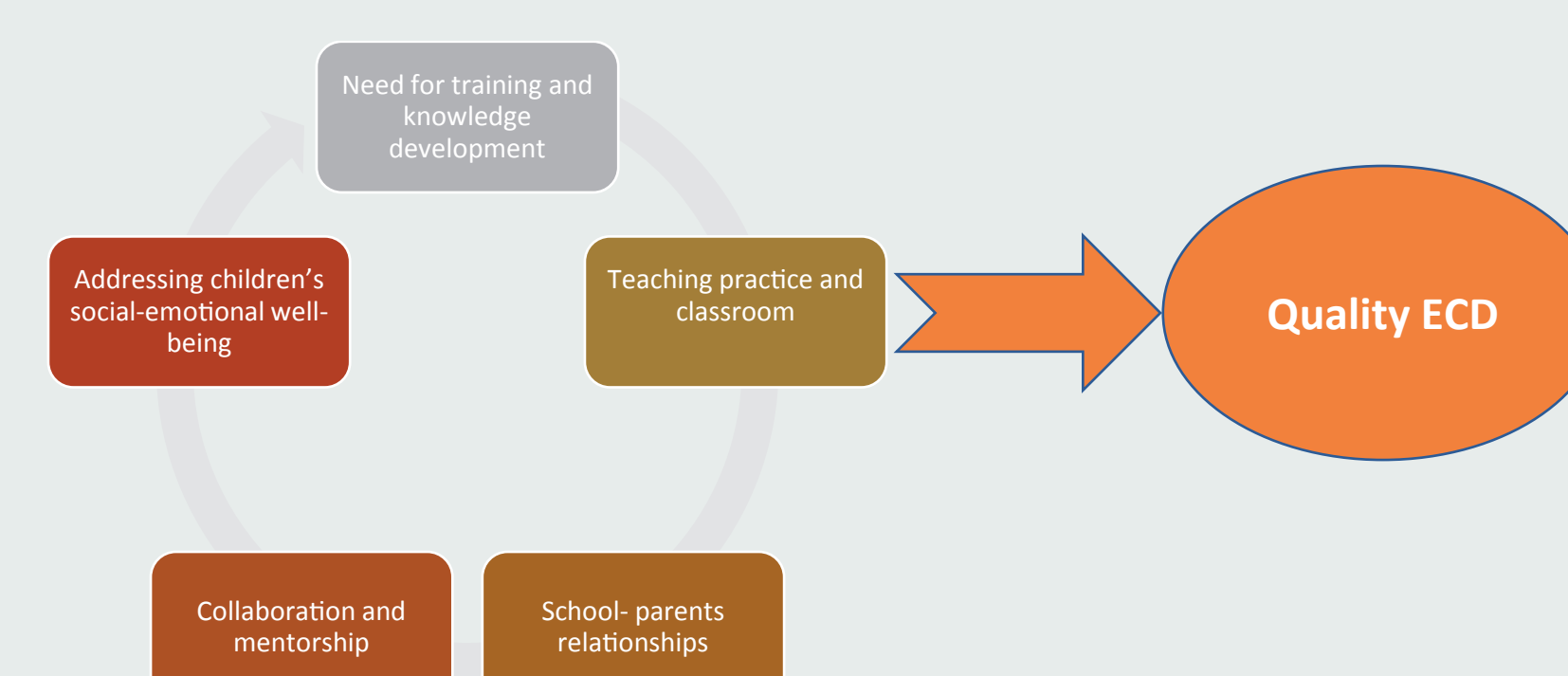
Approval was received for the study from the Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg.

## Findings

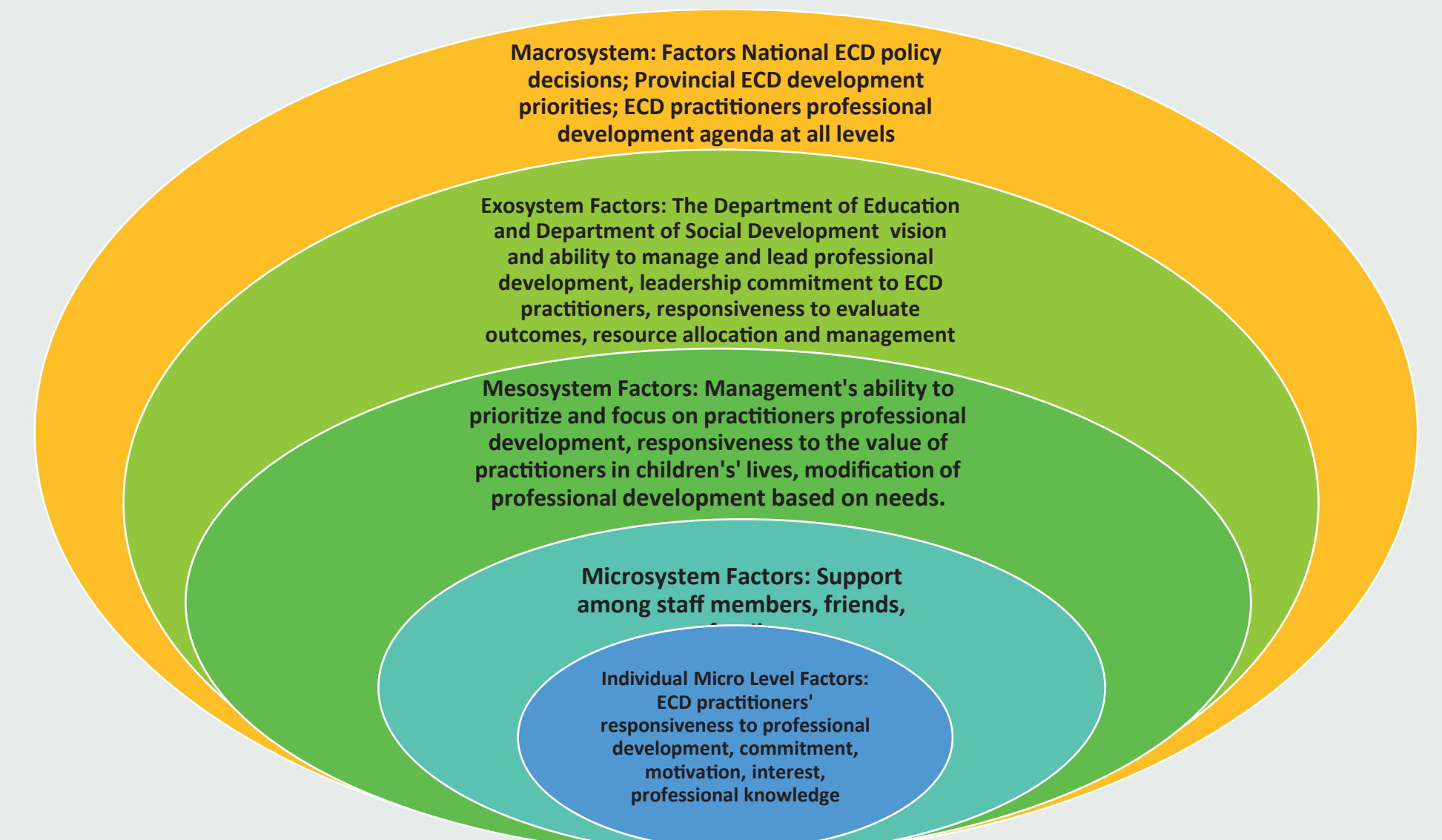
There were two sets of findings relating ECD from the two countries. From the document analysis of the Ethiopian study, ten indicators of quality ECCE were identified



From the South African qualitative data collection, the following five main themes were identified in this research from the analysis of the questionnaires and individual interviews:



## Recommendations



## Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study provides the basis for a multi-country study within the African continent. ECD practitioners need focused training and development and institutions offering training must ensure they address the needs of practitioners in communities. Future studies should include ECD practitioners from different countries in Africa. A comparative study - different social economic and cultural backgrounds and levels will add value to ECD. Furthermore, an impact study on the effectiveness of professional development programmes offered to ECD practitioners both by public and private service providers. While participants are aware of obstacles and barriers to their professional development and they are cognizant of ways to overcome them, there is a need for action from policymakers and institutions of higher education to develop vECD practitioners to improve the quality of education in the country and meet the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of Quality Education for All.

## Note of thanks

We want to thank the participants who committed to giving their experiences and voice as ECD practitioners. We look forward to a multi-country study that will focus on ECD in the continent.

## Declaration

The presenters have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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