

ABSTRACT

This study explored the current practices implemented by Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) caregivers / preschool teachers in Swaziland. It further investigated how the lack of an appropriate policy on Early Childhood Care and Development impacted on the delivery of services to the sector. The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology, eliciting responses through semi-structured interview schedules.

In order to conduct a more in-depth analysis, eight interviews were held at various early childhood care and development sites. The criteria for selection depended on whether the participating caregiver had direct, hands-on experience of the day-to-day care and running of ECCD sites. They also had to be involved in a full-time pre-school teaching programme and were purposively selected from the geographical location of Manzini, in Swaziland. The sites could be distinguished into three categories, namely: community (non-profit making), private and church or mission-run centres. The results showed that caregivers implemented diverse and uncoordinated practices and that there was no uniformity in terms of professional training, classroom practice and curriculum application. It was evident that the participants did not link the theory of their training to their practice, leaving gaps in the provision of services and educational programmes to the children.

The study concluded that unless the government of Swaziland and the ECCD unit at the national level of Education made a concerted effort to formulate a national ECCD policy, *Education for All* would remain a pipedream. The study recommended that government should formulate national ECCD policy guidelines to encourage uniformity in practice and provision of ECCD sites. Not only should government accelerate the development of the guidelines but they should also support the caregivers by continuous professional development activities.

KEY WORDS

- ❖ Caregivers/ Preschool Teachers
- ❖ Child Development
- ❖ Curriculum
- ❖ Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)
- ❖ Education for All
- ❖ Free choice activities (free play)
- ❖ Leavers certificate (O- Level)
- ❖ Policy
- ❖ Swaziland