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Lesenyego, Tshegofatso Dimpho

2025

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Investigating mechanisms and programmes for the provision of quality Early Childhood Education for immigrant children

Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego
2259221

Research report submitted in *partial* fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Masters* in Migration and Displacement,
Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr Liztie Prinsloo

ABSTRACT

This study explores the provision of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for immigrant children in South Africa, focusing on the integration of these children into the formal schooling system. Given the growing number of immigrant families in South Africa and the challenges faced by immigrant children in accessing education, this study investigated how Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres conceptualise and implement ECE for immigrant learners. Through a qualitative approach, this study gathered insights from teachers, principals and parents/guardians in both formal and informal ECD settings. The study identified critical barriers such as language difficulties, social exclusion, lack of documentation and insufficient policy support, which hinder the integration of immigrant children into the education system (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). Furthermore, the study examined existing programmes and mechanisms within ECD centres aimed at fostering a smooth transition into formal schooling, highlighting both the successes and the challenges in the current system (Babane, 2020). Findings indicate that whilst South Africa's national ECD policies aim to provide equitable access to education, there remain significant gaps in their implementation, particularly in under-resourced and informal settings (DBE, 2021). Based on these findings, the study offers recommendations to improve teacher training, foster parental involvement, enhance policy frameworks and address resource limitations in ECD centres. The study contributes to the ongoing development of inclusive educational practices and policies that ensure immigrant children's right to quality education in South Africa (UNICEF, 2020).

Keywords

Immigrant children, Early Childhood Education (ECE), Early Childhood Development (ECD), immigration integration, South Africa, education policy, teacher training, multilingualism, education barriers.

DECLARATION

I, Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego, hereby declare that this project is my own work. It is being submitted as part of the at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This report has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university

SIGNATURE 

DATE: 30 March 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has been a long and challenging one, I am eternally grateful for the abundance of God's grace and providence throughout.

To my Supervisor, Dr Liztie Prinsloo, thank you so much for your patience. For reminding me each day that I am capable, this work wouldn't have been possible without your enormous support and guidance. May God richly bless you.

I wish to thank all the ECD centres and parents who trusted me with their time and information. I am highly grateful for your willingness to participate.

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my family: my dad, Sebatana Lesenyego, my constant pillar, thank you for your encouragement and unwavering support throughout this process, may the Lord continue to keep and bless you. My late mother, Kenosi Lesenyego, who was there with me when I began this journey, I am so humbled and grateful that you are always with me in spirit. My loving siblings and my nephew for your prayers and immense support, always reminding me I can do it. My partner, Lungelo Masondo, thank you for standing with me through it all, I am deeply grateful for your love, patience and invaluable support.

Thank you to all my extended family friends for your words of encouragement and support.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA)

Community Works Programme (CWP)

Department of Education (DoE)

Department of Basic Education (DBE)

Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs (CoGTA)

Department of Social Development (DSD)

Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early Learning Programmes (ELPs)

Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA)

Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)

The Housing Development Agency (HDA)

National Curriculum Framework (NCF)

National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS)

National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP)

National Plan for Action for Children (NPAC)

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs)

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, migration continues to shape the socio-economic and educational landscape of host countries. Immigrant children, in particular, face numerous challenges in accessing quality education, which is crucial for their development and integration into society. Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a fundamental role in laying the foundation for cognitive, social and emotional development, ensuring that children are prepared for formal schooling.

South Africa, often referred to as the 'Rainbow Nation" is home to a diverse population, including a growing number of immigrant families. Guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes humanity, compassion and interconnectedness, the country has committed itself to inclusive education policies aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their background. However, despite these commitments, immigrant children frequently encounter barriers such as language differences, xenophobia, and limited access to well-resourced educational environments. These challenges raise critical questions about the extent to which the principles of Ubuntu are realized in practice, particularly within the early childhood sector.

This study examines the provision of quality ECE of immigrant learners in South Africa, focusing on the curriculum, policies and mechanisms in place to support their integration. It explores how quality education is conceptualised and implemented within the country's early learning institutions and the role of the policy in facilitating or hindering inclusive educational experiences. This chapter provides an overview of the study beginning with a background on international migrations and its implications for education in South Africa. The rationale and significance of this study are outlined followed by a discussion of the research problem, aim, objectives and research questions that guided this study. The chapter concludes with defining key terms and an outline of the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Context and background to study

To understand quality education for immigrant learners in host countries, it's important to understand the various factors within education. Migration has become a defining feature of global societies, significantly shaping educational landscapes worldwide. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were approximately 281 million international immigrants in 2020, an increase of 128 million since 1990 (IOM, 2024). From the period 1980, Africa experienced increased intra-continental mobility consequential to the rising political instability in

the continent, resulting in refugees from neighbouring countries such as Somalia, Mozambique, Sudan into various countries including South Africa, Ghana and Kenya (Thomas & Mara, 2024).The movement of immigrants is often motivated by their circumstance impacting their quality of lives and during this process, immigrant children become exposed to various environmental stressors and trauma (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021). Migration is influenced by political, social and environmental factors, often leading individuals and families to seek better living conditions, including access to quality education (Bağcı, 2019). For immigrant children, education is a crucial tool for integration, social mobility, and personal development, yet they often face systemic barriers that hinder their academic success.

Studies on immigrant education in Europe and North America reveal persistent challenges, including language barriers, socio-economic disadvantages, cultural adaption and policy constrains (Norozi, 2023). In countries like Norway and Germany, despite efforts to integrate immigrant learners through language programmes and multicultural education policies, immigrant learners continue to experience lower academic performance compared to native students (Hermansen & Birkelund, 2015; Norozi, 2023). This is often referred to as the 'Matthew Effect' where those with early advantages in education continue to accumulate more benefits, while disadvantaged learners, including many immigrant learners, struggle to catch up (Bağcı, 2019). One of the most critical barriers for immigrant learners is the lack of inclusive policies that support their integration into formal schooling. Research from Lithuania and Norway highlights how host countries often prioritize language assimilation over a holistic educational approach that considers the well-being and cultural identity of immigrant learners (Norozi, 2023). This absence of effective policies just adds to educational inequalities, limiting the ability of immigrant learners to fully integrate into their new societies.

South Africa has a long history of migration, with both regional and international immigrants contributing to the country's demographic and economic composition. South Africa is home to more than 2.4 million international immigrants, which equates more than 3% of the total population. (Stats SA, 2023). According to the 2022 census there are 956 120 immigrant households in South Africa (Stats SA, 2024). Immigrant households are identified by using the country of birth of the household head. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) press report, as of 2022 South Africa also hosts about 66 596 refugees and 84 316 asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022). This number is also inclusive of children who moved with their parents/guardians and those who are unaccompanied in an effort to find a better life in terms of accessing improved healthcare, education and better job opportunities (Spreen & Vally, 2012). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) utilising data from UNDESA, estimated the global number of child immigrants below 18 years to be around 36 million in 2020 (Migration Data Portal, 2024). The movement of immigrants is often motivated by their circumstance impacting

their quality of lives and during this process, immigrant children become exposed to various environmental stressors and trauma (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021).

Despite South Africa's commitment to Ubuntu many immigrant children continue to encounter challenges such as language barriers, social exclusion, xenophobia and policy gaps (Isseri et al., 2018; Mohamed, 2015; Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). South African schools, particularly in urban areas, have become increasingly diverse, yet the education system has not fully adapted to accommodate multilingual and multicultural learner populations. Research by Babane (2020) highlights how language barriers contribute to bullying, social isolation and poor psychosocial well-being among immigrant learners in Gauteng primary schools. Another challenge sees how xenophobic attitudes in schools and broader society further marginalize immigrant learners, making it difficult for them to integrate into the education system (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). Many immigrant learners are forced into informal schooling arrangements or excluded form Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes due to legal uncertainties regarding their documentation status. This exclusion is in contradiction with South Africa's constitutional commitment to equal education and its obligations under the international human rights treaties. It is therefore important to highlight the ECD curriculum, programmes, mechanisms and the policy infrastructure in place for immigrant learners in South Africa.

The South African government has made efforts to create an inclusive educations system that aligns with international standards such as the United Nations 2023 agenda for sustainable development goals. The National Integrated ECD policy aims to provide equitable access to early learning opportunities for all children, regardless of nationality or document status (Department of Social Development [DSD], 2015). The implementation of this, however, remains to have gaps. Many ECD centres, particularly in under-resourced areas, lack the funding, training and infrastructure to accommodate immigrant learners effectively. Unregistered ECD centres, where many immigrant leaners are enrolled, often struggle to meet government subsidy requirements, leaving them vulnerable to closure and depriving immigrant learners of critical early learning opportunities (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2022a)

Additionally, South African education policies have inconsistencies regarding the inclusion of undocumented immigrant children. While the constitution guarantees the right to basic education for all children, practical barriers such as school admission requirements, language policies and bureaucratic red tape make it difficult for immigrant families to enrol their children in formal schooling (Babane, 2020). Language policies in particular continue to be a contentious issue, with many schools offering instruction primarily in English or Afrikaans despite many immigrant learners coming from different indigenous language backgrounds (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020).

In light of the above this study sought to explore how ECE is understood and contextualized by South African teachers and what provision is taken to ensure equitable quality education and integration of immigrant learners.

1.3 Problem statement

According to the National Integrated ECD Policy (NIECDP) (DSD, 2015), programmes in the centres need to include psychological support of young children and their families, and those that promote "the child's early emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development" (DSD, 2015). The research problem takes into the consideration the lack of attention and recognition of the relationship between the quality of overall education in ECD centres and the development of immigrant learners relating policy frameworks aiding their integration into the schooling system by analysing the prescribed curriculum as well as experiences from teachers and parents/guardians.

1.4 Rationale

South Africa's commitment to inclusive education is rooted in its efforts to redress historical inequalities and align with international frameworks such as the United Nations 2030 agenda (United Nations, 2015) for sustainable development goals and the African Chater on the rights and welfare of the children. As part of these commitments, the government has prioritized ECD through policies like the National Integrated policy for ECD (DSD, 2015), which aims to provide equitable access to early learning opportunities for all children, including immigrant children. These children, despite these policy frameworks, continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality ECD services in South Africa

The number of immigrant learners in South Africa's schooling system continues to rise. In 2023 the number of immigrant learners in pre-Grade R-12 was 37 856 males and 38 949 females, with a total of 76 805 learners increasing every year (Stats SA, 2024). According to UNICEF in 2020, there were more than 642,000 immigrant or displaced children currently living in South Africa, which made us a country with the largest child immigrant population on the continent. (UNICEF, 2020). The South African government since 1994 has worked hard to deconstruct the exclusive education policies and systems formulated by the apartheid government, through developing a progressive and inclusive education system and policies that seeks to progress the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. The fourth goal speaks about the provision of equal and quality ECD and primary education for all children (United Nations, 2015). In its efforts to ensure that the right to education is realised, in 2015 the government approved and adopted a National Integrated Policy for ECD (DSD, 2015).

The government has also worked to align the education system and policies with Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1999). The charter highlights the right to education of every child as it contributes to the developing "a child's personality, talents, mental health and physical abilities." The Charter continues to emphasise the importance of providing education as a means of safeguarding the fundamental human right and freedoms for every child. ECD is defined as a child's early learning and development from birth through to the transitioning phase into formal schooling system (DSD, 2015).

The National Integrated Policy for ECD (DSD, 2015) is a vital policy in that it aims to prioritise among others "an overarching multi-sectoral enabling framework of ECD services, inclusive of national, provincial and local spheres of government." According to Harrison (2020), knowledge within the early childhood care and education sector is disorganised and this due to lack of communication amongst stakeholders.

With South Africa seeing a growing number in immigrant children, many of these children living in informal settlements are facing multiple challenges including access to healthcare, education and social services (Impact SA, 2022). The ECD sector has the potential to play an important role in reducing these barriers faced by immigrant children. Bureaucratic barriers, financial barriers, and lack of policy clarity on programmes that foster inclusivity and integration of disadvantaged immigrants in the system, impacts the future learning of children. Funding in this sector remains a contributing factor to these challenges, especially to unregistered/ informal ECDs where the most vulnerable children and informal ECDs face exclusion due to them not meeting the funding standards of subsidies (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023). According to the Department of Basic Education 2021 ECD Census Report (DBE, 2021), less than 56% ECD centres were registered. In its effort to combat these multi-folded challenges, in April 2022, the government decided to transfer the functioning of ECD from DSD to the DBE (DBE, 2025a). The functions of the DBE among others include developing the early learning curriculum, ensuring continuity and smooth transition between early learning and Grade R, and ensuring universal availability and quality inclusive learning opportunities and registration (DBE, 2021).

Given the above, this study sought to examen how ECE is conceptualised and implemented for immigrant learners in South Africa. This was done by exploring the curriculum, policies and institutional mechanisms in place, as well as the experiences of the teachers, principals and parents, this research aimed to identify barriers and challenges of the stakeholders in ECD education for immigrant learners. Ultimately this research sought to contribute to policy development and educational practice by offering insights into how South Africa and enhance equitable access to ECD services in line with its constitutional commitments and international obligations.

1.5 Research questions and objectives

1.5.1 Research questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

Primary research question:

How is ECE for immigrants in ECDs conceptualised and implemented to foster their development and integration into formal schooling system by policy, teachers and parents/guardians?

Secondary research questions:

a. What are the existing programmes and mechanisms in ECD that promotes an improved transition in the formal schooling system?

b. What are the experiences of teachers and parents/guardians of immigrant children in ECD centres with regards to the quality of education and the children's integration?

c. How does ECE aid immigrant children in their ability to transition and integrate into formal schooling system?

d. How do policies or systems address gaps or barriers in ECD sector impacting the quality of education experienced by immigrant children?

e. How would a cooperative support structure aimed at providing quality ECE, and child integration look like based on the perception and experiences of teachers and parents/guardians?

1.5.2 Research objectives

This study aimed to understand how ECE for immigrant children in ECDs is conceptualised and implemented to foster their development and integration into formal schooling system.

The following objectives will be pursued:

- To evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of existing ECD curriculum, programmes and mechanisms aimed at facilitating children's transition into the formal schooling system for immigrant learners in education institutions.
- To investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers and parents/guardians of immigrant children in ECD centres regarding the quality of education and the integration process into their new communities.

- To examine how ECE supports the transition and integration of immigrant children into the formal schooling system, with an emphasis on the key factors contributing to successful integration.

1.6 Significance of this study

This study sought to highlight the imperativeness of equitable quality education for all children in the South African context. Whether an immigrant is documented or undocumented, language and the lack of policy frameworks are considered among others, factors contributing to barriers that slows down integration. The significance of this study is to highlight the importance of quality ECE in building a progressive, inclusive and developed society. This study also contributes to the body of knowledge to assist policy makers and ECD practitioners regarding the level of quality of education for immigrant children in relations to their needs beyond ECD.

1.7 Literature and Theoretical Framework

Understanding quality education for immigrant children requires an exploration of ECD policy and challenges within host countries. This section focuses on integration programmes, quality ECD for immigrant learners and financing mechanisms for ECD centres.

1.7.1 Integrative programmes for immigrant learners

There seems to be a literature gap relating to the quality of ECD programmes for immigrant children. ECD is considered a priority sector in South Africa, and the most focus has been on ensuring equity, access and improved quality care of children aged 0-5 years old (Mbarathi & Diga, 2016). The focus however has been lacking in respect to immigrant children's experience in ECD, particularly those in rural areas and townships. The authors maintain that ECD has the ability to positively develop the ability of a child to transition into the schooling system. It is therefore vital to ensure that the appropriate programmes and resources are implemented and utilised in ECDs with immigrant children. However, Mbarathi and Diga (2016) highlights the "unevenness" within the ECD sector relating to the poor quality of the centres and programmes particularly in urban informal settlements. Programmes in this regard refers to various ways in which children and families are supported, such as health, learning and education, child welfare etc. (Britt et al., 2011).

1.7.2 Quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) for immigrant learners

According to Adams-Ojugbele and Hlalele (2021), to ensure the development of children, learning needs to be sustainable in all schools as it is a contributing factor to building a sustainable economy. This is in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 relating to the provision of an inclusive, equitable quality education at all levels (United Nations, 2015). The paper argues that all children must attend 1 year of free and compulsory ECE prior to them enter the schooling system. The authors further emphasise that this is an important phase that needs to be led by well trained and qualified teachers. To support this, the paper points out, citing Morland et al., (2016) that quality of ECE received by immigrant children plays a vital role in supporting their health, developing maths and reading skills and also language proficiency. Adams-Ojugbele and Moletsane (2019) found that the lack of professional development for the Grade R teachers at a Durban childcare centre (children aged 6 years) negatively impacted classroom practices and interactions driving learning, playing and overall development of immigrant children. To improve the quality of informal ECD centres in townships, it is vital for the state to work with all stakeholders through increasing support for activities at national, provincial and local levels (The Housing Development Agency [HDA], 2014).

1.7.3 Financing mechanisms for Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

There have been multiple studies carried out on providing access and quality early education in immigrant settings, there is however limited research into ECE for children in townships. A large number of ECD centres in South Africa are run by a non-profit sector (HDA, 2014; Marfo & Biersteker, 2011). The paper established that informal ECD centres deal with various barriers including lack of teacher skills and capacity, inadequate access to financial support and the lack of access to training for teachers. I would argue that financing plays an integral part in improving the quality of education offered to immigrant children in ECD centres through resources, programmes and educator training. This as result speaks to quality of ECE received not only by children of South African citizenship, but also immigrant children facing challenges of language, community integration and traumatic stressors.

Formal ECD centres are funded through the Department of Social Development (DSD) supports ECD utilizing two main channels: a per-child daily subsidy for registered ECD centres catering to children aged 0-4 years, and program funding for non-profit organisations (NPOs) that run non-centre-based ECD programmes. Both funding streams are difficult to track as they are embedded within the child care and protection services budget sub-programme. Expenditure tracking is further complicated by inconsistent ECD-specific reporting across provinces, with some not reporting at all (Giese et al., 2011). This income is then further subsidised by fees that parents pay.

1.8 Paradigm

Coe (2017) defines a paradigm as a distinct perspective through which a scientific community perceives the world. Moreover, it expresses a researcher's worldview and personal relationship with it. Based on the research problem presented, the research question and objective regarding the perspectives of teachers and parents/guardians of immigrant children, this study will be aligned within an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism challenges the idea that the social world—in relation to people's cultures, social practices, and institutions—can be studied using the assumptions and methods similar to natural sciences' study of the physical world. Unlike an atom, which does not change according to cultural language, concepts, and ideas within society deeply influence how individuals express and define the possibilities and constraints of human existence. The interpretive perspective argues for the complexity of the social world, emphasizing that individuals, including researchers and participants, construct meaning within their specific social, political, and cultural contexts (Potrac et al., 2014). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) an interpretivist theory enables the researcher to fully understand the phenomenon they are studying by engaging with participants who have a personal experience with the same phenomena.

1.9 Theoretical framework

This study will be utilising Bronfenbrenner's biological theory. This theory is defined by Bronfenbrenner as "an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Tudge et al., 2016). The theory asserts that the overall development of a child is largely influenced by various environments surrounding them (Nkomo, 2018). Working within this theory this study will aim to understand the experiences of immigrant children through the perception of teachers and parents/guardians. The research will follow the context levels of the theory, which includes the four systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem.

The Micro will be focusing on the immigrant children's interaction and overall development in relations to the quality of the ECD services. The Meso- will be focusing on the parent's or care giver's interactions with the centres and its teachers. The Exo- will be focusing on the community organisations involved in assisting centres. Lastly, the Macrosystem will be focusing on the policies and legislations related to immigrant and ECE. All of the above will be explored from the perspectives of the teachers and parents/guardians.

1.10 Research design and methodology

As this study aimed to understand how ECE for immigrant children in ECD centres is conceptualised and implemented to foster their development and integration into formal schooling system, this study will make use of a qualitative research approach.

1.10.1 Research methodology

This study will be following a qualitative approach as a method of enquiry. Qualitative research aims to explore social and cultural contexts by observing human participants in natural settings (Ary et al., 2018). It seeks to understand phenomena holistically rather than isolating variables (Ary et al., 2018), often employing an adaptable, unstructured approach. This methodology depends on participants' perspectives to generate thematic data analysis (Creswell, 2008), aiming to grasp viewpoints within social, historical, political, and cultural contexts, often in settings such as ECD centres and communities (Ary et al., 2018).

1.10.2 Research method

For this study, I will be using a phenomenological research method to enable me to answer the research question. Phenomenological research aims to describe participants' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). The use of transcendental phenomenological research focusses less on the interpretation of the researcher and more on describing the context and experience of the participant. Data gathered from the shared experiences of the participants allow for the adaptations and development of practices and policies (Creswell, 2008). Phenomenological research allows for the collection of multiple types of data that together creates a clearer picture of the participants context and experiences (Creswell, 2008). This method will provide a researcher with first hand personal experiences, which will allow me the opportunity to understand possible challenges faced by teachers of ECE children, and those of their parents'.

1.10.3 Area and population

For this study I used purposive sampling to select research participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting research participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or criteria within a population of interest. This method ensured that the chosen sample represents the group or population being studied (Stratton, 2024). According to Nkomo (2018), purposive sampling allows for the reliability of pedagogical perspectives from the chosen sample of participants. For this study the teachers, principal and parents/guardians of the immigrant children needed to be able to provide data based on personal experiences. Based on the objectives of the study the participants needed to be a specific group of people. The participating teachers needed to be teachers who are in service of an informal or formal ECD centre. The participating

parents/guardians needed to be from an immigrant home with a child attending an informal or formal ECD centre. Based on this criterion purposive sampling was the best suited.

The sample size was based in one township/informal settlement in the Free State province. I identified two informal and two formal ECD centres in total that had immigrant children attending their centre. This study's total sample included four principles of the informal and formal ECD centres, six teachers and six parents/guardians of immigrant learners.

1.10.4 Data collection and analysis

The core data collection instruments are:

1.10.4.1 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to have a set of standard questions for all the participants but allowed for additional questions during the interview for clarification or further expansion. The semi-structured interviews consisted of three sets of interview questions (see annexure D-F). These differed in order to provide data with relation to the principals'/teachers' perceptions and data in relation to the parents/guardians' perceptions. These interviews served as the main data collection tool and aimed to answer all research questions.

1.10.4.2 Policy documents

An analysis of available policy documents provided me with data that enforced data collected by the semi-structured interviews. This set of data was used to partially answer research question 1 (What are the existing programmes and mechanisms in ECD that promotes an improved transition in the formal schooling system?) and 4 (Are there policy or system gaps or barriers in ECD sector impacting the quality of education experienced by immigrant children?)

- Available policy documents from South Africa were collected and analysed.
- Documents were collected from official government pages and what is used by the teachers in the ECD centres.

1.10.4.3 Data analysis

This study made use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis consists of identifying and coding data under recuring themes found in the data set (Knott et al., 2022). The data collected from the interviews was transcribed (see annexure G-J for examples), translated and coded into various themes. The policy documents were used additionally to add to the data set under each identified theme (see annexure K). This type of analysis allowed me to create an overarching picture of the experiences of the participants. This will be described in more detail in Chapter 3.8.

1.10.4.4 Ethical consideration

Ethics refer to actions and morals influencing the reasoning and thought processes followed. Mouton (2011) defines research ethics as determining whether the research is morally sound, especially when involving individuals or their personal lives. Adherence to ethical codes, encompassing confidentiality, objectivity, data collection methods, data publication, and researcher impact on the environment, is crucial (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Mouton, 2011). I have applied for ethics at the University of Witwatersrand, have completed a research ethics course and have been awarded a certificate of competence in research ethics from the University of Witwatersrand. I received the Ethical clearance protocol number ACM24/10/05 (see annexure L) for this study.

1.11 Definition of key terms

1.11.1 International migration

International migration refers to the movement of people across national borders with the intention of settling temporarily or permanently in another country (International Organization for Migration, 2024). This movement can be voluntary, driven by economic opportunities or education, or forced, due to conflict, persecution or environmental factors.

1.11.2 Immigrant children

Immigrant children can be defined as children who have moved across international borders or within a country due to various circumstances, including language barriers, socio-economic hardships, and difficulties accessing education and healthcare (Babane, 2020). For the purpose of this study the term immigrant child or children will refer to a child that has moved across international borders.

1.11.3 Early Childhood Education (ECE)

ECE refers to the formal and informal educational programmes designed for children from birth to around eight years old, with a primary focus of holistic development, including cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth (UNESCO, 2021). ECE is considered a critical foundation for lifelong learning, helping children develop essential skills needed for academic success and social integration. In the South African context, ECE includes ECD programmes that cater to children before they enter formal schooling (pre-Grade R).

1.11.4 Early Childhood Development (ECD)

ECD refers to the holistic physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral development of children from birth to approximately eight years old (UNICEF, 2020) ECD encompasses health, nutrition, education and child protection services, ensuring children receive the foundational support needed for lifelong learning and well-being.

1.11.5 Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre

An ECD centre is any facility used for the care of more than six children, whether for profit or not, away from their parents. This includes crèches, day care centres, playgroups, pre-schools, and after-school care. Depending on its registration, an ECD centre may cater to babies, toddlers, and/or preschoolers. ECD centres are also known as ECD sites (DSD, 2006).

1.11.6 Informal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

An Informal ECD centre is defined as “a crèche, preschool or place of care for children between the ages of 0 and 9 in a vulnerable community that is not registered with the DSD as a place of partial care and is typically unable to.” (HDA, 2014).

1.11.7 Formal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

A formal ECD centre is defined as a facility that cares for more than six preschool children for part of the day or night. To operate, a crèche must have a formal agreement with parents or caregivers and be registered with the provincial government. The facility must adhere to the Guidelines for ECD Centres and comply with national standards, including maintaining a safe environment, providing proper care for sick children, ensuring adequate space and ventilation, offering safe drinking water, and maintaining hygiene with proper waste disposal. It should also have measures for food preparation, age-group separation, emergency action plans, and health care policies (DBE, 2024a).

1.11.8 Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasizes humanity, interconnectedness and communal responsibility. Rooted in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa, Ubuntu is often expressed as “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” that means a person is a person through other people. This concept highlights the importance of compassion, respect and collective well-being in shaping individual societal relationships (Tutu, 1999).

1.11.9 Xenophobia

Xenophobia refers to the fear, hatred or prejudice against foreigners or individuals seen as outsiders based on their nationality, ethnicity or cultural background (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010). It manifests in discriminatory attitudes, exclusionary practices and sometimes violence against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers

1.11.10 Education Policy

Education policy refers to a set of laws, regulations, guidelines and principles established by governments to govern the structure, quality and accessibility of education systems (Ball, 2012). These policies shape curriculum standards, teacher training, school funding and learner rights ensuring that education aligns with national development goals and international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development goals.

1.11.11 Language barriers

Language barriers refer to obstacles in communication that arise when people do not share a common language or lack of proficiency in the dominant language of interaction (Ellis, 2022). These barriers hinder effective learning, social integration and access to services.

1.11.12 Social integration

Social integration refers to the process through which individuals, particularly those from marginalised or minority groups, become active and accepted participants in society, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect (Berry, 1997). It involves overcoming social, economic and cultural barriers to enable full participation in education, employment and community life.

1.11.13 Equitable education

Equitable education refers to an education system that ensures all learners regardless of their socio-economic background, nationality or personal circumstances, have fair and just access to quality learning opportunities (Tessier, 2018). Unlike equality, that provides the same resources to all learners, equity focuses on addressing systemic disadvantages by allocating additional support to those who need it most.

1.12 Chapter outline

Chapter One: Introduction

The chapter begins by covering the significant role of quality ECD for the overall development immigrant children. It delves into the history and background of international migration in South Africa and Africa. This chapter also discusses South Africa's view and approach regarding inclusive education. The problem statement, significance and rationale of the study are also outlined. Lastly the chapter outlines the objectives of the study and main research question and sub-questions.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature on ECE for immigrant children focusing on integration programmes, quality ECE provisions and financing mechanisms. It revies international and South African studies to identify key themes, gaps and challenges in policies and practices that affect immigrant children's access to quality education.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, including qualitative research approach and phenomenological method used to understand the lived experiences or teachers, principals and parents of immigrant children in South African ECD centres. It describes the study's paradigm, sampling techniques, data collection tools and data analysis methods. Ethical considerations and measures to ensure reliability and validity of findings is also discussed.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results from the data collected from the interviews and policy document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to the experiences of the participants.

Chapter Five: Discussion and conclusions

This chapter discusses the key findings of this study and their implications for policy, practice and future research. Recommendations are provided for policymakers, ECD practitioners and other stakeholders on how to enhance the inclusion and quality of education for immigrant children.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by explaining the background and importance of ECE for immigrant children in South Africa. It highlighted the challenges these children face, such as language barriers, discrimination and gaps in education policies. The chapter also outlined the study's goals, research questions and research approach preparing for a deeper look into how early education supports immigrant children's learning and integration.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores existing research on ECE for immigrant children, focusing on their challenges and the policies that support or hinder their learning. It reviews studies from both international and South African contexts to understand how ECE is provided and what gaps still exist.

2.2 Early Childhood Education (ECE): A global perspective

ECE is now widely recognised as an important part of a child's development, helping to shape their learning, social skills and overall well-being. Organisations such as The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations (UN) have highlighted the need for all children to have access to quality early education no matter their background (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016). Many countries are working to improve the training and qualifications for early childhood teachers because research shows that well-trained teachers play a big role in children's learning and development (Irvine et al., 2023). For example. Finland focuses on strong teamwork among teachers to ensure that young children receive the best education possible (Ranta et al., 2023).

Even though ECE is improving in many parts of the world there are still several challenges that make it difficult for all children to receive the same quality of education. One of the biggest challenges is unequal access to early learning opportunities. While global organisations encourage universal ECE children from low-income families. Rural communities and immigrant backgrounds often struggle to enrol in good-quality programmes. In some countries ECE has become privatized, meaning only families who can afford expensive preschool programmes can access high-quality education (Gupta, 2017). This trend has raised concerns about the widening gap between privileged and disadvantaged children, with the latter being disproportionately affected by a lack of educational opportunities in their early years.

Another major issue facing the global ECE sector is workforce instability and professionalisation gaps. While efforts have been made to professionalize ECE, early year teachers in many countries continue to face low wages, poor working conditions and limited career advancement opportunities (Irvine et al., 2023). Unlike primary and secondary school teachers, early childhood teachers often do not receive the same level of professional recognition or financial compensation leading to high turnover rates and challenges in attracting and retaining qualified teachers. This has a direct impact on the quality of education as a lack of experienced and well-trained teachers affects children's learning experiences and developmental outcomes. In response, some

countries have introduced policies to increase teacher qualifications and establish professional development programmes, but significant gaps remain in terms of implementation and funding.

At the same time, multicultural education is becoming more important due to increasing migration worldwide. Many early learning centres now have children from different cultural and language backgrounds, so teachers need training to support diverse classrooms. Countries such as Canada and the United States have included programmes to help understand and work with children from different backgrounds (Suri & Chandra, 2021). However in some places, immigrant children still struggle to feel included in schools because policies focus more on making them learn the local language quickly rather than supporting bilingual education, which would help them keep their home language while learning a new language (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016). This approach can make it difficult for immigrant children to participate fully in educational activities and may negatively affect their sense of identity and belonging.

The challenge of multicultural and inclusive education remains a significant issue, particularly in countries experiencing high levels of migration. Many early learning institutions struggle to implement inclusive and culturally relevant education policies leading to difficulties in integrating immigrant children into the education system (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016). Language barriers continue to be a primary obstacle as many policies prioritize language assimilation over bilingual education - making it difficult for children from non-dominant language backgrounds to fully participate in early learning programmes (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Additionally, issues such as xenophobia, discrimination and lack of culturally diverse teaching materials further exacerbate the educational disadvantages faced by immigrant learners. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policies that promote inclusive teaching practices culturally responsive curricula

2.3 Migration in the South African context

Migration has had a significant impact on ECE in South Africa as the country continues to be a primary destination for immigrants from neighbouring African nations. South Africa's historical, economic and social positioning makes it an attractive option for immigrants seeking better opportunities, including access to education for their children. The number of immigrant learners in South Africa's schooling system has been steadily increasing. In 2023, there were 37,856 male and 38,949 female immigrant learners enrolled in pre-Grade R to Grade 12, bringing the total to 76,805 learners, a number that continues to grow annually (Stats SA, 2024). Additionally, data from UNICEF (2020) reported that more than 642,000 immigrant or displaced children were living in South Africa, making it the country with the largest child immigrant population on the African continent. The difference in the statistics with children in the school system and those living in South Africa raises some concerns. These immigrant children often face numerous barriers to

quality education such as difficulties with documentation, language barriers and social exclusion which hinder their ability to integrate into early learning environments (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African government has made significant efforts to transform the education system, moving away from exclusive policies that previously marginalised non-citizens. Thought progressive and inclusive education policies the government aims to align with the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals, particularly goal 4 that focuses on ensuring equal access to quality ECE and primary education for all children regardless of their nationality or migration status (United Nations, 2015).

2.4 Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the South African context

The African Union's *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* states in Article 11 that through education, every nation must adhere to the promotion and the development of a child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities according to their fullest potential (African Union, 1999). This means that there needs to be policies, strategies and frameworks in place to realising and successfully coordinate and ensure the holistic development of every child in South Africa. As mentioned before, there are still countries facing challenges in providing quality ECE to marginalised children. In South Africa, there are still high levels of inequalities within the education system, and some of those are seen with the basic education system.

In South Africa, ECE has gained a lot of attention as the country is working towards reducing educational disparities and also promote social equity. Although challenges are evident, however the knowledge within the sector is still considered scarce (Harrison, 2020). These challenges include inequalities in access to quality programmes, resource availability, teacher development and professional training, and parental Involvement.

2.4.1 Inequality and access

Children from poor backgrounds are more likely to attend the centres that are low-resourced, impacting their cognitive development (Mbarathi & Diga, 2016). With each province seeing varied numbers of children enrolled in ECD programmes, according to Statistics South Africa (2012), attendance to ECD facilities among children younger than 5 years in KZN was at 26.6 percent compared to Western Cape, which recorded 39.0 percent of children younger than 5 years who attended ECD programmes (Mbarathi & Diga, 2016). This is with indication from various studies on the limited or no access to ECD programmes within the communities (Atmore, 2013; Marfo & Biersteker, 2011; UNICEF, 2020). The *South African Early Childhood Review 2024* shows that about 1.15 million children aged 3-5 years old are not enrolled in any kind of early learning programme (Hall & Posel, 2019).

2.4.2 Quality of programmes

Although 'quality' is freely used in literature and policy documents, it is important to note that its meaning within this context is highly broad (O'Keeffe et al., 2022). Quality education programmes focus on prioritising three things: structural, process and system (Eadie et al., 2022). With ECD as an umbrella of programmes that focuses on harnessing a child's development mentally, physically, emotionally, socially etc, the quality of programmes offered to propel such development needs to be of a good standard. These programmes include healthcare and immunisation, adequate nutrition, access to basic services such as safe drinking water and proper sanitation, shelter and electricity (Department of Education, 2001a). The quality of ECD education programmes is shaped by circumstance and context. Wright et al. (2023) argue that our own definitions and understanding of quality ECE must accommodate the children's own perspectives and conceptualisation of learning quality, as a means of respecting children's rights and enhancing meaningful participation. This approach is called Transformative Pedagogy, whereby learners are encouraged to be active participants in their learning, creating knowledge where education is not just limited within the classroom (Harrison, 2020).

2.4.3 Resource availability

Providing quality ECE/ECD requires important resources such developmentally appropriate equipment, learning materials and structured learning tools. However, many centres, particularly those serving children from disadvantaged and rural communities continue to face challenges of limited learning resources (Atmore et al., 2012). Structural resources like adequate classroom space, books, toys and stationery are often lacking, compromising the delivery of quality education (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Sello et al., 2024). These shortages are frequently tied to financial constraints as most ECD centres rely heavily on parental fees and are unable to access consistent funding for educational supplies (Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021).

2.4.4 Teacher development and professional training

Teacher development and professional training is pivotal to ensuring quality ECD in South Africa. Despite extensive policy development and recognition of the importance of ECD several challenges continue to hinder the professionalism and training of ECD teachers. A consistent concern seen in available literature is the inadequacy of training and qualifications for ECD teachers. Meier and Lemmer (2015) argue that the variability in the professional qualifications of ECD practitioners, ranging from highly qualified to those with no formal training. This undermines the consistency and quality of care and education provided. The lack of standardised, accredited training programmes further perpetuates the inequities in service delivery, especially in the rural and under-resources areas (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018).

A positive initiative is seen in the efforts to develop ECD by the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) who has implemented several strategic initiatives aligned with the National Skills Development plan. In the 2023/24 period the ETDP SETA prioritised capacitating ECD practitioners by providing targeted training to improve professional competencies and service delivery. Notably 86 staff members were professionally capacitated, exceeding the annual target due to increased participation in risk and contract management (Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority, 2024). Additionally, the SETA facilitated occupationally directed programmes that implemented digital transformation strategies to improve access and efficiency in training delivery. These efforts underscore the importance of well-funded, structured and accessible professional development pathways for teachers.

2.4.5 Parental involvement

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in ECD and is recognised as a foundational element in effective ECD service delivery. According to Meier et al. (2015) South Africa's ECD policy frameworks, including the Children's Amendment Act and the National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) emphasises a family-centred approach that actively involves caregivers and parents in the child's development programmes. The Expanded Public Works Programme also seeks to train not only ECD teachers but also parents and caregivers to support learning at home and in the community (Meier et al., 2015). Sello et al., (2024) further highlight that ECD centres offer essential support to care givers, particularly working parents, by providing extended services like early morning opening times and aftercare. These services allow for caregivers to maintain employment while ensuring their children receive consistent early learning opportunities, thus contributing to the overall well-being and social development (Sello et al., 2024).

2.5 Challenges faced by immigrant learners in accessing quality Early Childhood Education (ECE)

One of the primary barriers to education for immigrant children in South Africa is the lack of proper documentation. Many immigrant families struggle to secure the necessary legal permits for their children to enrol in ECD centres as the South African education system requires documents such as birth certificates or residence permits for school registration. Although there is lack ok of reliable data on the number of non-national children being denied access to education (Buckland, 2011), this requirement excludes a significant number of children from foundational education which is critical for their cognitive and social development (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023). Without formal documentation, many children are forced to attend informal learning centres, which may lack proper resources, trained teachers and structured curricula. This situation leaves immigrant

children at a disadvantage compared to their South African peers and perpetuates educational inequality at the earliest stages of learning.

Language barriers present another significant challenge to the inclusion of immigrant children in South African ECE. Many immigrant learners come from countries where French, Portuguese or indigenous African languages are predominantly spoken. Upon arrival in South Africa they must adapt to a schooling system that primarily uses English and Afrikaans as language of instruction. Studies indicated that non-English-speaking immigrant children struggle with classroom participation leading to lower academic performance and difficulties in social interactions (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023). While South Africa has multilingual education policies in place, in practice immigrant children are often expected to assimilate rather than receive structured bilingual education which would support their linguistic and cognitive development.

2.6 The role of policy supporting of hindering immigrant education

Immigrant and refugee children face multiple challenges accessing education in host countries. Firstly, the South African Constitution and the Children's Act of 2005 recognise the rights and universal protection of all children residing in the country regardless of any social construct. The right to access to education is highlighted and emphasised in various policies in South Africa, however the application or implementation of thereof is not adhered to, due to some learning institutions restricting the enrolment of children due to their lack of documentation (Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa, 2021). Inclusive and progressive policies have the potential of alleviating challenges faced by immigrant children and their families through ECE programmes. Michaelsamy (2021), argues that ECCE programmes have the abilities to identify and address challenges such as mental health due to environmental stressors faced by children, in the sense that having a solid support structure in the early years helps in building fundamental coping mechanisms which are beneficial to children's long-term development.

2.6.1 Navigating the refugee and asylum processes

Navigating the South African asylum and refugee system remains difficult, and this is due to the waiting periods at Home Affairs, where systems are overburdened by backlogs, resulting in immigrants waiting for years for their applications to be processed (Maunganidze et al., 2021). These circumstances render immigrants in state of no agency where they are unable to get employment, and immigrants children facing high chances of education exclusion.

2.6.2 Inequalities and discrimination

Political rhetoric plays an important role and has a significant influence, even with policies and legislations in place. Negative sentiments places immigrants in positions where they have to fight

for their inalienable right in South Africa. In her study, Blessed-Sayah (2023), notes that due to the nationalist view on migration upheld in South Africa, basic human rights of individuals, more especially non-nationals, are consequently undermined. Again, I note that even with the prevalence of policies and legislation, with their existing gaps on safeguarding universal human rights of all individuals residing in South Africa, political will is also required for successful implementation. To support this idea, Achiume and Landau (2015) state that:

"although the African Common Position and the Migration Policy Framework both emphasise a human rights frame as essential to ensuring social integration and the wellbeing of migrants and their hosts, they do very little to provide evidence-based recommendations for concrete policy solutions that would successfully assist member states to use human rights in this way. (p. 3)"

It is important to note that some of the barriers impacting immigrants in accessing ECE are similar to the ones faced by the poor and marginalised South Africans, however even with the goal to eradicated inequalities imposed by the apartheid system through policy redress, some of these policies have played a role in discriminating non-national with regard to accessing education (Buckland, 2011). For example, sections 39 of the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 restricted "illegal foreigners" from receiving any learning or training at any institution (South Africa, 2002).

2.6.3 School admission policy

The National Education Policy Act of 1996, section 19 stipulates that all children residing in South Africa, regardless of their nationality or migration status of their parents, have the right to attend public schools (DoE, 1996). This provision applies even to children whose parents do not hold permanent or temporary residence permits. However, while the policy guarantees this right, challenges remain in its practicality. While the intention of this policy is to foster inclusivity, studies has shown that immigrant children often encounter significant barriers when accessing education in South Africa (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023). Many immigrant children encounter difficulties related to documentation, such as the lack of birth certificates or residency permits, which often hinder their enrolment, especially in formal education settings (DoE, 1996). Moreover, despite these legal protections, many schools continue to impose strict documentation requirements, which lead to delays or outright rejections of immigrant children's application for enrolment (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011). This policy gap highlights the need for more flexible school admission policies that take into account varied legal statuses of immigrant families to ensure smooth transitions into the education system, as outlined by the NIECDP (DSD, 2015).

2.7 South African policy for Early Childhood Education (ECE)

As mentioned before, government policy plays a major role in developing and shaping ECE. Since the end of apartheid, the government has worked rigorously to formulate progressive policies that

reflect social development and eradicate pre-existing inequalities. The government has also worked to align the education system and policies with Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1999). The charter highlights the right to education of every child as it contributes to the developing “a child’s personality, talents, mental health and physical abilities.” The Charter continues to emphasise the importance of providing education as a means of safeguarding the fundamental human right and freedoms for every child. ECD is defined as a child’s early learning and development from birth through to the transitioning phase into formal schooling system (DSD, 2015).

2.7.1 The White Paper on Education and Training

The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) underscores the importance of ECD in South Africa. It highlighted the need for inclusive policies that provide equitable access to quality education for all children, including those from immigrant communities (DoE, 1995). The document stressed that the significance of teacher training, emphasising the need for specialised ECD teachers and national standards for curricula and training. The White Paper also advocated for increased funding to support ECD centres, especially in underserved areas and encouraged partnerships with NGOs, businesses and international bodies (DoE, 1995). Parental involvement was also a key component, with the government promoting educational programmes that empower parents, particularly those in immigrant communities (DoE, 1995).

2.7.2 The Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The Education White Paper 5 on ECE (DoE, 2001a) outlines comprehensive strategies and policies for improving ECD in South Africa, with an emphasis on accessibility and quality for immigrant learners. Efforts to increase access to ECD services are focused on vulnerable populations, including immigrant families, with funding mechanisms such as conditional grants designed to support community-based ECD centres in under-served areas (DoE, 2001a). These initiatives aimed to ensure that ECD services are available to the poorest 40% of families, with special attention given to those living in poverty including immigrants. Independent ECD centres also cater to immigrant learners, although these institutions typically do not receive government subsidies. The quality of ECD services is enhances through focused teacher training with a national accreditation system that ensures teachers are prepared to meet the diverse needs of all children, including those from immigrant backgrounds. Regular assessment and monitoring ensure that these services meet national policy standards (DoE, 2001a). Parental involvement is strongly encouraged, especially in community-based centres where the financial burden on families is alleviated through subsidies that reduce fees. These funding models prioritise poorer families, addressing socio-economic disparities that disproportionately affect immigrant learners. Furthermore, the government has committed to improving the overall quality of ECD provision

and integrating community-based sites into the public system, thereby ensuring better oversight and support for all learners, including immigrants.

2.7.3 The Education White Paper 6 on special needs education

The Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001b) emphasises the importance of an inclusive education system that accommodates divers learners, including immigrant children. It highlights the need for teacher training and professional development to equip teachers with the skills to support learners with disabilities or learning barriers, including immigrant children who may face additional challenges like language differences. The funding strategy proposed involved conditional grants, provincial education budgets and donor funds to improve resources in schools and ECD centres, ensuring access to necessary material like assistive technologies. Parental involvement is also a key focus, with campaigns aimed at raising awareness among parents, including immigrant families, about their rights and encouraging active participation in their children's education (DoE, 2001b).

2.7.4 The National Early Learning and Development Standards

The national Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) provide a framework for ECE in South Africa (DBE, 2009), focusing on holistic development for children from birth to four years. These standards are particularly relevant to immigrant learners emphasising inclusivity and the importance of providing quality ECD services to all children, regardless of their background. The document highlights the need for coordination among various government departments and stakeholders to ensure the diverse needs of vulnerable groups, including immigrant children, are met (DBE, 2009). Key components include engaging parents and caregivers, fostering cultural sensitivity and offering training for ECD teachers to address the specific challenges faces by immigrant families such as language barriers and cultural difference. Additionally, the provision of culturally relevant, age-appropriate resources and a safe, well-equipped learning environment is vital for supporting the development of immigrant learners (DBE, 2009).

Furthermore, NELDS stresses the importance of monitoring and assessing children's development to ensure that immigrant children receive the necessary support. This includes using tailored assessment methods to take into account language barriers and cultural backgrounds. The document also emphasises the role of government funding in enhancing the quality of ECD services, which should extend to marginalised communities, including immigrant populations (DBE, 2009).

2.7.5 Policy on Early Development Centres

The policy on ECD centres aims to provide a framework for ensuring that all children receive appropriate care and education during their formative years (DSD, 2011). It emphasises the importance of qualified and trained teachers, although they might not always need formal qualifications, provided they undergo relevant training programmes. This ensures that educators are prepared to address the diverse needs of children, such as language barriers and cultural sensitivities. The policy also highlights the importance of family involvement in the educational process, stressing the need for ECD centres to engage and support immigrant families. While it does not specifically address the fee structures for immigrant children, the policy underscores the need for accessible services and the centres are required to comply with national standards for registration, resources and safety (DSD, 2011). Zoning regulations ensure that ECD centres are strategically located to be easily accessible to all families, including immigrants. Although the policy does not explicitly mention immigrant-specific provisions such as language support, it focusses on holistic child development implies that ECD centres should foster an inclusive and culturally sensitive environment for all children (DSD, 2011).

2.7.6 Policy Framework for Universal Access to Grade R

The Policy Framework for Universal Access to Grade R outlines several key areas focused on improving access, teachers training, funding and quality of education, which are vital for immigrant learners. This framework aims to achieve universal access by 2014, with a target of 80% participation and by 2019 100% of children are expected to have access to Grade R (DBE, 2011). This initiative prioritises disadvantaged learners, which may include immigrant children, by providing equitable funding for both formal and community-based sites, including non-fee-paying schools. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive, overing a comprehensive resource pack to teachers, ensuring that quality education is accessible to all. Furthermore, the policy emphasises improving teacher qualifications through various training programmes, including Diplomas in Grade R practices (DBE, 2011), to ensure that all educators are adequately equipped to support their learners. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place to assess the quality of Grade R programmes, ensuring that all learners, including immigrants, receive necessary support (DBE, 2011).

2.7.7 The National Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy (NIECDP) of 2015

This vital policy aims to prioritise among others “an overarching multi-sectoral enabling framework of ECD services, inclusive of national, provincial and local spheres of government” (DSD, 2015). According to Harrison (2020), knowledge within the early childhood care and education sector is

disorganised and this due to lack of communication amongst stakeholders. This policy places an emphasis on upholding access to education as universal human right by ensuring the universal access for all children, without discrimination, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds (DSD, 2015, DSD, 2021). Dissecting its challenges, Rudolph et al., (2019) argue that the policy loses the understanding of people's or communities' realities as it places them in static categories. Further stating that continuous dialogue in communities will reveal varied challenges they are facing which are influenced by the ever changing socio-political, economic and personal circumstances (Rudolph et al., 2019).

2.7.8 The South African National Curriculum Framework of 2015

Developed by the DBE, the vision of this framework is to provide a holistic support of a child's development. Designed to be used by ECE practitioners, care givers, and other personnel within the sector, the policy is set against the backdrop of The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from Birth to four, building on its focus of addressing the learning of children from birth to 4 years of age, by taking into consideration: "South African priorities and provincial curricula, African childhoods and global ECD trends" (DBE, 2015:3). The *holistic* emphasis on development in this policy places its focus on developing physical motor skills, socio-emotional development, language, creative and cultural-identity development (Murris, 2019). One of the visions stipulated in ECD policies is the capability of ECD programmes in designing and offering varied activities that promote local and indigenous knowledge for children and their families, to enhance the inclusion and integration within the ECD, and also encourage adaptability for children with varied learning needs (DBE, 2022b). The framework has six developmental areas called *Early Learning and Development Areas* (ELDAs). These are: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communication, Exploring Mathematics, Creativity, Knowledge and Understanding of the world. Therefore, to promote local and indigenous knowledge as stipulated in the framework, it important for ECD programmes to incorporate multicultural activities within the set learning themes that will not only ensure integration the formal schooling system but also encourage children to develop an understanding of themselves. Argued by Murris (2019), this encourages a broader rather than narrow conceptualisation on school readiness and success than the one portrayed in the framework whereby children's outcomes in ECD determine their ability for entry into Grade R.

2.7.9 Policy and Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification and Higher Education for ECD Educators

This policy on ECD teachers in South Africa emphasises the importance of training teachers to support diverse and inclusive learning environments, which is particularly beneficial for immigrant learners (DHET, 2017). It sets qualifications aligned with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) promoting competencies that encourage culturally responsive teaching. The policy

highlights increased funding for ECD, recognising its cost-effectiveness in addressing socio-economic disparities, which can support immigrant children's integration into educational settings. Parental involvement is also a key focus, with teachers trained to engage with families from various backgrounds (DHET, 2017).

2.7.10 National Plan of Action for Children

The National Plan of Action for Children (2019-2024) in South Africa outlined several key strategies aimed at improving ECD services, particularly for vulnerable groups such as immigrant learners. It emphasises expanding access to quality ECD services to children aged 0-4, with dedicated budget allocations for infrastructure and grants (DSD, 2019). Additionally, the plan highlights the need for enhanced teacher training, including inclusive education practices and the development of specialised skills such as sign language and Braille to accommodate all children. Parental involvement is also a focus, with programmes designed to empower caregivers to support their children's education. Furthermore, the South African legal framework ensures that all children, regardless of migration status, have the right to education with provisions for immigrant children, including those who as unaccompanied or undocumented (DSD, 2019). Special measures are outlined to address the specific vulnerabilities of these children, ensuring they are integrated into the educational system. The plan also calls for strengthening of the legislative framework to safeguard the rights of immigrant children and guarantee access to education and social services without discrimination (DSD, 2019).

2.7.11 White Paper on Families in South Africa

The revised White Paper on Families in South Africa, emphasises the need for equitable access to ECD for all families, including immigrant learners. It advocated for expanding both home- and centre-based ECD programmes and ensuring that immigrant families can access educational and nutritional support through initiatives like the National School Nutrition programme (DBE, 2009). To strengthen the quality of ECD, the White Paper called for increased funding and targeted training for teachers, focusing on inclusive teaching practices for vulnerable groups, including immigrant children (DSD, 2021). It also encouraged greater parental involvement, offering support to immigrant families to actively participate in their children's education. Moreover, the White Paper stressed the importance of improving resources for ECD centres and ensuring that immigrant learners can access the same educational opportunities as other children. It also highlighted the need for policies that facilitate the integration of immigrant families into South Africa's educational and social support system, including addressing barriers like legal documentation to ensure full participation (DSD, 2021).

2.7.12 The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill

The BELA Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2024 introduced several changes relevant to ECD, particularly in the context of policy, governance, resource management and parental involvement. Although the BELA Bill does not explicitly reference standalone ECD centres, it has implications for early educations, especially in schools that offer Grade R. A key amendment includes shifting authority over language policy from the Head of Departments to the school governing body, which includes parental representatives. This change empowers parents to have a more active role in decisions affecting the foundational phase of learning. The BELA Bill also promotes child-centred practices by prohibiting acts that humiliate or threaten learners (Republic of South Africa, 2024). The BELA Bill emphasizes on recognising cultural and religious diversity further supports inclusive early learning environments (Republic of South Africa, 2024). However, while the BELA Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2024) provided broader inclusion, it does not explicitly address the specific needs or rights of immigrant children within the education system. This absence highlights a potential gap in ensuring equitable access and support for all learners, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds who may face language barriers, cultural adjustment challenges or uncertain legal status.

2.7.13 South Africa's 2030 strategy for Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes

The South Africa's 2030 strategy for ECD programmes (DBE, 2024b) aims to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE, with an emphasis on vulnerable and under-served groups, including immigrant learners. The strategy focuses on providing equitable access to ECD services by 2023, ensuring that children from all backgrounds, locations and nationalities can access early learning opportunities. Special attention is given to addressing historical disparities through funding mechanisms, ensuring that financial barriers do not exclude immigrant children from receiving quality education. The plan includes expanding and improving the infrastructure of ECD centres, with a focus on rural and under-served areas, where immigrant families are often located (DBE, 2024b). Parental involvement is crucial, and the strategy highlights the importance of parent support programmes to empower immigrant parents to be actively involved in their children's development. These programmes aim to equip all parents, regardless of their status with the skills and resources necessary to foster a nurturing learning environment at home (DBE, 2024b). Furthermore, the strategy calls for the training and development of a skilled ECD workforce, ensuring that teachers are equipped to work with diverse communities, providing culturally appropriate and inclusive practices that meet the needs of immigrant families. A strong focus on quality assurance and the implementation of a NCF ensures that all children are supported through structured learning environments. Proposed monitoring and data collection systems

designed to track the inclusion of immigrant learners is found as part of this strategy (DBE, 2024b). Lastly this strategy also proposes legislative reforms, including the Children's Amendment Bill, aiming to create more inclusive regulatory environment, removing barriers such as the registrations of Early Learning Programmes (ELPs), which can prevent immigrants from accessing services.

2.8 Integrative programmes for Early Childhood Education (ECE)

There seems to be a literature gap relating to the quality of ECD programmes for immigrant children. ECD is considered a priority sector in South Africa, and the most focus has been on ensuring equity, access and improved quality care of children aged 0-5 years old (Mbarathi & Diga, 2016). The focus however has been lacking in respect to immigrant children's experience in ECD, particularly those in rural areas and townships. The authors maintain that ECD has the ability to positively develop the ability of a child to transition into the schooling system. It is therefore vital to ensure that the appropriate programmes and resources are implemented and utilised in ECDs with immigrant children. However, Mbarathi and Diga (2016) highlight the "unevenness" within the ECD sector relating to the poor quality of the centres and programmes particularly in urban informal settlements. Programmes in this regard refers to various ways in which children and families are supported, such as health, learning and education, child welfare etc (Britto et al., 2011).

Programmes in this regard refers to various ways in which children and families are supported, such as health, learning and education, child welfare etc. (Britto et al., 2011). Due to the challenges faced by immigrants, research evidence in the United States argues that immigrant and refugee children are highly unlikely to participate in ECE programmes in comparison to children in the United States, and this is the same within South Africa (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021).

2.9 Financing mechanisms for Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres

Funding for ECD in South Africa currently operates through a dual system comprising formal and informal financing provision, and it is primarily supported by the supply-side subsidies. These are government funds which are allocated directly to the providers of ECE services. Although the DBE full administrative control of the sector, the system still has disparities in with relations to access, equity, and administrative feasibility, particularly relating to ECD centres that serve children in vulnerable communities (DSD, 2015; Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021).

With South Africa seeing a growing number in immigrant children, many of these children living in informal settlements are facing multiple challenges including access to healthcare, education and social services (Impact SA, 2022). The ECD sector has the potential to play an important

role in reducing these barriers faced by immigrant children. Bureaucratic barriers, financial barriers, and lack of policy clarity on programmes that foster inclusivity and integration of disadvantaged immigrants in the system, impacts the future learning of children. Funding in this sector remains a contributing factor to these challenges, especially to unregistered/ informal ECDs where the most vulnerable children and informal ECDs face exclusion due to them not meeting the funding standards of subsidies (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023). To support this, the NIECDP (DSD, 2015) highlights the importance of increased public investments within the sector. The policy states that:

"The science is conclusive: investments in early childhood development yield lifetime development returns for the child, his or her family and society. Notably, early childhood development has the potential to contribute significantly to the reduction of key development challenges facing South Africa in 2015, particularly poverty and inequality. (p. 21)"

According to the DBE 2021 ECD Census Report (DBE, 2021), less than 56% ECD centres were registered. In its effort to combat these multi-folded challenges, in April 2022, the government decided to transfer the functioning of ECD from DSD to the DBE Education (DBE, 2025a). The functions of the DBE among others include developing the early learning curriculum, ensuring continuity and smooth transition between early learning and Grade R, and ensuring universal availability and quality inclusive learning opportunities and registration (DBE, 2021).

A large number of ECD centres in South Africa are run by a non-profit sector (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011; HDA, 2014). The paper established that informal ECD centres deal with various barriers including lack of teacher skills and capacity, inadequate access to financial support and the lack of access to training for teachers. I would argue that financing plays an integral part in improving the quality of education offered to immigrant children in ECD centres through resources, programmes and educator training. This as result speaks to quality of ECE received not only by children of South African citizenship, but also immigrant children facing challenges of language, community integration and traumatic stressors.

2.9.1 Formal funding mechanism

Formal ECD centres, which ones registered with the DBE are now funded through the DBE. The department supports ECD utilizing two main channels: a per-child daily subsidy for registered ECD centres catering to children aged 0-4 years, and programme funding for non-profit organisations (NPOs) that run non-centre-based ECD programmes. Since 2019, the subsidy per-child has remained at R17 per day, and with the aims of increasing quality learning and access, the subsidy has been increased to R24 per day per child (DBE, 2025b). This is however lower

compared to the formal schooling sector where subsidy per child is closer to R96 per day (Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021).

Both funding streams are difficult to track as they are embedded within the childcare and protection services budget sub-programme. Expenditure tracking is further complicated by inconsistent ECD-specific reporting across provinces, with some not reporting at all (Giese et al., 2011). This income is then further subsidised by fees that parents pay.

Other systems of funding include conditional grants that assist the centres in meeting registration and operational requirements. According to the DSD (2015), these grants aim to support physical infrastructure development which need to be in compliance with the health and safety standards. Additionally, programmes such the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and Community Works Programme (CWP) assist in subsidising wages for ECD practitioners and funding initiatives carried out at the centres (Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021).

The sector still finds itself with great disparities relating to the allocation of funds. For example, in 2016/17 KwaZulu-Natal allocated R5 010 per child annually, compared to the Western Cape which allocated R3 333 (Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021). Based on the modelling carried out by Ilifa Labantwana, subsidy per child was modelled to be R33 in 2024, and R46 by 2029, this figure would be keeping up with inflation and further enabling the provision of quality ECD programmes (Wills & Kika-Mistry, 2021).

2.9.2 Informal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and funding gaps

The informal or unregistered ECD centres which make up a large portion of the sector, is often excluded from funding or public subsidies, forcing the centres to be dependent on fees and other external donations (Sello et al., 2024). In most cases these types of centres are found in impoverished and poor areas, serving children who in need of most support, however they find themselves excluded due to systematic barriers. Contributing factors to such barriers include the lack of proper infrastructure, the absence of a bank account and not meeting the required zoning and safety regulations (Sello et al., 2024). According to the 2021 ECD census, 43% of ECD centres were not registered with the DSD, with their lack of bank account emerging as the strongest predictor of registration failure (Sello et al., 2024).

Furthermore, due to financial constraints, informal centres often find themselves lacking basic administrative systems and tools, as such they are unable to afford budgeting tools, receipt books and payroll records, further making it difficult to qualify for subsidies even if other requirements are met (Aina & Bipath, 2022). According to the *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services* (DSD, 2006), majority of the centres are run by community-based organisation which

rely on volunteering, resulting in further complications related to sustainability and quality assurance.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the challenges faced by immigrant children in accessing quality ECE, both globally and within the South African context. Despite global recognition of ECE's importance, immigrant children continue to face barriers such as unequal access, language difficulties and discrimination. In South Africa, while policies such as the NIECDP (DSD, 2015) and the Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a) aim to promote more inclusivity, issues like insufficient funding, lack of teacher training and exclusion of informal centres from government support persists. These challenges are compounded by the lack of culturally responsive and bilingual education, leaving immigrant children at a disadvantage. Although there is literature about studies on ECD and ECE in South Africa, very few studies have looked at immigrant children within the ECD education system. Addressing these gaps requires improved policy implementation, better funding and more inclusive, culturally relevant educational practices to ensure all children, regardless of their background or status, have equal opportunities in their early learning experiences.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research approach applied for this study – qualitative research approach. It explains the purposive sampling methods utilised to identify participants and methods of data collection. The chapter further outlines Bronfenbrenner's biological theory of development. Finally, the chapter will explain various ethical measures taken to ensure the credibility of the study.

3.2 Theoretical framework

This study utilised Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. This theory is defined by Bronfenbrenner as "an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Tudge et al., 2016). The theory asserts that the overall development of a child is largely influenced by various environments surrounding them (Nkomo, 2018). Working within this theory this study aimed to understand the experiences of immigrant children through the perception of principals, teachers and parents/guardians. The research examined four of the five the context levels of the theory, which are: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem. Employing this theory for particularly for this study in crucial in understanding immigrant families' relation with other with social structures.

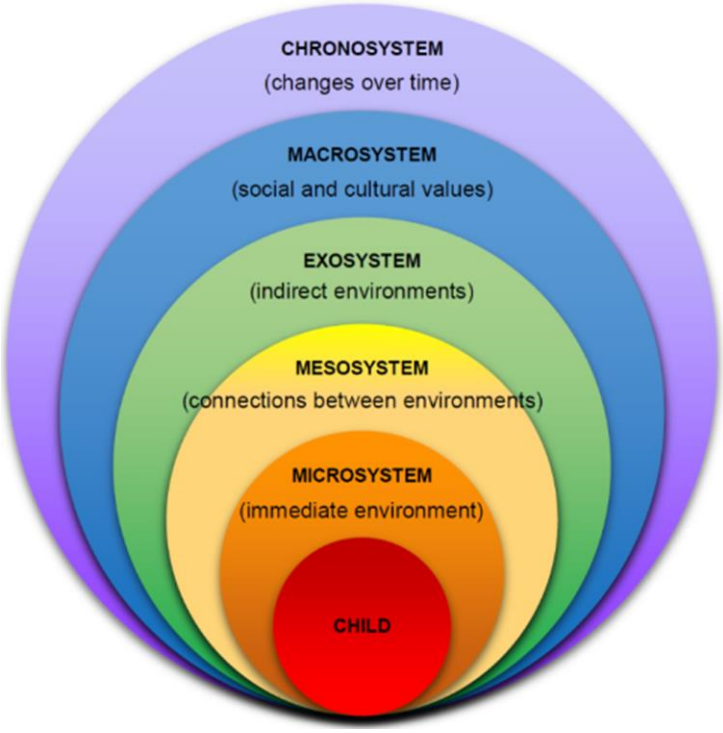


Figure 3-1 : Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/whole-child/chapter/ecological-theory-2/)

The micro-system focused on the immigrant children's interaction and overall development in relations to the quality of the ECD services. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977) this paradigm relates to the day-to-day interactions and experiences of immigrant children, and how these may shape their perspectives and reality.

The meso-system focused on the parent's or care giver's interactions with the centres and its teachers. This paradigm draws in on the family interaction with other ecological systems such as the school, the neighbourhood, and other external environments (Paat, 2013).

The exo-system focused on the community and organisations involved in assisting the centres. Paat (2013) asserts that immigrant families and children, assimilate better within a society when there is support for existing cultural diversity. This is an important aspect of a child's development and identity throughout ECD into young adulthood.

Lastly, the macro-system focused on the policies and legislations related to immigrant and ECE. All the above was explored from the perspectives of the teachers and parents/guardians. If migration laws and policies are drafted and practiced, and perceived as inclusive, immigrant families are likely to feel welcomed by the host countries and neighbourhoods they reside in (Paat, 2013).

3.3 Research paradigm

A paradigm is defined by Coe (2017) as a representation of a distinct perspective through which a scientific community sees and interprets the world. It sums up the researcher's worldview, which influences how they approach knowledge generation, methodological choices and their interaction with the research subject. Contrasting it with the research problem, which sought to understand varied perspectives of teachers, parents/guardians of immigrant children, this study was placed within the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm is well-known for its view that reality is socially constructed, shaped by cultural historical and social context, as opposed to being objectively measurable similarly in the natural science (Thanh &Thanh, 2015). The interpretivist paradigm challenges the assumption that social circumstances can be studied making use of the same methodologies and assumptions as the natural science (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). For instance, unlike objects in the physical world, which do not change regardless of human perception, social realities change through cultural interactions, language and shared experiences. Interpretivism as a result, does not agree with the notion of a single objective truth, but instead recognises various subjective realities that are developed through human experiences.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), this paradigm allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon by engaging with participants who have had first-hand

experience with the situation. This aligns with the study's quest and focus on understanding how immigrant children and their parent/guardian experience ECE within a particular socio-cultural context. The interpretivist paradigm puts priority on meaning-making and lived experiences, with an understanding that knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This co-construction is carried out through conducting interviews with participants, allowing them to articulate their ow experiences and perspectives on their own terms.

Lastly, the interpretivist paradigm places emphases on context. Meaning human experiences cannot be understood in isolation from its environment, rather these experiences are shaped by cultural norms, social structures and historical influences (Willis, 2007). This study therefore explored the lived experiences of participants relating to contextual factors impacting the educational experiences of immigrant children. These included language barriers, institutional policies and cultural differences. By placing the focus of the study on the lived realities of participants, the study aimed to captured varied and unique nature of their experiences.

3.4 Research methodology

3.4.1 Qualitative research

This study followed a qualitative approach as a method of enquiry. Qualitative research aims to explore social and cultural contexts by observing human participants in natural settings (Ary et al., 2018). It seeks to understand phenomena holistically rather than isolating variables (Ary et al., 2018), often employing an adaptable, unstructured approach. This methodology depends on participants' perspectives to generate thematic data analysis (Creswell, 2008), aiming to grasp viewpoints within social, historical, political, and cultural contexts, often in settings such as ECD centres and communities (Ary et al., 2018).

This methodological framework seeks to explore social and cultural circumstances by engaging with participants in their natural settings (Ary et al., 2018). This is in contrast to quantitative research approach, which relies on numerical and statistical relationships, qualitative approach focuses on understanding depth over breadth, with the aim of understanding circumstance holistically rather than isolating variables (Ary et al., 2018). This approach is considered valuable when investigating human experiences, beliefs and their interactions as it enables you to capture social realities shaped by complex circumstances and contextual realities (Lim, 2024).

Choosing qualitative research for this study it premised on its ability to tackle research questions that otherwise cannot be fully investigated using quantitative research methods. Loraine et al., (2020) highlight that qualitative research is useful as it assists in understanding the *why* behind social circumstances, allowing you to uncover patterns that may not be clear behind numerical data. For instance, while quantitative data may assist in measuring enrolment rates of immigrant

children in ECD centres, qualitative research is able unravel the lived experiences of parents, educators and policymakers. Various issues such as barriers to access, perceptions of quality and challenges in implementation can be uncovered. Furthermore, qualitative research allows for ample, descriptive accounts of the experiences of immigrant children in ECE, which offers insights into emotional, psychological, and cultural factors that may be influencing their integration into the schooling system (Sağlam et al., 2023).

3.5 Phenomenological research approach

For this study, I used a phenomenological research method to enable me to answer the research question. Phenomenological research aims to describe participants' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). The use of transcendental phenomenological research focuses less on the interpretation of the researcher and more on describing the context and experience of the participant. Data gathered from the shared experiences of the participants allow for the adaptations and development of practices and policies (Creswell, 2008). Phenomenological research allows for the collection of multiple types of data that together creates a clearer picture of the participants context and experiences (Creswell, 2008). This method will provide a researcher with first hand personal experiences, which allowed me the opportunity to understand possible challenges faced by teachers of ECE children, and those of their parents'.

This method has been widely applied as a research methodology in various disciplines as the social science, nursing and education (Wilson, 2015). The use of this approach, however, seems to limit within education research (Farrell, 2021). According to Matua and Van Der Wal (2015), phenomenological research method originates from the philosophical works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, who respectively, also created the descriptive and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology. The two approaches are deeply rooted in understanding human experiences, which makes it relevant to this study.

The descriptive phenomenology research approach, which was developed by Husserl, places focus on the lived experiences of participants and excludes the interpretation of the researcher. It makes use epoche (bracketing) a concept whereby researchers exclude their preconceptions in order to study a subject matter in its purest form (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Making use of this methodology enables researchers to publish unbiased research which then informs policy makers and educators regarding the experiences of immigrant children in ECD centres and understanding various challenges they may be facing within the system. Utilising this method enables researchers to collect fist-hand experiences from participants, and for the basis of this study, it helps in identifying various challenges such as languages barriers, inclusion and cultural differences that may impact the quality of leaning for immigrant children.

According to Farrell (2021), the limited use of phenomenological research can be attributed to the manner in which researchers perceive the complexities of its philosophical foundations. In order to evaluate trustworthiness of the phenomenological research, criteria such as transferability, credibility, confirmability and dependability need to be adhered to (Farrell, 2021). Another challenge of this method is the difficulty for researchers in ensuring bracketing, as they might struggle to put aside their biases and preconception about the phenomenon (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Phenomenological research provides researchers with a valuable perspective in understand individual's lived experiences. It allows for an in-depth knowledge of the complexities human experience by prioritising participant's voices, while understanding how those experiences are shaped by their external environment. This research method has the potential to improve educational research and education experiences of children through informing policy and systems.

3.6 Area and population

3.6.1 Area

Mangaung Metropolitan is one of the eight metropolitans in South Africa (see figure 3.2). Mangaung is a Sesotho name meaning 'place of Cheetahs' (Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs [CoGTA], 2020). It is also where the African National Congress was formed in 1912 at the Wesleyan Church, and in 1914 the National Party also formed in Bloemfontein Cheetahs' (CoGTA, 2020). In 2022, the metro recorded a population of 811 431 (Stats SA, 2023). The city of Bloemfontein is home to immigrants from various countries including Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, and Nigeria (Kurzwelly & Escobedo, 2021). One of the city's thriving economies is trade and entrepreneurship. Some immigrants make a living through informal business operations such as hair salons, spaza shops, clothing stores, sewing, cosmetics shops etc (Ramogwebo et al., 2024).

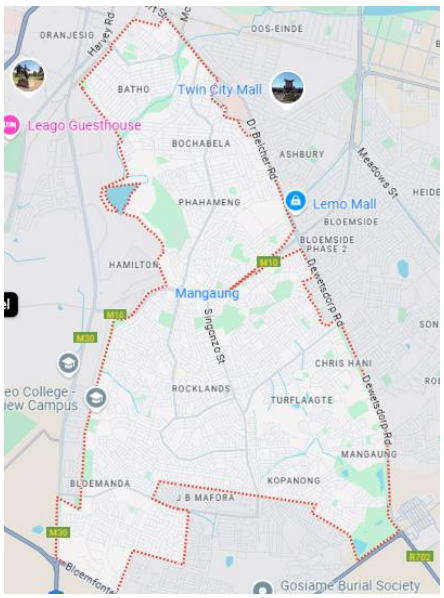


Figure 3-2 : Map of area (https://maps.app.goo.gl/83SVF8t4C8DmFTjW7)

3.6.2 Population sampling techniques

Shukla (2020) refers to a population as a "set of all the units which possess variable characteristic under study and for which findings of research can be generalised". In this study, the population is referred to as research participants. For this study I used one sampling method to select research participants, namely, purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting research participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or criteria within a population of interest. This method ensures that the chosen sample represents the group or population being studied (Stratton, 2024). According to Nkomo (2018), purposive sampling allows for the reliability of pedagogical perspectives from the chosen sample of participants. In this study the teachers, principal and parents/guardians of the immigrant children need to be able to provide data based on personal experiences. Based on the objectives of the study the participants need to be a specific group of people. The participating principals and teachers need to be principals or teachers who are in service of an informal or formal ECD centre. The participating parents/guardians need to be from an immigrant home with a child attending an informal or formal ECD centre. Based on this criterion purposive sampling was the best suited.

3.6.3 Sample size

The sample size includes the participants and the research sites. This study was based in various selected townships/informal settlement in the Free State province. A total of 4 ECD centres that have immigrant children registered in their centre were chosen, this included 2 formal ECD centres and 2 informal ECD centres. In total 16 participants were interviewed. They included a total of 6 teachers, 4 principals and 6 parents/guardians. Although I would have liked to include

more participants and an additional province, time constraints for this study had an impact on the sample size.

3.7 Data collection and analysis

The core data collection instruments are:

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to have a set of standard questions for all the participants but also allows for additional questions during the interview for clarification or further expansion. In this study semi-structured interviews were carried out with all participants. The semi-structured interviews consisted of three sets of interview questions (annexure D-F for interview questions). These differed to provide data with relation to the teachers' and principals perceptions and data in relation to the parents/guardians' perceptions. The questions were carefully worded and posed in a manner that encouraged participants' full understanding. To ensure that, I posed the questions to some participants in a language we both can speak. This allowed for the participants to answer confidently and fully and were able to elaborate and engage further on the discussion topic. These interviews served as the main data collection tool and aimed to answer all research questions.

3.7.2 Policy documents

An analysis of policy documents provided me with data that enforced and supported data collected through the semi-structured interviews. This set of data was used to partially answer research question 1 (What are the existing programmes and mechanisms in ECD that promotes an improved transition in the formal schooling system?) and 4 (Are there policy or system gaps or barriers in ECD sector impacting the quality of education experienced by immigrant children?)

- Available policy documents from South Africa were collected and analysed.
- Documents were collected from official government pages and an analysis of what is used by the teachers in the ECD centres.

3.7.3 Rigor - Reliability and Validity

Ensuring reliability and validity is crucial in qualitative research to enhance the credibility and trustworthy of the findings, This study employed several strategies to achieve reliability and validity in data collection.

3.7.3.1 Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and dependability of the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To enhance reliability in this study, the following measures were taken:

- Triangulation: Multiple data were used, including semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals and the parents/guardians, as well as policy document analysis. This ensured that findings could be cross-verified and reduce researcher bias (Patton, 2014).
- Consistent data collection procedures: The interview questions were semi-structured to ensure all participants were asked similar core questions while allowing flexibility for additional probing (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). This helped maintain consistency across interviews.

3.7.3.2 Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study ensured validity through:

- Credibility: I built trust with participants by conducting interviews in familiar and comfortable environments, allowing them to express their experiences openly (Shenton, 2004).
- Transferability: Rich descriptions of participants experiences, as well as the contextual factors influencing immigrant children's education, were provided to enable other researchers to assess whether findings can be applied to similar settings (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025).

By implementing these strategies, this study ensured that the findings were credible, dependable and accurately represented the experiences of teachers, principals and parents/guardians regarding ECE for immigrant children.

3.8 Data analysis

This study made use of thematic analysis as the primary method of data interpretation. Thematic analysis consists of identifying and coding data under recuring themes found in the data set (Knott et al., 2022). It offers a flexible yet rigorous framework for making sense of rich and detailed data. This method was well suited for examining the experiences, perceptions and social realities of the participants. The data collected from the interviews with teachers, principals and parents/guardians were first transcribed and, where necessary, translated to ensure accuracy and consistency (see annexure G-J) for summaries of the transcription. Following this data were

carefully coded into segments of text labelled to recurring ideas or issues that emerged across multiple interviews. These codes were then grouped into overarching themes that capture shared patterns of experience or systemic challenges.

In addition to the interview data, policy documents were reviewed and used to complement and triangulate findings. These documents were not analysed in isolation but were integrated into the coding process (see annexure K), enriching each identified theme from the interviews with relevant policy content. For example, themes such as ‘language and communication barriers’ or ‘documentation and enrolment challenges’ were not only evident in the participant narratives but were also mirrored in national ECD policy frameworks and Educational Whitepapers. This type of analysis allowed the researcher to create an overarching picture of the experiences of the participants and how this is shaped by the broader structural and policy-related factors.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics refer to actions and morals influencing the reasoning and thought processes followed. Mouton (2011) defines research ethics as determining whether the research is morally sound, especially when involving individuals or their personal lives. Adherence to ethical codes, encompassing confidentiality, objectivity, data collection methods, data publication, and researcher impact on the environment, is crucial (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Mouton, 2011). The primary role of research ethics is to safeguard the rights of all participants (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mouton, 2011). To this study, two data collection tools namely policy documents and semi-structured interviews were utilised.

The participants for this study included principals and teachers from informal and formal ECD centres and parents/guardians of immigrant children. To ensure transparency and fair treatment, all participants were provided with information sheets informing them of the study objectives and aims and the voluntary nature of their participation. Additionally, signed consent forms were obtained prior to data collection (see annexures A-C for examples of forms). Although this study was classified as a low risk study, careful attention was given to ethical considerations throughout this research process. In particular, the study acknowledges the potential sensitivity of topics such as trauma, displacement and undocumented status, which could arise when working with immigrant families. To mitigate any potential harm, the interviews were conducted in a respectful and empathetic manner allowing participants to decline to answer any question that made them feel unfordable. The participants were provided the option to conduct the interview in any language that the researcher is also fluent in. Where appropriate, participants were also offered the option to pause or terminated the interview at any point without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants identities, and any identifiable information was removed from the transcripts and this masters report. For

undocumented participants extra caution was taken to ensure that no data could be linked back to them in any form.

An ethical clearance application was made to the University of Witwatersrand, with the African Centre for Migration & Society Ethics Committee, and constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). Clearance certificate number is ACMS24/10/05 (see annexure L). Permission to conduct research was sought from the ECD centre principals (see annexure A for letter requestion permission) and from the Provincial Department of Education. I have completed a research ethics course and have been awarded a Certificate of Competence in Research Ethics from the University of Witwatersrand. Research commenced after the permission from the Department was obtained.

3.10 Limitations

The study focused on how immigrant children aged 4 to 6 years old experience education within ECD centres. It explored ECD centres in township areas in the Free State. Therefore, this study relied on the participation of research subjects, and due to the design of the study, reservations among parents and caregivers of immigrant children arose. It must also be noted that there is a lack of literature on immigrant children's experiences in ECD centres in township/informal areas, and this study therefore relied on the limited information provided by the participants. Although there is a lot of research on ECD in South Africa, specific focus on immigrant children's experiences in these centres are limited. In the identification of possible sites, it was found that the majority of the children in informal/formal ECD centres in these areas originate from Lesotho. The participants that volunteered to participate in this study was however from other countries. The Free State province was also identified as a province with minimal studies regarding migration. There were a lot of reservations among parents and principals of the ECD centres in these areas. As migration is increasingly criminalised and with the on-going anti-immigrant rages in the country, immigrants face scrutiny and are afraid of their safety. Therefore, the afore mentioned factors had high probabilities of affecting participants comfortability in disclosing information.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology used in the study explaining the qualitative research approach, purposive sampling methods and data collection techniques. It also discussed Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which provided a framework for understanding the experiences of immigrant children in ECE. Lastly, the chapter highlighted the ethical considerations, reliability and validity measures, and limitations of the study ensuring that the research was conducted in a credible and ethical manner.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings on the experiences of immigrant children in South African ECD centres. It explores how ECD policies are implemented in practice and examines challenges related to enrolment, language barriers and parental engagement. Findings are organized under key themes derived from participant interviews and supported by relevant policy documents.

4.2 Research questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

Primary research question:

How is ECE for immigrants in ECDs conceptualised and implemented to foster their development and integration into formal schooling system by policy, teachers and parents/guardians?

Secondary research questions:

a. What are the existing programmes and mechanisms in ECD that promotes an improved transition in the formal schooling system?

b. What are the experiences of teachers and parents/guardians of immigrant children in ECD centres with regards to the quality of education and the children's integration?

c. How does ECE aid immigrant children in their ability to transition and integrate into formal schooling system?

d. How do policies or systems address gaps or barriers in ECD sector impacting the quality of education experienced by immigrant children?

e. How would a cooperative support structure aimed at providing quality ECE, and child integration look like based on the perception and experiences of teachers and parents/guardians?

4.3 Demographic information about participants

The research and data collection were collected from 4 ECD centres (2 formal and 2 informal), all located in the township area. Teachers for each ECD labelled as T1 to T6. ECD Principals are labelled as PRC1 – PRC4. Parents are also labelled P1 – 6. This is done to protect the identities

of the centres, principal, teachers and parents. All ECDs were identified in the township areas. See the distribution and information of the participants listed below in Table 4.1-4.4

Table 4-1: Participant distribution

Group of Participants	Number of Participants (Total of 16)
ECD Principals	4
ECD Teachers	6
Parents of immigrant children	6

Table 4-2: Principals' qualifications

Name	Qualification	Years of experience	ECD Centre in charge of.
PRC1	ECD Qualification	14	ECD - A
PRC2	ECD Qualification	25	ECD - B
PRC3	ECD Qualification	More than 10	ECD - C
PRC4	Grade 11	24	ECD - D

Table 4-3: Teacher qualifications

Name	Qualification	Years of experience	ECD centre where participant is employed
T 1	No formal teaching qualification	10	ECD – A
T2	No formal teaching qualification	2	ECD – B
T3	No formal teaching qualification	4	ECD – C

T4	Currently in process of obtaining an ECD Diploma	9	ECD – D
T5	Matric	3	ECD – D
T6	Matric	1 Month	ECD – D

Table 4-4: Parent/guardian demographics

Name	Country of origin	Child's age
P1	Democratic Republic of Congo	5
P2	Democratic Republic of Congo	6
P3	Malawi	6
P4	Zimbabwe	4
P5	Democratic Republic of Congo	4
P6	Democratic Republic of Congo	5

4.4 Conceptualisation and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for immigrant children

4.4.1 Existing Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes and mechanisms supporting immigrant learners

South Africa's policies support ECE for all children including immigrant learners. The National Integrated ECD policy ensures that all children, regardless of nationality, have access to early learning (DSD, 2015). Similarly, the Education White Paper 5 promotes ECD by connecting the centres with social support services (DoE, 2001a). However, immigrant children still face difficulties accessing quality ECD programmes due to language barriers, limited funding and documentation requirements.

4.4.1.1 Use of the official Early Childhood Development (ECD) syllabus vs. centre-developed timetables

The NCF for children from birth to four years (DBE, 2015) provides guidelines to help all children, including immigrant learners, developing essential skills before Grade R. However, teacher interviews reveal that ECD centres use this framework differently. Some teachers follow the government's official syllabus, while others create their own schedules based on available resources and student needs (T1, T2, and T6). Teachers in the formal ECD centres reported following government guidelines (T3 T4, T5) ensuring structured learning for all learners. In contrast to this the teachers in informal ECD centres said they lacked access to official learning materials, and as a result they design lesson plans based on their experiences and available resources. The Policy and Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification and Higher Education for ECD Educators (DHET, 2017) mandates structured teacher training. However, many informal ECD teachers, especially those working with immigrant children do not receive this training. Some teachers, however, were unaware of the existing syllabus drafted by the department of basic education.

4.4.1.2 Language development support in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

Language development is essential for young children, especially immigrant learners who may not speak the local languages when they enter ECD centres. The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) (DBE, 2009), aims to ensure that all children, regardless of background, develop basic language skills before starting school (DBE, 2009). Language support however varies widely, especially in low-income communities. Some ECD centres actively help immigrant learners learn the local languages using bilingual learning strategies (P2, P3, P4, T3, T5). Teachers in these centres use peer learning where immigrant learners are paired with native speakers to help them learn (T2, T3). Other methods include visual aids, songs, and play-based activities to make language learning engaging (T1, T2, T3, T5, T6). Many ECD centres lack language support structures, expecting immigrant children to adapt on their own. This makes social and academic integration difficult. Parents worry that without proper language support, their children struggle to make friends and follow lessons (P3, P4).

> Teacher 3: *When the current learners (migrants) initially arrived at the centre, they were 3 years old, and I was their teacher. They were not familiar with the local language. So, I used to pair them with children from our country and teach them how to teach migrant children the local language. In most cases we teach them in the local language".*

The findings correspond with research globally and locally where we find that policy documents prioritise inclusion for all learners, but the implementation thereof varies (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016).

Although the some ECD teachers make an effort to teach the local language to immigrant learners, English and Afrikaans is still widely used as language of instruction in South Africa, leading non-native speakers to struggle with classroom participation (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

4.4.1.3 Principals' perspective on government policy gaps and limited resources

Principals from both formal and informal ECD centres agreed that government policies and funding gaps make it difficult to provide quality education for immigrant learners (PRC 1. PRC 2). The policy on universal access to Grade R aims to ensure all children receive a year of structured learning before formal schooling (DBE, 2011). However, immigrant children are often excluded due to documentation requirements and lack of government funding for informal ECD centres. While the government provides funding for registered ECD centres, informal centres, where many immigrant learners are enrolled, do not receive financial support (PRC 3, PRC 4). This finding was also reported by Sello et al., (2024) where they reported that unregistered/informal ECD centres represent a large portion (43%) of the sector but is exploded from funding or public subsidies. The National Plan for Action for Children (NPAC) (2019-2024) acknowledges this issue and recommends removing documentation barriers to improve access to education (DSD, 2019). However, principals reported that bureaucratic processes still prevent undocumented children from enrolling in government-funded programmes. Another challenge is the lack of teacher training on working with immigrant learners. The Policy and Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification and Higher Education for ECD Educators provides guidelines, but it does not cover multicultural or multilingual education leaving many teachers unprepared to support immigrant learners (DHET, 2017).

4.4.1.4 Principals' perspective on Early Childhood Development (ECD) registration challenges

Registering an ECD allows for understanding in terms of the quality of education offered in that centre (Department of Social Development and Economic Policy Research [DSD & EPRI], 2014). Principals acknowledged the importance of offering quality ECD programmes for child development, however some have expressed challenges in the highly bureaucratic registration processes, with one principal deciding to run their centre independently.

> PRC 1: *Now that the DoE has taken over, many ECD centre owners are expressing their frustrations with the strict requirements imposed on them. One of my friends was forced to close her centre due to the stringent regulations.*

> PRC 4*: I am still in the process of registering my centre. I am currently busy with a file called Vangasali. It is still difficult, and it is a lot of work, they have a lot of requirements.*

Although policy documents state (DBE, 2011; DoE, 2001a/b; DSD, 2011; DSD, 2015; DSD, 2021) that all learners, regardless of status should have access to early learning opportunities, many immigrant parents still struggle to enrol their children into ECD centres due to legal permits (Buckland, 2011; Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023)

4.4.2 Enrolment trends and dropout rates of immigrant children

South African policy frameworks recognize the challenges immigrant learners face in accessing formal ECE. The National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) and the NPAC (2019-2024) highlight that undocumented children often struggle to enrol in registered ECD centres due to legal and administrative barriers (DSD, 2015; 2019). As a result, many immigrant children attend informal ECD centres which are more affordable and accessible but lack structured support and government funding. One principal from a formal centre expressed less challenges regarding enrol issues, and drop-out rates among immigrant children, this is due to the structure she utilises.

> *PRC1: I wouldn't say I experience higher dropout rates among my immigrant children, because most of them register for a full year. I did not have any children drop out during the year due to lack of documentation or anything. Before they come and register, I need proper papers, so that I don't have any difficulties during the year. They must understand that it is a 12-month contract, therefore parents need to abide by the contract.*

> PRC 3: *We do experience higher drop-out rates among immigrant children, even now I am only left with a few. Sometimes a child just stops attending due to documentation issues, resulting in them having to go back to their home country. You would find that a child has neither a birth certificate nor a clinical card.*

4.4.2.1 Differences in enrolment rates between formal and informal Early Childhood Development (ECD)

The National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) states that all children, regardless of nationality, should have access to quality early learning. However, interviews with principals and teachers show that in reality, many immigrant children are enrolled in informal ECD centres due to documentation requirements and financial constraints (Principals: All). The principals form the formal ECD centres reported that their enrolment processes followed government regulations requiring birth certificates, proof of residence and other legal documents. As a result, many immigrant children are unable to register leaving unregistered informal centres as the only option (PRC 1, PRC 2).

> PRC 1: *In the beginning I used to experience challenges with enrolment and drop-outs, however due to time and learning how to operate my day care, I don't have that anymore.*

On the other hand, principals from informal ECD centres stated that they accept immigrant children without documentation but lack government support to provide high-quality learning environments (PRC 3, PRC 4). Although Policy on Universal Access to Grade R aims to ensure structured early learning for all children before formal schooling the policy does not provide guidance for accommodating undocumented children (DBE, 2011). This finding enforces the reports from global and local studies where immigrant families struggle to enrol their children into high-quality programmes due to factors like documentation and fees (Gupta, 2017; Mbarathi & Diga, 2016; Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

4.4.2.2 Higher dropout rates in informal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres due to financial struggles and frequent relocations

The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) stresses the importance of targeted interventions to prevent dropouts and ensure retention, especially for disadvantaged children (DoE, 1995). Interviews with teachers and principals highlighted that financial instability and frequent relocations are the main reasons for immigrant children to drop out (PRC 3, PRC 4, T3, T6). Teachers reported that many immigrant families struggle to pay school fees leading to children being withdrawn from ECD programmes (T3, T6). Principals from informal centres noted that since these centres do not receive government subsidies, they rely on fees paid by parents making them financially unstable (PRC 3, PRC 4). Additionally, immigrant families frequently relocate in search of better jobs or safer housing disrupting their children's education (T6). Policy acknowledges these challenges and recommends increased financial support, however principles reported that these recommendations have not been effectively implemented (PRC 1, PRC 2, PRC 3, PRC 4).

4.4.2.3 Parental decisions influenced by affordability and proximity to home

The National Integrated ECD policy states that early learning should be accessible and affordable for all children (DSD, 2015). However, interviews with parents reveal that financial constraints and locations are the main factors influencing their choice of ECD centres (P1, P2, P5). Many parents reported that formal ECD centres are too expensive and have strict enrolment requirements forcing them to enrol their children in informal centres that are closer to home and more affordable (P1, P2) (Gupta, 2017). A parent also raised concerns about hidden costs such as transportation and additional school fees making formal ECD centres financially inaccessible (P5). While the NPAC (2019-2024) recommends reducing the financial barriers to ECD, immigrant families still struggle to afford quality early learning (DSD, 2019).

4.5 Experiences of teachers and parents regarding quality and integration of immigrant learners.

4.5.1 Language and communication barriers

Language remains a significant challenge in the integration of immigrant children into South Africa's ECD system. The National Integrated ECD policy recognizes that linguistic diversity should be supported in ECD programmes to ensure effective learning for all children, including immigrants (DSD, 2015). The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) warns against introducing young children to formal learning in a language they do not understand (DoE, 1995). Despite this many ECD centres lack structured multilingual support, leaving immigrant learners struggling to communicate with teachers and peers. The South African 2030 strategy for ECD programmes calls for improved language training for ECD teachers to help support learners from diverse backgrounds (DBE, 2024b).

> Teacher 3: *"When the children first came to the centre, they did not how to speak the local language, they only spoke Shona."*

> Teacher 2: *In the beginning it used to be a real challenge communicating with the children, because they did not understand the local language.*

4.5.1.1 Difficulties with English and local languages

Interviews with teachers and parents confirm that language barriers significantly impact immigrant learners' ability to integrate into South African ECD centres (T3, T5, T6, P3, P4). Many immigrant children struggle to understand English or the local languages making it difficult for them to follow lessons, communicate with peers and engage in classroom activities. Teachers reported that immigrant learners often experience isolation because they lack the necessary language skills to interact with other children (T3, T5).

> T6: *What I have realised is that immigrant children isolate themselves, because they don't understand some of the words used by their classmates during playtime.*

This affects social development and confidence as they feel excluded from group activities and struggle to express themselves. Parents also shared concerns without proper language support that their children would take longer to adjust and may fall behind academically (P4). The NELDS (DBE, 2009) emphasise that early exposure to language rich environments is essential for cognitive and social development, but immigrant children often do not receive adequate language support.

4.5.1.2 Bilingual learning strategies versus rapid assimilation

The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) promotes mother tongue-based education yet many ECD centres do not have formal strategies and training to support bilingual learning (DoE, 1995). Teachers at some of the ECD centres reported that they use bilingual approaches such as attempting to incorporate mother tongue, to assist learners in understanding the local language. This, however, still requires training as it is not done in a structured manner. Other teachers mentioned pairing immigrant children with native speakers or using visual aids, songs, and stories to help the children learn local languages naturally (T3, T5). However, one teacher expressed frustrations that they were not trained to teach children with different language backgrounds and some centres do not have the resources to implement bilingual education (T3).

> Teacher 3: *We used to have pamphlets with animals, and we would use them to teach them how to name those animals in the local and English language. However, I would sometime have to ask them to say it in their mother tongue so they can understand what I am asking and trying to teach them.*

Parents stress the importance of structured language support rather than the expectation of rapid assimilation (P4). They found without proper language assistance they children faced additional challenges in adjusting to the school environment and are more likely to struggle academically and socially (P4). Policy promotes inclusive education, but it does not provide guidance on how to integrate immigrant children linguistically (DoE, 2001b). This confirms what was found globally that immigrant children struggle with the rapid assimilation of the language and struggle to understand the work (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016; Suri & Chandra, 2021)

4.5.1.3 The need for teacher training and language support in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

All teachers indicated that they have received little to no training on ECD and on how to teach multilingual learners. The principals acknowledge that there is a gap in teacher training when it comes to supporting immigrant children's language needs (PRC2, PRC 3).

> PRC3: *When immigrant children first arrive at the centre it is a real challenge. Communication becomes difficult because we don't understand each other's languages. It is a struggle when teaching, so I must find ways to try and make them understand the activity. For instance, I would pair them up with other children during practical activities so they can see what is being done.*

While the Policy and Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification and Higher Education for ECD Educators (2017) states training standard for early childhood teachers, it does

not specifically focus on multilingual education (DHET, 2017). As a result, many teachers struggled to provide effective language support which in turn delays immigrant children's ability to socially and academically integrate (T3, T5). The interviews highlighted ongoing challenges faced by immigrant children due to insufficient bilingual education and limited teacher training.

> T3: *I don't have any formal teaching qualifications, but I have teaching experience as I used to help my grandmother at her creche."*

The above findings confirm what is found in studies conducted both globally and locally where the training of teachers vary from highly qualified to no qualifications (seen in the distribution of teacher qualifications in Table 4.3) (Irvine et al., 2023; Meier & Lemmer, 2015) Although there are initiatives like the ETDP SETA (2024) there remains a lack in standardises, accredited and accessible training programmes to ensure quality service delivery (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018).

4.5.2 Social and emotional adjustment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

Immigrant children often find it difficult to adjust socially in ECD centres. They struggled to make friends and understand cultural differences which lead to isolation and loneliness (P5, P6, T6). The NPAC (2019-2024) highlights the need for inclusive and welcoming environments in ECD seemed to help children feel safe and supported (DSD, 2019).

4.5.2.1 Struggle with peer interaction and cultural differences

Teachers and parents shared that immigrant children often feel left out in ECD centres because of cultural differences and language challenges (P5, P6, T6). These children might not understand local customs or traditions making it difficult for them to engage in Group activities to make friends. One of the teachers noticed that immigrant children prefer to play alone as they struggle to communicate with other children (T6). This makes learning and participation difficult as much of ECE relies on social interaction and group learning. Parents also reported that their children often felt shy or hesitant to speak especially when they first started ECD centres (P5, P6). They worried that without social support their children would struggle to build confidence and adjust to school life. The BELA Bill (2022) as a legislative document made explicit reference to the importance of supporting cultural and religious diversity in early learning environments (Republic of South Africa, 2024). This finding confirms global and local findings that although programmes are developed to help teachers understand culturally responsive teaching the implementation thereof is lacking (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

4.5.2.2 Play based learning and peer interaction strategies

Teachers shared that play based learning helps immigrant children integrate by allowing them to interact with others in a fun low-pressure way (T6). The NCF for children from birth to four (2018) recommends using play as a way for children to learn and socialize. Many ECD centres use games, music and storytelling to help children from different backgrounds connect (T6). Teachers reported that when immigrant children engage in group-play, they learn social skills and feel more comfortable interacting with their peers. However, this same teacher indicated that they are not trained in culturally responsive teaching and do not always know how to support immigrant children's social development (T6).

4.5.2.3 Improvement in confidence and communication over time

Parents reported that their children became more confident after spending more time in ECD centres (P3, P5). Overtime, children started speaking more, playing with others and participating in class activities. One parent shared that her child was very quiet at first but eventually began talking and making friends (P3). The other parent noted that her child's confidence grew as they learned the local language and became familiar with the school's routine (P5). This aligns with the NPAC (2019-2024) which encourages ECD centres to create safe and supportive spaces where all children including immigrant can build self-confidence and social skills (DSD, 2019). Teachers and parents agreed that more support is needed to help immigrant children feel welcome and included. This includes more training for teachers on how to support children from different cultural backgrounds, better resource play-based learning activities and more awareness programmes to help local children understand and accept their immigrant classmates.

4.5.3 Parental engagement and communication with schools

Parental involvement is crucial for children's success in ECD programmes. However, many immigrant parents struggle to engage with ECD centres because of language barriers, cultural differences and unfamiliarity with South Africa’s education system (P1, P3, P6). The White Paper on Families in South Africa (2021) emphasises that parents play an essential role in their children's learning and recommend that schools provide better support to help families understand and navigate the schooling system (DSD, 2021). Many ECD centres lack effective communication strategies to engage immigrant parents, making it difficult for them to participate in their children's education.

4.5.3.1 Language barriers and cultural differences in parental engagement

Many immigrant parents struggle to communicate with teachers and school staff due to language differences (P1, P3, P6). In some cases, parents are unable to read or understand school notices,

making it difficult for them to stay informed about their child's progress or school activities. Some parents shared that they feel unwelcome in ECD centres because they do not speak the local language fluently (P1, P3). They fear being judged or misunderstood, which discourages them from attending parents' meetings or engaging with teachers (P6). Additionally cultural differences affect communication between immigrant parents and school staff. In some cultures, parents may not be used to directly engaging with teachers leading to misunderstandings about expectations for parental involvement. A teacher also noted that some parents hesitate to ask questions or attend meetings as they do not feel comfortable speaking in the language, they are not fluent in (T3). The National Integrated ECD policy encourages parental engagement programmes and home visiting initiatives to help parents feel more connected with schools (DSD, 2015). However, these programmes (Meier et al., 2015; Sello et al., 2024) are not widely implemented, leaving many parents without proper support to engage with the child's education.

4.5.3.2 Financial challenges and the impact on school-parent communication

Principals and teachers reported that irregular school fee payments create challenges for ECD centres, particularly the informal centres that rely on parental contributions (PRC 3, PRC4, T3). Some parents struggle to pay school fees regularly, which affects the school's ability to pay teachers, by learning materials and maintaining operations. A teacher shared that financial struggles often lead to poor communication between parents and ECD centres. Parents who cannot afford fees may avoid interactions with teachers or school staff out of fear of being asked for payment (T3). This creates a disconnect between schools and parents making it harder for teachers to update parents about their child's learning progress. The White Paper on Families in South Africa highlights the need for stronger financial and social support for families particularly those in vulnerable communities (DSD, 2021). However, ECD centres continue to struggle due to lack of government funding which forces them to rely on inconsistent parental contributions.

> PRC 3: *The biggest challenge I face is school fees. Sometimes it is not that some parents are unable to pay school, they just don't want to try. At the end of the month, I must take money out of my pocket and buy food for the children, and make sure they are provided for. During the winter at times some parents do not want to make necessary contributions that assist with winter provisions. At the end of the month, I must split whatever money is available among paying salaries, the upkeep of the centre and buying groceries.*

> PRC 4: *Sometimes you would take in the child, and then the parent/s don't want to pay school fees. As the overdue school fees accumulate, a child will just stop attending, to find out the parent run away from paying school but then went to enrol them afresh at another ECD centre.*

These findings confirm the local reports on how funding remains a major issue for ECD centres in particular unregistered/ informal ECDs. The unregistered/ informal ECDs often do not meet the correct criteria to register for funding leaving the centres reliant on other forms of funding (Aina & Bipath, 2022; HDA, 2014; Marfo & Biersteker, 2011; Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023; Sello et al., 2024).

4.6 How ECE supports immigrant children's transition into formal schooling

4.6.1 Readiness for Grade R/1

School readiness is an important milestone for children moving from ECD centres to formal schooling. In South Africa the Policy Framework for Universal Access to Grade R states that children should be prepared for primary school through structured learning programmes that develop literacy, numeracy and social skills (DBE, 2011). However, immigrant children often struggle with school readiness, particularly in language, writing and counting skills making their transition to Grade or more difficult (T6, P3, P4, P5).

4.6.1.1 Key indicators for school readiness

Most teachers and parents agree that literacy, numeracy and social skills are essential for school readiness (T1, T2, P3, P5). These skills help children follow instructions, interact with peers and complete basic academic tasks needed for Grade R. Teachers shared that some children, particularly immigrants, struggle with early writing and counting because they have had limited exposure to structured learning environments before entering ECD centres (T3, T6). Parents also noted that their children needed extra help with school related tasks such as holding a pencil, recognizing numbers and speaking in the classroom language (P3, P4). The Education White Paper 5 on ECE (2001) suggest that school readiness should be assessed based on a child's background and learning experiences, rather than expecting all children to perform at the same level (DoE, 2001a). However, many ECD centres lack resources to conduct proper readiness assessments, leaving some children unprepared for the academic and social demands of Grade R.

4.6.1.2 Challenges in readiness for immigrant children

Parents and teachers noted that many immigrant children struggle with writing and counting which affects their ability to keep up with their peers in Grade R (T3, T6, P4). Teachers observed that immigrant children often take longer to adjust, especially since they have not attended an ECD centre before starting Grade R (T3, T6). Language barriers also contribute to school readiness challenges. Immigrant children who do not speak the local language fluently may have difficulty understanding instructions or participating in classroom activities (T3) (Suri & Chandra, 2021).

This impacts the ability to develop literacy and numeracy skills at the same pace as their peers. The National Integrated ECD policy acknowledges that children from diverse backgrounds need additional support, but ECD centres often lack structured language assistants to help immigrant learners (DSD, 2015).

4.6.1.3 Parental concerns about progression to Grade R/1

Some parents worry that documentation issues may prevent their child from progressing to Grade 1 (P5). Many formal schools require birth certificates and residency documents for enrolment, and undocumented immigrant children often face delays or rejection when trying to register for primary school (P5). While policies such as the NPAC (2019-2024) suggested removing barriers to education for immigrant children many schools still enforce strict documentation policies making it difficult for children to move from ECD centres to Grade 1 (DSD, 2019). A parent shared that they fear their children would not be able to continue their education despite completing ECD programmes (P5).

4.6.2 The role of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in supporting transition

ECD centres are expected to play a key role in preparing children for primary school by aligning their curriculum with the Grade R syllabus. In most cases formal centres utilises the Grade R syllabus due to availability of resources to conduct the necessary activities.

> T5: *I make use of the Grade R syllabus to plan and conduct my lessons.*

The Policy Framework for Universal Access to Grade R provides guidelines for early learning that aims to ensure continuity between ECD and formal schooling (DBE, 2011). However, many ECD centres, particularly informal ones that serve immigrant children do not have the resources to provide structured transition support.

4.6.2.1 Support for Grade R/1 and registration and transition

Some ECD centres actively assist immigrant families with registering their children for Grade 1 and provide guidance on school transition requirements (PRC 1, P1). These centres help parents navigate school admissions processes, ensuring that children are placed in appropriate learning environments.

> PRC 3: *Don't have a problem accepting undocumented immigrant children, however, the real challenge they face is registering for Grade 1. I had a learner who experienced the same challenge, where the primary school requested a birth certificate, of which the child did not have. However I assisted by referring parents to the DBE, and they eventually*

received assistance with Grade 1 enrolment. Unfortunately, some end up not going to school at all.

As reiterated in the literature, the National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) calls for improved coordination between ECD centres and primary schools to facilitate smooth transitions. However, due to lack of institutional support many immigrant children struggle to enrol in Grade R (Hall & Posel, 2019; Marfo & Biersteker, 2011; Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

4.6.2.2 Additional preparation in reading and writing

While some ECD centres support children's transitions, one of the parents indicated that they feel their child needs additional preparation in reading, writing and foundational academic skills before starting Grade 1 (P4). The Education White Paper 5 on ECE (DoE, 2001a) highlights the importance of early literacy and numeracy skills ensuring a smooth transition. As stated in the literature, school readiness should be understood broadly, for a holistic development, where education is not just limited to classroom learning (Harrison, 2020). However, due to differences in curriculum implementation across ECD centres, not all children receive the same level of preparation.

P 4: *For now, my child is not ready even to start Grade 1, because she doesn't know how write. She is struggles to speak English and even the local language.*

4.7 Barriers and policy gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD) for immigrant learners

4.7.1 Documentation and legal challenges

4.7.1.1 Barriers to enrol due to documentation requirements

Many immigrant parents struggle to obtain the necessary documents for their children which delay or prevents enrolment in ECD centres (PRC1, PRC 2, P5). The NPAC (2019-2024) acknowledges this issue and calls for the removal of document related barriers to ensure equal access (DSD, 2019). The Children's Act (2005) and Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001b) affirms that all children regardless of their legal status should have the right to education. This notion is supported in the literature which highlights the UNESCO and UN's emphasis on all children having access to education regardless of their background (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016). Despite these legal protections some ECD centres remain hesitant to admit undocumented children due to unclear policy implementation and administrative restrictions. One parent reported difficulties in navigating the system with some schools requiring proof of residence and additional legal documents making access to early learning even more challenging (P5) (Hall & Posel, 2019;

Irvine et al., 2023). Both teachers and principals have highlighted the need for more flexible policies that allow immigrant children to access ECD programmes without these strict documentation requirements (PRC 2, T3). The National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) supports inclusive education and acknowledges the diverse needs of children from diverse backgrounds. However, there is little guidance on how ECD centres should handle undocumented children leaving many centres uncertain about their role in admitting these learners. The informal ECD centres have found alternative ways to accommodate undocumented children by relying on community support and non-government organisations. However, these informal solutions do not provide long term security for immigrant learners and do not guarantee their transition into great awe and primary school.

4.7.2 Financial and infrastructure limitations

4.7.2.1 Insufficient government funding

Lack of government funding remains one of the biggest challenges affecting ECD centres particularly those that serve immigrant children. Many ECD's struggles to provide adequate learning materials, train teachers and proper infrastructure due to limited financial support (PRC3, PRC 4, T3).

> PRC 3: *"Buying toys, paints, potty trainers, etc, is all in my hands, and its difficult."*

This finding confirms other studies in South Africa that reported that there is a lack of adequate classroom space, books, toys and stationery, especially in informal ECD centres (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Sello et al., 2024)

The Policy on Early Development centres (DSD, 2011) underscored the importance of accessibility of centres and the need for all centres to comply with the national standards for resources and safety. The National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) however, acknowledges that funding for ECE remains inadequate, especially for informal centres that cater to vulnerable children including immigrants. While some formal ECD centres receive government subsidies, financial support is often linked to registration and compliance with strict legal requirements which many of these informal centres do not meet.

> PRC 3: *Although not registered, support would really go a long way in terms of infrastructure upkeep, building toilet facilities for the children, toys, food, blankets. We would be happy to receive any form of assistance. We have children from disadvantaged homes and are in need of help."*

The Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a) advocated for increased government funding to expand ECD access and improve service quality. However, in practice funding remains conditional on legal documentation meaning that many informal seekers that serve immigrant children are excluded from financial assistance (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Sello et al., 2024; Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023).

4.7.2.2 Reliance on community donations for informal Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres

Due to the absence of government support, many informal ECD centres rely on community donations and non-governmental organisations to operate (PRC 3). Community members, local businesses and charitable organisations often step in to provide resources such as food, teaching materials and even financial contributions to keep these centres running. However, this type of support is inconsistent and does not provide long-term sustainability for all the children they serve.

> PRC 3: "*We do receive some assistance in the form of donations. As you can see some of these tables were donated by people who had some furniture to give away and some toys. One of the shops around here sometimes donates food. At least I can say we do receive some assistance."*

The National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) recommends stronger partnerships between government, private sectors and communities to support ECD service delivery. However, in many immigrant communities these partnerships remained weak leaving informal centres struggling to survive. The teachers and principals highlighted that without stable funding they were unable to hire qualified staff, maintain facilities or provide structured learning opportunities for immigrant children (PRC 3, PRC 4, T3).

> PRC 3: *As you can see, if parents were consistent with school fees, or if there was anything better, we could do, our centre would have been in a much better standard/state that we want to see.*

This finding confirms what was reported by the other studies conducted in South Africa where the funding for informal/unregistered ECD is highly reliant on parent fees and other external donations (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Sello et al., 2024).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the experiences of immigrant children in South African ECD centres through the perspectives of teachers, principals and parents/guardians; by highlighting challenges they face in terms of enrolment, language barriers and integration into the formal schooling

system. Despite the existence of policies aimed at supporting immigrant children, such as the National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015) and the Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a), the implementation of these policies is hindered by significant barriers, including documentation requirements, financial constraints and insufficient teacher training. Immigrant children from both formal and informal ECD centres struggle with language acquisition, social integration and limited educational resources. Informal centres, which often serve immigrant children, face additional challenges related to lack of government funding and bureaucratic barriers, making it difficult to provide quality education. Furthermore, the study revealed while some teachers and principals make efforts to support immigrant children, the absence of structured bilingual education and consistent resources poses significant obstacles to their successful transition into the formal schooling system. Addressing these issues requires a more comprehensive approach, including policy reform to remove documentation barriers, increase funding for informal centres and enhanced teacher training to support multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the main conclusions drawn from the research findings, with reference to the research questions. It then outlines recommendations for quality provision of ECE to immigrant children. This study investigated how quality ECE is conceptualised and implemented for immigrant children in both formal and informal ECD centres. It explored the challenges and barriers immigrants' children face in accessing quality ECE.

5.2 Summary and discussions of the findings

This section discusses the findings presented in chapter 4 and conclusions based on the study's research questions. The following conclusions can be drawn through the analysis of the interviews and document analysis.

5.2.1 Conceptualisation and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for immigrant children

This study revealed that the conceptualisation and implementation of ECE differ across policies, teachers, principals and parents/guardians. In the section below I will highlight the similarities and differences found among the stakeholders as reported in chapter 4.

5.2.1.1 Conceptualisation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) through policy documents

The findings indicated that South Africa's policies emphasise and supports ECE for all children in the country, regardless of their background. Policies and legislation such as the Constitution, the National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015), the Children's Act of 2005, and the BELA Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2024), stipulating that a learner must be allowed to attend formal schooling regardless of document status or the status of the parents/guardian (DBE, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). However, immigrants still face challenges accessing quality ECE programmes due to documentation issues, financial issues and language barriers.

5.2.1.2 Teachers' conceptualisation of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The teachers showed a commitment to providing education for all children. The finding shows that teachers from both formal and informal are committed to ensuring that children are ready and assisted to smoothly transition into formal school. However, various challenges are faced, which

consequently impact the quality of education received by immigrant children. Language remained a significant challenge, which impacted communication between teacher and child. The findings revealed that miscommunication impacted the children's understandings of classroom and outdoor activities. As a result, children's communication skills take longer to develop. Teachers also expressed frustrations due to lack of multilingual training and support, as a result they had to formulate their own frameworks and structures of assisting children integrate into the centre (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021). These strategies revealed that teachers and principals understood that all children needed to speak the same language either, English or the local language, in order ensure full comprehension of lessons, to aid in social integration and keep on track with academic skills allowing them to properly transition into formal schooling (HDA, 2014).

5.2.1.3 Parents/guardians conceptualisation of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Parents of immigrant children often understood ECE as a means for their children to obtaining a promising future. Findings revealed that social integration and foundational academic skills played an important role in their children's cognitive development. However, some parents expressed their concerns regarding language constraints, whereby children still struggled to either communicate in the local language or English. Findings also showed that some parents had differing understanding of quality ECE due to cultural beliefs and expectations, which sometimes leads to misunderstandings between teachers and parents (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Overall, the study concluded that parents value a supportive environment, language, academic and social development that ECE provides for their children's holistic development.

5.2.2 Existing Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes and mechanisms supporting immigrant learners

Early childhood education programmes not only play a vital role in the overall development of a child but also facilitates a better transition into formal schooling. Findings revealed that the use of NCF provides a holistic development to children, providing them with essential skills for Grade 1. These structured programmes equip children with essential skills for a smoother transition into Grade 1. The study found that formal ECDs utilised both the NCF and Grade R curriculums for a more structured programme which promotes cognitive and language development (DBE, 2021). However, informal centres tent to rely on centre-developed timetables and face challenges in curriculum delivery due to resource constraints (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

5.2.3 Barriers in accessing quality Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Immigrant children face significant barriers which often impact the chances of accessing quality ECE programmes. Firstly, the study found that financial barriers is one of the obstacles immigrant

children face in accessing quality education. It was also found that parents who cannot afford to pay fees end up having to pull their children out of the centres, resulting in them being excluded from ECD programmes (UNICEF, 2020). This challenge creates a disconnect and leads to poor communication between teacher and parent.

Secondly, as already mentioned, language is one of the major barriers' immigrants faces. The study found that language gaps make is difficult for teachers to effectively communicate with children. Parent- teacher communication was also impacted, where teachers could not effectively communication the children's need to the parent (Babane, 2020). This impacts the child's development, slowing down their progress due to parents' limitations in understanding their children's academic needs (DSD, 2015).

Thirdly, the study concluded that the lack of documentation often leads to immigrant children being excluded from ECE opportunities. The lack of birth certificates and clinic cards lead to children dropping out of the programmes to return to their home countries. Another barrier relating to documentation, is that formal ECDs have stringent regulation regarding accepting children with no documentation. Forcing immigrant families to rely on informal centres who may lack resources to provide quality ECE (Stats SA, 2024).

5.2.4 The role of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in transitioning and integrating into the formal schooling system

ECE plays an important role in facilitating school readiness. The findings showed that quality ECE aids in language and communication development, especially languages spoken within the communities' immigrants have settled. This also significantly contributes to identity development and social integration, as the findings revealed that children developed confidence and can play with their peers free. ECE aids in addressing the education gap, as it is highlighted in the findings. On the other hand, it was revealed from the findings that access to quality ECE from formal centres affords immigrant children a better chance at quickly integrating into formal schooling system (Nnadozie & Morojele, 2023).

5.2.5 The role of policies or systems address gaps or barriers in Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector impacting the quality of education experienced

Policies and systems play a significant role in building not only an inclusive ECD sector, but also one that ensure quality provision of education. Findings revealed that funding structures and mechanism are imbalanced, informal centres are unaware of other funding avenues they can access, to assist with providing improved ECD services, and also their daily expenses.

As noted in the findings, the NPAC (2019-2024) has the acknowledged the issue of barriers related to lack of documentation for immigrant children (DSD, 2019). To address this the policy has called for the removal of all barriers related to documentation. Unfortunately, according to the findings, the practical implementation of such policies is not adhered to, more especially by the formal ECD centres.

5.2.6 Cooperative support structures aimed at providing quality Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Cooperative structures can assist in alleviating some of the challenges faced by informal ECDs. According to the findings, teachers would like to build more solid parental engagement structures, where they can effectively communicate the children's needs. This structure will assist ensure that children receive full support both from the ECD centres and from their homes, which will highly contribute to their overall development (Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021).

Another finding was that there is a need for teacher training programmes that will focus on providing teachers, especially from informal centres, with solid structures and strategies on how to provide multilingual education, in order to ensure that immigrant children progress and develop at equal footing with their peers (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021, HDA, 2014).

Lastly, the findings revealed that more government support is needed, both for parents and teachers. Parents of immigrant children need the assistance of government in terms of combating the realities of challenges pertaining to access to quality ECE. Findings revealed that although multiple policy mechanisms are in place supporting universal access to education for all children regardless of their background, they are however disconnected from the realities faced by immigrant families and fall short at providing practical measures of support (DBE, 2021, DSD, 2015).

It was concluded that those teachers and principal according to the findings, need more government support, particularly informal centres. Stringent registration requirement restricts informal centres' ability to provide quality ECE that formal centres can provide. Limited resources and lack of physical infrastructure development in terms of proper toilets and out-door play equipment, impact children's cognitive, physical and social development skills.

5.3 Recommendations

Through engaging with the lived experiences of immigrant parents and ECD practitioners, I came to realise the extent to which systemic inequalities intersect with undocumented status, affecting access to foundational learning. Initially, I viewed policy gaps as administrative failures; however,

the narratives revealed a deeper socio-political neglect. This shaped my understanding of inclusive education as a relational, rather than merely procedural, practice. Based on the above I propose a triadic framework of policy-practice-perception in ECE for immigrant children.

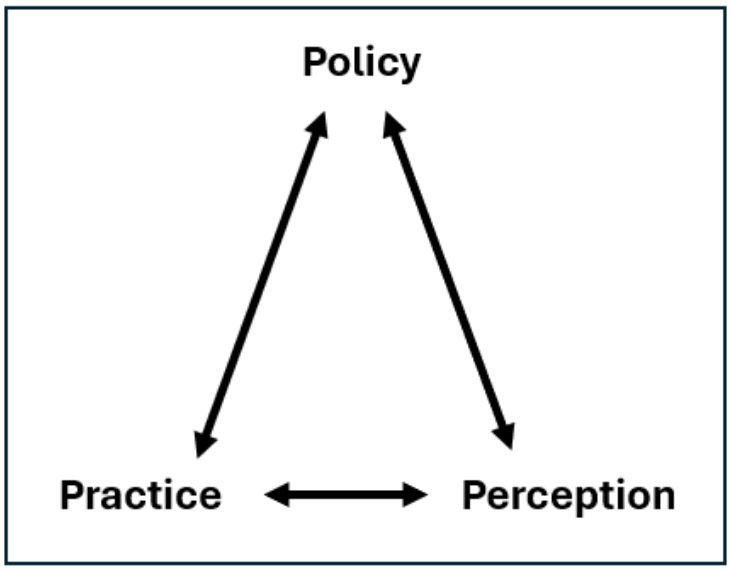


Figure 5-1 : Framework for inclusive immigrant ECE

This framework illustrates how inclusive quality ECE for immigrant children can be understood and improved through the interconnected dynamics of three key components:

- Policy – National and provincial regulations, curriculum frameworks, registration standards, and funding models.
- Practice – Implementation at ECD centres (teaching strategies, language use, enrolment processes, resource distribution).
- Perception – Lived experiences and attitudes of teachers, principals, and immigrant parents (barriers, needs, and aspirations).

These three components are mutually influential and must align for immigrant children to benefit from equitable, inclusive ECE.

The arrows between key components indicate two-way influence (Figure 5.1). For example: 1) Policy ↔ Practice: Policies shape practice, but grassroots realities also reveal gaps or push for policy reform. 2) Practice ↔ Perception: Classroom experiences inform how inclusion is perceived and implemented. And finally, 3) Perception ↔ Policy: Stakeholder narratives (teachers/parents) provide feedback loops into policy discourse. Inclusive ECE education for immigrant children can be achieved when alignment and responsiveness exist between all three components. The framework suggests that policy intentions alone are insufficient unless supported by grounded classroom practices and informed by the lived perceptions of stakeholders. This framework

serves as a diagnostic and developmental tool for policymakers, ECD practitioners, and researchers seeking to understand and address systemic disparities in early education access for vulnerable populations.

Based on the above framework (Figure 5.1), I propose the following recommendations to stakeholders:

5.3.1 Policy and institutional support

It is recommended that policies pertaining to ECD provide practical measure and strategies for immigrants to combat and address their daily challenges and barriers to accessing quality ECE (DSD, 2015). It also recommended that the DBE reduces red tape for the registration of ECD and provide funding structures informal ECD centres can access to improve their ECD centres, to the be able to meet register with the DBE requirements. Importantly, it is recommended that ECD centres are registered, in order to access full funding benefits, and have access to various other services provided by the DBE such access to a social worker.

It is recommended that a local monitoring and evaluation committee be created for ECD centres, which ensure that immigrant children are not restricted any access into ECD centres. It will also provide parents with a formal avenue that can assist them with ECD registration.

5.3.2 Teacher training and professional development

Language and comprehension are significant components in learning. Teacher training programmes pertaining to multilingual teaching strategies need to be development and provided for teachers, for them to deliver structured lessons to immigrant children, combating language and communication barriers (Adams-Ojugbele & Hlalele, 2021; ETDP SETA, 2024).

5.3.3 Community and parental involvement

Improved parent-teacher communication structures are required. Where parents become active role players in their children's development. Structures such as voluntary government bodies, can help build strong parent-teacher relations where communication barriers are removed.

It is recommended that through the already suggested governing body structures, parents and teachers utilise this structure as a means of building a healthy parent-teacher relation, where cultural and language differences/ barriers are resolved (Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Sello et al., 2024).

Immigrant families lack support integrating into the communities and schools. It recommended that community support structures such as NGOs, religious communities, and other local

community structures incorporate activities and programmes that support and foster integration of immigrant children.

5.3.4 Resource allocation and funding

It is recommended that the imbalanced funding according to provinces be monitored and corrected. ECD centres should also be assisted by the DBE in accessing other funding opportunities, to meet their daily needs, as research showed that the current per child subsidy is insufficient according to the current inflation rate in South Africa (DBE, 2021).

5.3.5 Curriculum and programme development

It is recommended that the NCF and Grade R curriculum incorporate multilingual support, where children can develop communication and learning strategies both in the local language and their home language (Wright et al., 2023). Routine and structure are vital for a better transition into the formal school system. It is recommended, that the DBE provides assistance and training to ECD centres in the process of registration on how to their daily programmes in a way that prepares children for the formal schooling environment, especially during the final year of ECD. This can help develop children's concentration, navigating strict daily programmes, and build their communication and participatory confidence.

As noted, before, ECD is a holistic programme that ensures a child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. It is therefore also recommended, that the government encourages the registration of more centres. ECE significantly contributes to identity development and provides a sense confidence in their academic skills. Centres should ensure that different learning needs of immigrant learners are met, through various learning activities such as visual aids, culturally relevant learning activities, multilingual activities, etc.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this final chapter discussed the findings and provided recommendations based on the findings. It is demonstrated through this chapter that there is a gap in providing quality ECE to immigrant children. The key themes were highlighted which are important in providing quality ECE and a better transition into formal schooling for immigrant children. These included: bridging the gap between education policy and implementation, teacher professional development and training, parental engagement, bilingual education and improving funding mechanisms.

This research also emphasised on the power of harnessing collaboration and building strong cross-sector relations in providing holistic quality education. ECDs provide important services to children, hence their need to be effective in meeting the varied needs of children regardless of

their background. The chapter also highlighted systematic challenges faced by immigrant communities impacting their chances of gaining access to quality ECE opportunities. These included lack of documentation, financial constraints, and language barriers. Overall, this section revealed that although South Africa has made efforts to address education disparities, marginalised South African and non-nationals, still struggle to access quality learning programmes due to poor policy implementation, and lack of resources.

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ANNEXURE A: LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION



University of the Witwatersrand,
African Centre for Migration and Society

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at [insert organization name].

My name is Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego.

I have a deep interest and passion for social and policy development and the protection and promotion of human rights. I have an undergraduate degree in Politics and Public governance, and an Honours degree in Political Sciences both obtained from the North-West University. I am studying for a master's degree in Migration and Displacement in the school of African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am seeking permission to do research at [insert organisation name].

I am conducting a research study about how to improve early childhood education for migrant children in South Africa's ECD centres. My aim is to understand teachers' and parents' experiences in different ECD centres, to understand how better to enhance immigrant children's integration into formal schooling. The study title is Investigating mechanisms and programmes for the provision of quality early childhood education for migrant children in early childhood development centres. Your centre has migrant learners enrolled and would therefore provide great insight into understanding the above.

I will invite 2-3 teachers and 2-5 parents or guardians of immigrant children from your organization to participate in this study. If they agree, they will be asked to participate in a short interview. This interview will be approximately 30-60min and will be audio recorded. The individuals will be asked to not name the any organization or individuals.

Participants will be asked to give their written consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the organisation) will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated through a summary of the dissertation.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

All research data will be saved on a laptop with a secure password for three years and then destroyed. The research and supervisor will be the only individuals that will have access to the data.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organization. The permission letter should be on your organization's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego

Dr. Liztie Prinsloo

ANNEXURE B: INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego. I am a Masters student in Migration and Displacement at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Liztie Prinsloo. I am conducting a research study about how to improve early childhood education for migrant children in South Africa's ECD centres. My aim is to understand teachers' and parents' experiences in ECD centres, in order to understand how better to enhance immigrant children's integration into formal schooling. The study title is Investigating mechanisms and programmes for the provision of quality early childhood education for migrant children in early childhood development centres.

I am inviting you to take part in a single interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 30-60min The interview will take place in person. An arrangement will be made with regards to the day, time and place that works for you.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored on a password protected laptop and deleted after 3 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life OR some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Tshegofatso

Researcher:
Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego,

Supervisor:
Dr. Liztie Prinsloo,

ANNEXURE C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigating mechanisms and programmes for the provision of quality early childhood education for migrant children in early childhood development centres.

Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview will be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their manuscript	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their manuscript)	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

ANNEXURE D: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Formal ECD Centre

1. What challenges do you face with regards to the daily operations of your centre?
2. What are the yearly enrolment rates of immigrant children in your centre?
3. Does your centre experience more dropouts by immigrant children compared to native-born children? Please elaborate

Informal ECD Centre

1. Have you attempted applying for financial support from the government?
2. If the above answer is yes, how was the experience regarding the application process?
3. What challenges do you face with regards to the daily operations of your centre?
4. What kind of support do you need from the government?
5. What are the yearly enrolment rates of immigrant children in your centre?
6. Does your centre experience more dropouts by immigrant children compared to native-born children? Please elaborate.

ANNEXURE E: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Biographical

1. How many years of experience do you have as an ECD teacher?
2. What is your highest qualification?

Questions

3. Do you make use of the approved ECD syllabus for planning your teaching and learning activities? If not, what do you use to plan the activities?
4. Do you think that teaching an immigrant child should differ from other children in the classroom?
5. What are common challenges that you think immigrant children have within your classroom?
6. How do you facilitate child participation and interaction for immigrant children?
7. What strategies or learning materials do you use to mitigate different learning needs of children?
8. How do you assess a child's readiness for Grade 1?

ANNEXURE F: PARENT/GUARDIAN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you decide on an ECD to register your child?
2. What were the motivations behind the choice of school?
3. How would say your child has integrated into the centre?
4. How is your interaction and relationship with your child's teacher?
5. With regards your child's integration into the community, has the ECD played a role, and how would you say the ECD has contributed?
6. How would you say the centre has developed your child's readiness for Grade 1?
7. What assistance do you think is needed to assist with child's development and readiness for Grade 1?

ANNEXURE G: EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED FORMAL ECD PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Please note that a summary was made as the original interview took place in another language

PRC 1 – FM

Formal ECD Centre

4. **What challenges do you face with regards to the daily operations of your centre?**

   I do not have any challenges now because I've been working for kids for 14 years. In the beginning is not knowing your teachers, but now I've been with them for more than five years. So, at this moment I do not have, because they know what they have to do. I don't want to lie.

5. **What are the yearly enrolment rates of immigrant children in your centre?**

   This year I have five kids. Last year there were 10, if I'm not mistaken. There were a lot. This year I don't have a lot of immigrant kids. Each year they differ.

6. **Does your centre experience more dropouts by immigrant children compared to native-born children? Please elaborate**

   I wouldn't say that because most of my immigrant kids, they come for 12 months. I didn't not have anyone that can drop out in the year due to not having proper papers and anything. Before they come in, I need proper papers so that I don't have any difficulty during the year. They have to understand that it's a 12-month contract, so they need to abide by my contract. So, I think I do not have that. I think because I already asked proper things in the beginning, that is why I don't encounter that problems. So, I don't know about any other schools, but my school I do not have. But then in the beginning I did have, but due to time and due to learning on how to operate my day-care, I don't have that anymore.

ANNEXURE H: EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED INFORMAL ECD PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Please note that a summary was made as the original interview took place in another language

PRC 3 – IFM

Informal ECD Centre

1. **Have you attempted applying for financial support from the government?**

   No, I have not attempted applying for financial support from the government. I run an independent crèche, from my family house. My issue with the government is that they have restrictions on how you should run your centre. I also would not want to be restricted one day if I want to close down because the crèche is operating from a family house (in the same yard as the family house).

   I get assistance with resources from the community, such as table donations, toys and food.

2. **If the above answer is yes, how was the experience regarding the application process?**

   N/A

3. **What challenges do you face with regards to the daily operations of your centre?**

   One of the challenges I face is parents sometimes the inconsistencies of parents in paying fees, sometimes not paying fees at all. This is resulting in the crèche not being at the standard I would like for it be. It is difficult buying this such as paint, potty trainers, toys. All those are left to me as the owner. School fees is a major challenge. Some parents don't even try at all to make payment. At the end of the month I have to top up from my own pocket to ensure that children eat and provided for in the centre, and also pay the teachers.

4. **What kind of support do you need from the government?**

   I would like the government to assist with the condition of the crèche, like painting and toilets for kids, toys, food, clothes etc. Sometimes we have indigent children in my centre, and those who are sitting at home because parents cannot afford fees. So I wish the government was not too strict.

One other issue that concerns me is the absorption of ECD into BDE, and hearing cases of how restrictive it is towards ECDs. However I am confident because I obtained my ECD training qualification.

5. **What are the yearly enrolment rates of immigrant children in your centre?**

   By estimation it could about 10 -15 children especially beginning of the year. Children that mostly enrol, are from Lesotho, Nigeria, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

6. **Does your centre experience more dropouts by immigrant children compared to native-born children? Please elaborate.**

   Yes, it does. Even now I am only left with a few children. Some reason being challenges with obtaining their documents, as result they have to go back home. Especially families from Lesotho. You would find that a child has no birth certificate or clinic card.

ANNEXURE I: EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED TEACHER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Please note that a summary was made as the original interview took place in another language

Transcript – T5

Biographical

1. **How many years of experience do you have as an ECD teacher?**

   I have 3 years' experience as an ECD teacher

2. **What is your highest qualification?**

   My highest qualification is Matric

Questions

3. **Do you make use of the approved ECD syllabus for planning your teaching and learning activities? If not, what do you use to plan the activities?**

   Yes, I do. I make use of ECD and Grade R syllabus.

4. **Do you think that teaching an immigrant child should differ from other children in the classroom?**

   No, I don't believe there should be a difference. It will depend on how quickly the child is able to grasp and remember what they ae taught, and how quickly they are able to learn the language.

5. **What are common challenges that you think immigrant children have within your classroom?**

   Mainly language difference, whereby we struggle with communication. However, as time goes, they are able to learn and understand, because children are able to absorb easily.

6. **How do you facilitate child participation and interaction for immigrant children?**

   Personally, patience is key. I make space and teach them about other children in class and their characters. Also to take time know them and their character. This helps with enhancing interaction in class.

7. **What strategies or learning materials do you use to mitigate different learning needs of children?**

   Depending on what I am teaching at the time, for example learning about animals, I will make use of a poster of different animals and also teach them the names of those animals. This is so that by the time we do a colouring activity of those animals, they have already familiarised themselves with those animals and their names.

8. **How do you assess a child's readiness for Grade 1?**

   There are various ways. Every child is different, some are quick at learning, and some require more patience. Therefore, we put in some extra time those who are not as quick until they get to level, we think they are ready to start Grade 1.

ANNEXURE J: EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED PARENT INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Transcript – P4

1. **How did you decide on an ECD to register your child?**

   My child started crèche last year, because I had to go to work, I then decided to enrol her to the crèche nearby where I live. The crèche was nice in the beginning, but there were times my child came home hurt and bruised.

2. **What were the motivations behind the choice of school?**

   The child attends close to home

3. **How would say your child has integrated into the centre?**

   I would say there is a difference from when she started attending and now. Before she couldn't speak Sesotho, but now she can talk Sesotho. She also sings in Sesotho. However her English has not improved. I would say She learns English from cartoons.

4. **How is your interaction and relationship with your child's teacher?**

   We have a good and free relationship. I am able to express my complaints, and fears. She is very understanding.

5. **With regards your child's integration into the community, has the ECD played a role, and how would you say the ECD has contributed?**

   Since she can now speak Sesotho, she can easily go outside and play with other children. Also, before she started attending crèche, it was not easy for her to play with other children and socialise. So I believe the crèche assisted in that way.

6. **How would you say the centre has developed your child's readiness for Grade 1?**

   For now she is not ready, because she doesn't know how to write, and she speak proper English. I also feel like she doesn’t speak proper Sesotho.

7. **What assistance do you think is needed to assist with child's development and readiness for Grade 1?**

   Teaching her how to write and read, because She doesn't know how to read. She doesn't know how to count beyond 5. Some other things as well like talking Sesotho. Because

sometimes children are bullied in school because they don't know how to speak the local language.

ANNEXURE K: POLICY DOCUMENTS THEMES

Theme: Existing policy documents

Document	Key quote
2030 ECD Strategy (DBE, 2024b)	"The proposed mixed provisioning approach… a partnership model between state and non-state role players… to unlock a new supply of quality programmes towards universal access"
National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015)	"Development of a dual regulated model of public and private delivery… prioritise home and community-based services"
Education White Paper 5 on ECE (DoE, 2001a)	"Key challenge facing Government is to increase access to ECD programmes, correct existing imbalances… and deliver ECD services in a co-ordinated way"
Policy framework for Universal access to Grade R (DBE, 2011)	"Grade R is part of the Foundation Phase but is not always serviced in the same way… currently, community-based Grade R sites are excluded from reliable data sets"
Policy on Early Development centres (DSD, 2011)	"ECD services refer to programmes offered directly to young children… provided in primary schools, community centres and homes."

Theme: Experiences of teachers and parents/guardians of immigrant children

Document	Key quote
NPAC (2019-2024) (DSD, 2019)	"It is South Africa's obligation to provide for the survival, protection, development and participation rights of [migrant] children while the country is still attending to their residence/citizenship status"
NCF Birth to four (DBE, 2015)	"Poor social integration skills… Biased behaviour – racist remarks, bullying, and aggression towards those who are different."

Theme: Role of ECE in transition and integration into formal schooling

Document	Key quote
2030 ECD Strategy (DBE, 2024b)	"Children who benefit from [playful learning, stable relationships, interaction]… are more likely to develop… and to have the foundations in place to succeed at school and beyond"
NCF Birth to four (DBE, 2015)	"Children connect with different aspects of their life experiences (home, centre, religion)… understand that differences exist and must be respected"
Education White Paper 5 on ECE (DoE, 2001a)	"ECD provision must give attention to children in poor rural and urban areas, HIV/AIDS infected children and those with special learning needs… to ensure a solid foundation for lifelong learning."
Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators (DHET, 2017)	"Intervening in the earliest years helps to reduce the social and economic disparities and race and gender inequalities that divide South African society."

Theme: Policy gaps or barriers in ECD affecting immigrant children

Document	Key quote
2030 ECD Strategy (DBE, 2024b)	"Supply-side barriers (e.g., regulation, funding) and demand-side barriers (e.g., unaffordability)… prevent the system from working in the interests of all children"
National Integrated ECD policy (DSD, 2015)	"Children with disabilities are largely excluded… Quality early learning programmes must be scaled up to reduce the school-readiness gap."
National Integrated ECD Policy (DSD, 2015)	"By 2030, all infants with disabilities… must access inclusive ECD services of high quality and design… guidance provided on mainstream or specialist placement."

Education White Paper 6 (Inclusive Education) (DoE, 2001b)	“Barriers to learning exist primarily within the learning system… special schools and specialised settings must be upgraded to support learners with disabilities.”

Theme: Cooperative support structures for ECE and integration

Document	Key quote
2030 ECD Strategy (DBE, 2024b)	“Parent support programmes… CHWs and family motivators… rapid roll-out in under-served and vulnerable communities”
NCF Birth to four (DBE, 2015)	“Adults… promote children’s well-being, positive identities, inclusivity, child-focused activities and competence for living.”

ANNEXURE L: ETHICS CERTIFICATION

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

AFRICAN CENTRE FOR MIGRATION & SOCIETY ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: ACMS24/10/05**
PROJECT TITLE	Investigating Mechanisms and Programmes for the Provision of Quality Early Childhood Education for Refugee Children in Informal Early Childhood Development Centres
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Tshegofatso Lesenyego (2259221)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	African Centre for Migration & Society
DATE CONSIDERED	15 November 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	LOW RISK
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 20 November 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Dr Jean Pierre Misago)

cc: Supervisor:

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

_____ **Signature**

_____/_____/_____ **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

ANNEXURE M: TURNITIN RECEIPT

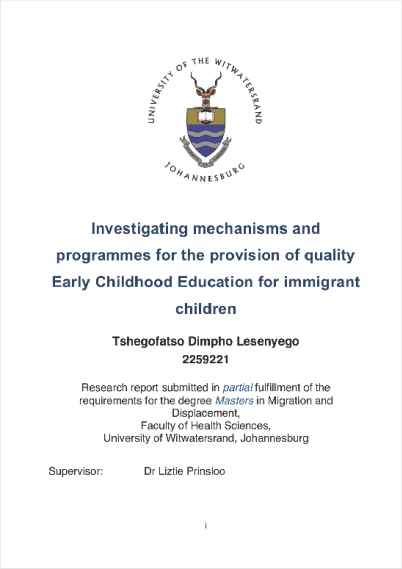
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Page count:	114
Word count:	31,802
Character count:	190,372
Submission date:	30-Mar-2025 03:38PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	2628812534



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Tshegofatso Dimpho Lesenyego
2259221

Research report submitted in *partial* fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Masters* in Migration and Displacement,
Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr Liztie Prinsloo

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