

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN PRIVATE EARLY LEARNING CENTRES (PELCS) IN SOUTH AFRICA

Masello Hellen Phajane

ABSTRACT

Empirical research has confirmed the importance of quality of teaching and learning in Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) to subordinates in improving the quality of teaching and learning. This study investigated the nature of quality of teaching and learning in Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) provided at previously marginalised Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. To meet this objective qualitative research design was used. The subjects of the study were all purposefully selected teachers, Head of Department and School Manage Team (SMT). Data was collected through observations and semi structured interviews (individual and focus group). The total number of 14 purposefully selected participants took part in the research. Participants were selected according to the socio-economic status of their school. A theoretical framework, based on a model of quality development by Woodhead, informed the study. The findings showed that the quality of teaching and learning in PELCs compromised the quality of teaching. Teachers were also very vocal about the absence of support they get with regard to classroom practices from the School Management Team (SMT). The Head of Department also mentioned lack of knowledge of quality of teaching and learning in PELCs practices, work overload and limited time as challenges that inhibit them to provide the needed support.

Keywords: Private Early Learning Centres, Experiences, Perceptions, Quality of Teaching, School Management Team

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) are educational institutions attended by children aged 0 to 4 Department of Basic Education (2011), (DBE, 2011). Institutionalized education seems to replace parental care and socialization of young children. In response to the changing nature of society, and particularly the demand for mothers to participate in the economy, the Private Early Learning Centres (PELC) emerged. The purpose of Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) includes preparing the child for the primary level of education among others. The objective of Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) include caring for the child's physical, cognitive, and social and education needs. The age of a child attending Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) corresponds to a critical period of his or her development (DBE, 2011). Consequently, the number of Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) have grown rapidly in the last few years. Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) has largely become a public focused

activity or private endeavour, resulting in a situation where owners run these centres as private for profit businesses (Clasquin-Johnson 2011).

The developmental stage of children attending PELCs corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and socio-psychological growth Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake, & Smith, (2013). The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain in the future Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake, & Smith, (2013). Given the limited knowledge that is available on the management and establishment of PELCs, the continued uncertainty around these institutions, harbours the fear young children are subjected to experiences that are detrimental to their future growth and identity formation. These institutions are well intended to provide a service to the community, but due to the absence of appropriate policy and infrastructure to facilitate their provision of a quality service, an investigation in the operation of the PELCs would be beneficial (Clasquin-Johnson 2011).

There are mixed feelings as to whether Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) are driven by Pedagogy or Economics? Or are they just enterprises with profit making as their main motives? Like any private enterprise, Early Learning Centres strive hard to attract customers and offer them the best possible value Smith Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, (2012). On the other hand, many individuals kept centres on an ad hoc basis according to which form of employment provided the best income. This has resulted in pressure to appoint the most affordable teachers, who are often not the best qualified for the job. Furthermore, the lack of government involvement implies the absence of a structure that would enable the coordination of efforts to determine whether these centres meet particular quality criteria Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, (2012). As researchers of private education have found in other emerging economies, official databases of registered independent centres are not comprehensive or up-to-date in South Africa.

The number of unregistered, fly-by-night or unreliable PELCs that are below the official radar screen can only be guessed Samuels, Taylor, Shepherd, van der Berg, Jacob, Deliwe, and Mabogoane, (2015). This research has also discovered numerous unregistered PELCs. Private Early Learning Centres (PELCs) in Gauteng Province of South Africa face many disadvantages like lack of funding, low image with local children, and profoundly strict regulatory environment Samuels, Taylor, Shepherd, van der Berg, Jacob, Deliwe, and Mabogoane, (2015). Yet, despite these obstacles, PELCs have managed to survive and thrive, finding a niche for themselves and contributing to the development of South Africa as a global schoolhouse. The result is that there is little assurance for parents and children that such centres are always good PELCs. Parents themselves must depend on becoming qualified to judge whether centres offers a constructive experience, if they wish to protect their children Samuels, Taylor, Shepherd, van der Berg, Jacob, Deliwe, and Mabogoane, (2015).

Unlike other countries South Africa's PELCs do not receive any government funding, they do not have to comply with values such as equality of opportunity, the right of all children to a high-quality education, rejection of discrimination and respect for ethnic differences Kruger, Wessels, Ebrahim, & Shaik, (2015). However, there is much consensus among owners of PELCs that they have a moral obligation to contribute to the development of children as well as respect for tolerance of difference especially in a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation such as South Africa.

Participation in good PELCs is therefore linked with achievement at subsequent levels of education and contributes to the quality of the education system as a whole Kruger, Wessels, Ebrahim, & Shaik, (2015). It is however, difficult to state with absolute specificity what constitute quality of the teaching in PELCs. The writer is however interested in quality as an input and the extent to which teachers' motivation after quality teaching and learning in PELCs.

All definitions of quality education, according to Kruger, Wessels, Ebrahim, & Shaik, (2015), involve some assumptions with respect to a frame of reference. For instance; *Quality as an input*: described in terms of resources inputs such as teaching, structural buildings, equipment etc. *Quality as an output*: described in terms of childrens' educational achievement. Quality as a process refers to the interaction of the different systems of the educational process. Quality as content refers to the school curriculum content (Clasquin-Johnson 2011).

This study intends to research the experiences of a small sample of teachers teaching at one of these institutions operating in the community. The perceptions and experiences of teachers will provide the reader with insight into what can possibly be taking place and how these teachers can be assisted in providing a better quality of education and dispel the fears that presently surrounds some of the PELCs. This is a case study of one institution, providing services to about 300 children. Data were collected using qualitative techniques to answer the research question: What are teachers' perceptions and experiences on quality teaching and learning in PELCs? Data were analysed using the thematic method of analysis, which were used to develop the findings. After this introduction, this article unfolds as follows: the literature review, which will be followed by a note on the methodology. This will lead to data analysis and presentation, followed by the findings, which will be discussed. The article ends with a conclusion in which the research question is discussed and recommendations are made.

Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences on the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Vandeyar, (2010), what is teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching and learning in PELCs and why is it important? The term teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching in PELCs carries varying definitions and dimensions in literature on the topic. For example, how closely related are employment satisfaction and employment motivation, self-efficacy and motivation, personal achievement and motivation? This report will define teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching and learning in PELCs as the willingness, drive or desire to engage in good teaching, (Vandeyar, 2010), which is furthermore acted upon. Good teaching and learning here is taken to mean adherence to professional conduct and efforts to help learners learn as best as the teacher knows how. Thus, employment satisfaction, self-efficacy, and personal achievement are dynamic components of teacher motivation that both drive and are driven by teacher motivation in a virtuous cycle. When convinced of the effectiveness of improved teaching methods, the motivated teacher will also utilise these methods as part of his or her effort to help children learn as best as she or he knows how, (Vandeyar, 2010).

On the other hand, low teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching and learning leads to negative educational outcomes, low motivation results in absenteeism, underutilisation of class time, professional misconduct, reliance on traditional teaching practices, poor preparation, and lesser income-generating activities that distract from teaching duties. Similarly, Vandeyar, (2010), found that low motivation results in high attrition rates, constant

turnover, lack of confidence, varying levels of professional commitment, and a feeling of helplessness to either improve learner outcomes or teachers' own situations.

Motivation according to (Steyn, 2010), is process of creating conditions that encourage employees to strive for superior performance. Teachers will carry out the roles assigned to them in a responsible and dependable fashion, if there is an innovative and spontaneous activity in achieving the centre objective. Steyn, (2010) opined that the principal is expected to motivate the teachers of his or her centre so that goals of the school can be accomplished. The success of the centre organisation is thus dependent on the ability of the principal to do this effectively and efficiently. The availability and utilization of appropriate instructional materials is one of the factors that accounts for high standard or quality teaching in most PELCs? This is in agreement with Shanahan, (2016:769), report that: *Children learn best when they can actively explore an environment that is rich in materials, when they are given the choice about what is learned, when they are able to interact informally with their teachers and with one another.*

It is evident therefore that the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom is increased by the use of instructional materials because according to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011), the instructional material complement and supplement the teachers' efforts. Shanahan, (2016:772), also claimed that children learn differently and through the use of different senses. That is if a child fails to acquire knowledge, through the use of one of the senses, he might still learn through the use of other senses. Good physical facilities and conducive teaching and learning environment are also necessary to facilitate learning such as well painted, colourful, attractive and clean environment. Mayesky, (2012), also suggests ensuring ease of movement in the schools by making clear arrangements to differentiate the facilities needed for formal programmes, for example, classroom teaching, library studies, laboratory uses from non-formal programmes like recreation and those for convenience like rest rooms, stores, toilets etc. Mayesky, (2012).

Support and supervision of instruction is also a necessary tool in ensuring that each individual teacher has been performing the duties for which he or she was scheduled. This improves the effectiveness of teachers and can thus contribute maximally to the attainment of quality teaching and learning in early learning centres (Cram, Chilisa & Mertens 2013). Several studies have noted that privatization of centres have led to such achievements as lower children-teacher ratios, increased teacher autonomy, increased attendance, high children access to computers and better maintained facilities in centres under private management (Cram, Chilisa & Mertens 2013). However, most studies have noted the lack of evidence of children achievement gains under privatization models (Cram, Chilisa & Mertens 2013).

The constructivist ideal holds sway in early year's theoretical discourse and centres on the view that, as (Smidt, 2010) states, knowledge is not passively received and absorbed but actively built up by the individual. On this basis, young children must therefore engage actively in the learning process to ensure that effective learning takes place. Smidt, (2010) considered that the intense involvement of children in such contexts facilitates their overall development. He also defined involvement as a quality of human activity, characterized by not only a high level of motivation, but also by concentration and persistence, intense perceptions and experience of meaning, by a strong flow of energy and a high degree of satisfaction Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, (2010).

Teacher quality has a significant impact on children's academic performance (Higgins, Kokotsaki, and Coe 2012). More importantly, teacher quality is intertwined with teachers' perceptions and experiences on their work life (Higgins, Kokotsaki, and Coe 2012). Teacher job satisfaction is often regarded as an important determinant on the educational outcomes such as children's achievement (Higgins, Kokotsaki, and Coe 2012).

THE ADVANTAGES OF PRIVATE EARLY LEARNING CENTRES (PELCS)

According to literature conducted by Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, (2010), Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) & Cram, Chilisa & Mertens (2013), advantages of PELCs are smaller classes, the value of diverse cultures, freedom of innovation and flexibility and the benefit of positive parent involvement.

Centres and Classes tend to be much Smaller

According to the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR) (2009:2), the main advantage of PELCs in South Africa is that most PELCs feature smaller classroom sizes that allow children to receive a lot more attention from teachers. On average, PELCs have a child-teacher ratio of 1:10, because there is more personal attention given to children, the dropout rates are generally lower Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, (2010).

Diverse Cultures

The diversity landscape in PELCs environment provides an invaluable experience to children. Children normally come from different countries bringing along with them the diverse cultures of their respective countries. Children are therefore, exposed to people from different socio-economic classes, which can broaden their educational experience Aluko, (2014). In addition, PELCs offer the opportunity for integration of age groupings. Learning is not age specific and younger children have the opportunity to tap on the experiences of the older children Aluko, (2014).

Innovation and Flexibility

For the reason that PELCs do not have to abide by certain government regulations, they spend less time on mandated paperwork and more on instruction. They are also not compelled to focus on assessment. As a result, teachers tend to enjoy more autonomy in the classroom. They also have creative control over their teaching methods and they have more flexibility to develop programs as well as practices best suited for their children Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, (2010).

Positive Parent Involvement

Not only do PELCs encourage parents' participation, but also it is true that the parents of PELCs children tend to be extremely committed to having a say in their child's education (Lam, Ardington

& Leibbrandt 2010). PELCs view children and parents as clients. Therefore, they must be more proactive to meet their needs and concerns.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to understand the generated data in terms of quality, I selected the model of Woodhead (1996) on quality development, as a basis to inform a possible framework for the South African context in early learning centres. Martin Woodhead, a developmental psychologist, developed this model in 1996. The Woodhead model is based on three key questions: Who are the stakeholders in the quality of a programme, who are the perceived beneficiaries of quality, and what are the indicators of quality? The framework consisting of quality indicators grouped under three broad categories, namely input, process and outcome indicators Shanahan, (2016:773).

Woodhead explains that the model is intended as the starting point for appraising a programme and negotiating its development with all the stakeholders who are interested and involved in it. He argues that it is not a top-down perspective, but an inclusionary model that takes account of other perspectives, which discourages narrow prescriptions about what makes for a good programme, which goals are worth pursuing, and which criteria should be taken as indicators (Woodhead 1996). I am of the opinion that this model provides an appropriate theoretical framework to explain the relationship and interdependency between the main features of the study.

The interpretive paradigm, which focuses on a participant's interpretation and experience, is employed as the theoretical framework for this study (Nieuwenhuis 2010). According to this paradigm, a person's social world is constructed through their interactions with others and the imparting of meanings (Nieuwenhuis 2010). According to constructivist learning theories, learning is regarded as a constructive process, in which individual learners build an internal image of knowledge and perceptions.

Statement of the Problem

Despite government policy requiring every public school to have a pre- primary school linkage, the proportion of children enrolled in these PELCs remain low. Majority of parents who can afford it prefer to enrol their children and wards in the PELCs because they believe the PELCs engage in more qualitative teaching and learning. Hence, the main objective of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences on quality teaching and learning in PELCs.

In addressing the problem of this study, the following main research question was raised:

What are teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching and learning in PELCs?

The sub-questions are:

- i. To what extent does availability of teaching materials affect quality of teaching and learning in PELCs in Gauteng Province of South Africa?
- ii. Does conducive environment for teaching and learning affect the quality of teaching in PELCs in Gauteng Province of South Africa?

Research Design and Methodology

The research design used in this research inquiry is a case study, Sullivan, and Glanz, (2013); Lam, Ardington & Leibbrandt (2010:11), suggest that the interpretive researcher's purpose is to gain understanding of situations that are complex. The research approach used for this research were a qualitative research approach, namely observation and interviews. The study endeavours to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences on the quality of teaching and learning in PELCs. In terms of addressing the main objective, a case study was chosen because through case studies researchers: *.....get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings and partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires)*, (Lewin and Mawoyo 2014).

Sullivan, and Glanz, (2013) recommend case study research as a suitable choice when a researcher wants to answer a descriptive question (e.g. what happened) or an explanatory question (e.g. how or why did something happen?) I chose an instrumental case study as research design, because I opted for a design featuring an in-depth study of interactions of a single instance in an enclosed system Shanahan, (2016:776).

In this study, I focused on a real situation (teacher's experiences of PELCs on quality teaching and learning), with real people (teachers, children and parents) in an environment familiar to myself (Private Early Learning Centres). In order to answer the research questions, I thus studied interactions of events, human relationships and other factors.

Sampling

A non-probability, convenience sampling was used to select the participants. All teachers were targeted, with the knowledge that the group does not represent the wider population but a particular group with the same interest (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001). For this study, the researcher interviewed three teachers in semi-structured interviews with open-ended question to create opportunities for further probing (Lam, Ardington & Leibbrandt 2010).

Data Collection

A descriptive survey method was used for the research and data was collected through observation and interviews where questions were organised according to an interview schedule. Shanahan, (2016:777) writes that, in semi-structured interview, issues and questions are prepared in advance. According to Smit & Romm, (2012), the semi-structured interview is a more flexible version of the structured interview, and one, which tends to allow the interviewer to probe and expand the responses.

The researcher asked one teacher individually the same open-ended question, namely, according to you, what is your perception and experience on quality teaching and learning in PELCs. These responses on the question, if preferred so, could be audio recorded by the researcher. The researcher then transcribed the responses. The researcher connected closely enough with the teachers to establish an insider's identity without becoming part of the group participation Shanahan, (2016).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study comprised the transcribed responses obtained during face-to-face interviews with teachers. Teachers already documented the structured interview responses of the teachers in hard copy format when I received them. I analysed these responses electronically and identified themes and topics. I grouped themes that emerged from the interviews under broad categories based on the theoretical framework, specifically the quality indicators, namely the input, process and outcome indicators. I organised and coded the inscriptions in broad categories to produce a record of the things that I have noticed. During the process of data analysis, I initially ended up with a huge number of themes and encountered a challenge to distinguish between possible and suitable themes for data interpretation and to strike a balance between rigour and flexibility concerning the identification of suitable themes that emerged from the interviews.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings are presented as follows: First, the findings from the observations and then the findings from the interviews are presented.

Findings from the Observations

Below are the detailed descriptive narratives of what was observed, from the research observations. In PELC, classrooms A and B were held in living rooms familiar to the children and C in a sitting room. There were probably about 28 children, rather more girls than boys. The children sat round three sides of the room at long desks, which could take four or five children. The youngest child sat in the front row facing the older teacher. The overall profile of children who attended PELC in Gauteng Province ranged from infants (are children were under two years of age), toddlers (the children between three and four) to older children (about aged five or more).

The PELC consists of School Management Team (one older principal aged 78, one deputy aged 70, two Heads of the Department aged 40 and 38, and fourteen teachers aged between 40 and 24 years. Although elderly teachers kept the vast majority of PELCs, there were a few exceptions. One such case was the principal of PELC who opened her home up as PELC, when she was 30 and was still teaching at the age of 78. This principal for instance, was reported to be helped by her deputy (farmer's daughter) who taught 22 children. The ages of teachers in PELC varied considerably but it appears that they started teaching at a later age than those engaged in public Early Learning Centres.

Calculations based on six PELC in Gauteng Province showed that the majority of teachers began teaching in their mid-thirties, following on from other work. Westraadt, (2010), with no formal retirement age, a few exceptional PELCs, and teachers continued to work well into their seventies. It was not unusual for them to call upon relatives and friends to help according to need, thus ensuring that the income remained in the family. For instance, the principal at the centre was reported to be upwards of 78 years of age and used his 24-year-old granddaughter to take over during his illness.

According to Department of Basic Education (2011) on average, the PELCs listed had been kept for about 10 years. In some cases, individuals had devoted the best part of their working lives to teaching. A number of older principals and teachers of PELCs had no formal training or recognized university qualifications and they received little training as school administrators or as teachers (DBE, 2011). When inspectors and others encountered decent PELC teachers, they were keen to encourage them to take a formal course of training.

Participants' responses were significantly different across the different levels of PELCs. As expected, SMT members felt that they are the most important individual in the organization. They saw profit motive as the key objective. This is largely expected, as PELCs do not receive any funding from the government Guile, (2014). The SMT members felt that there is a little need to consult organisational members as they normally comes up with the final decision alone. This could be due to the differing interests of the SMT members and the teachers. Teachers normally would want to make requisitions on various equipments (hardware and software) which could make their work easier while older principal and deputy may see such requests as making unnecessary investments into equipment. In addition, the principal should play a leading role in a partnership with neighbouring PELCs and be a link to district-level resources and authority Zepeda, (2012). Their collaboration will be one of the key elements in identifying local school improvement goals and to plan strategies to achieve these goals.

As some of the SMT members in the sample studied are not trained professionally, they may not be able to utilize their resources effectively for improvement of their schools. Moreover, teachers in PELCs are usually not encouraged to take up training. The main reason for this is that almost all the PELC engage part-time contract teachers and do not see training as an important element in their overall centres policies. The SMT members strongly believe that teachers will leave after receiving professional training, thus wasting their financial resources Zepeda, (2012).

Findings from the Interviews

Furthermore, it was observed that some of the teachers indicated that even though they were dedicated to their work, there are some problems and challenges that they came across. For instance, they complained that:

Lack of Resting Time (Physical Facilities)

Lack of resting time caused psychological problems for preschool teachers. They stressed that this situation makes them overloaded very much. Both physically and psychologically they get tired of being in the same environment for long hours, this affects the quality of the teaching for their opinion.

"It is a real disaster for PELC teachers because both physically and psychologically I feel terrible (Teacher A)." *I feel as if I am captured in a prison, I even cannot go out for drinking coffee and tea (Teacher A)."* *Staying for long hours in the class makes me tired both physically and mentally (Teacher C)."*

Despite using children free play times as to get rest a little, PELC teachers explained that the purpose from getting relaxed should not be considered as to sit and doing nothing rather it

should let teachers to get out of the classroom and change the atmosphere for frequent breaks. These break times of preschool teachers must have stated legally in the related regulation.

Crowded Classroom (Physical Facilities)

PELC teachers explained that crowded classrooms cause a decrease in the overall quality of the education carried out in classroom settings. For teachers, first of all, this eliminates the one-to-one interaction with children. Teachers had to deal with the overall performance of the children rather than finding a chance to interact with each child individually. Also, the more children PELC teachers have in the classroom, the more they get tired physically and this affects their classroom performance accordingly.

“It really makes me tired to have a crowded classroom (Teacher B). “I have 23 children in my classroom and I am having difficulty during preparing materials for the activities and while implementing the activities (Teacher B). “I do want to deal with each child in my classroom during activity times however it is impossible to do when you are in such a crowded classroom (Teacher C).”

PELC teachers stressed that there is nothing to do for the teachers to overcome the problem of being in crowded classroom rather the number of children within a classroom have to be reduced between 15-16 children for a productive education environment.

Small Classroom Environment (Physical Facilities)

One of the consequences of being in a small classroom environment clarified by the PELC teachers is the limitations about the kinds of activities. They elaborated that once the classrooms are small and not suitable for the activities with movements, the activities have to be limited with table activities. Furthermore, more teacher-directed and guided activities were chosen to be carried out within the classroom environment. PELC teachers indicated that the beginning and end of the activities should all be defined by the teacher because teachers are the responsible for children’s safety as well.

“Small classroom environment restricts my children’s movement so I have to give more places to table activities (Teacher B).” “Small classroom environment prevents children from moving freely so to provide safety in the classroom, I provide more teacher directed activities (Teacher A).” “Since I have a small classroom, I have to give more places for table activities and teacher directed activities (Teacher A).”

Another consequence of being in small classroom environment is the increase in aggressive behaviour among children. The PELC teachers emphasized that when there is less personal space left to each child, they cannot move freely as to express themselves. For teachers, it is unrealistic to expect 3-4 year-olds to sit on their chairs for long hours. Children are full of energy and have to move to release their energy however small classroom environment prevents their free movements so this results in aggression among the children in the classroom.

“Each child needs enough personal space but they don’t in my classroom so after a while, they show aggressive behaviours (Teacher C).” “Children have to move to release their energy otherwise this may create problems in the classroom (Teacher C).”

“This age of children needs more movements more but they can’t move freely in this small classroom so this leads aggressive behaviours among my children (Teacher B).”

In sum, being in a small classroom environment caused the decrease about the kinds of activities and the increase aggressive behaviour among children. As a solution to those issues, PELC teachers involved in outdoor activities more when the weather is warm and suitable. However, when this is not available, the teachers added that they are creating more space within the classroom by carrying tables and chairs to one side of the classroom. Despite, it is difficult and tiring to re-shape the classroom environment in each time when there is a need for activities with movements, it is vital to provide harmony among children. As for the PELC teachers, it is worth for children’s healthy development otherwise this may create more problems in the future. So, for teachers, there is an urgent need to build large classroom environment as well as decreasing the number of children in existing small classroom environment.

Finding Time for Writing Detailed Evaluation (Evaluation)

PELC teachers elaborated the reason of not finding time for writing detailed evaluation as there is a loaded curriculum during the day so this occupies whole time of teachers. Then, no time is left for teachers to write and complete the evaluation in three parts; evaluation for the plan, for the each child and for the teacher.

“There is already a program to follow during the day so I don’t have time to write detailed evaluation (Teacher A).” “Honestly, I don’t have time to write detailed evaluation rather I must complete doing the activities required for the day

Teacher B, “In addition to follow the program required for the day, it is nonsense to expect PELC teachers to write detailed evaluation. I don’t have to do it (Teacher B).”

PELC teachers clarified that they try to take small notes regarding the things they found significant in the classroom. Later on, they add these things to their evaluation reports.

“I don’t find writing daily evaluations for each day as healthy; it becomes just repetitions of same comments (Teacher A).” “Making daily plans for each day and writing a daily evaluation accordingly are difficult and unnecessary for me (Teacher C). “It is too long to write those evaluation parts, I can’t understand what the logic behind writing the same things for every day. It is meaningless (Teacher C).”

“What it is wrong is that I have 21 children in my classroom and it is impossible to write evaluation for each of them on a daily basis (Teacher B).” “I can’t get the logic behind observing each child in my classroom, the maximum number of child that I can observe in a healthy way is just 2 (Teacher B).”

As a result, one of the possible solutions to this issue created by the teachers was that they prefer to take notes in less frequent time intervals. For them it is better to take notes for children when there is a need. For teachers, if learning is a process, children should be evaluated in a weekly base rather than focusing on each day.

“There is a lack of resources so we had to do the same things for math activities. (Teacher C).”

“I do not have adequate resources for doing rich math activities; I am just repeating myself (Teacher A).” “There is a problem of resources, to be able to make good math activities I need different resources (Teacher B).”

“I can’t make experiment in my classroom because there is no available place for it (Teacher C).”
“There is no chance for me to make experiments in my classroom (Teacher A).” *“There is no available space for making experiments in my classroom (Teacher B).”*

Field Trips (Plans and Activities)

“The process of permission taking is a kind of torture to me, at least 2 weeks before; you have to start the writings as to get it (Teacher A).” *“Permission taking process is a tiring issue for me and it is really overburdening to wait for the consents of parents (Teacher B).”* *“It was a really big problem for us to deal with permission taking process (Teacher C).”*

Moreover, as another obstacle in front of the field trips is the attitude of parents towards field trips. The PELC teachers clarified that parents are not willing to give their consent for the field trips as the children are still young. They explained that parents do not want their child to be involved in field trips for safety and health issues.

“Parents here are so sensitive about their kids; they think that their kids will get cold and became sick during the field trips (Teacher C).” *“Parents with the concerns of what if something happens to my child during field trips do not want their child to participate in such activities (Teacher A).”*
“With the concerns of safety issues, parents do not allow their child to be in field trips (Teacher A).”

Parental Involvement

The PELC teachers elaborated the reason of having problems in providing parent involvement as the attitudes of parents towards PELCs education. They claimed that parents see the PELCs education as a playing area rather than a learning environment. For parents, children do not learn academic skills such as Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills in PELCs, so this leads parents to underestimate the significance of PELCs education and to see parent involvement as an unnecessary activity.

“For parents, PELCs education centres are just a playground (Teacher A).” *“I think parents just perceive PELCs education centres as a caring place (Teacher A).”* *“Parents don’t see here as a place to learn something rather they see as a playing area (Teacher B).”*

PELC teachers, as a solution to this problem, supported that it is necessary to inform parents about the importance of PELCs education for children’s well-development so they make parent meetings at the beginning of the year. However some of the teachers found those parent meetings as something inefficient to serve for the purpose rather there is a need for role play or dramatization to show real-life experience regarding the importance of PELCs education for child development and psychology to parents.

Inclusion

As one of the reasons of having problems in inclusion, PELC teachers complained about the lack of support from parents and school administration. For teachers, inclusion needs collaboration. Parents are responsible for providing information about their children’s abilities: what she or he could do or could not do because inclusive children are coming from diverse disabilities and

disorders so it is the parent's responsibility to acknowledge about his or her child's disorder or disability. Teachers, only in this way, can see their ways how to enhance that child's skills.

"When the inclusive child comes into the classroom, all the responsibility is on the shoulders of the teacher. Parents and school administrator should be a collaborator (Teacher A)." "First the parents should be the helper to the classroom teacher but they don't and teacher became the only responsible for the inclusive child (Teacher C).

As another reason for having a problem in inclusion, PELC teachers claimed the lack of assistant teacher accompanying to the inclusive child. There is a necessity of assistant teacher accompanying to the inclusive child otherwise as teachers, they cannot decide whether to focus on normally developed children or the inclusive child. For them, those children need one-to one interaction for learning so when there is a lack of assistant teacher, teacher cannot deal with the inclusive child.

"There is no PELC assistant teachers helping to the inclusive child so I cannot figure out what to do: deal with the normal ones or the inclusive child? (Teacher A)." "There should be a teacher to the inclusive child but there is not. So I don't know what to do: focus on normally developed children or inclusive child? (Teacher C)..." "There is an urgent need for a teacher next to inclusive child in the classroom (Teacher C)."

Also, not having a separate curriculum for inclusion is proposed by PELC teachers as another reason having problems in inclusion. For them, this curriculum is focusing on normally developing children beginning from defining goals and objectives ending with the types of activities.

"To be able to talk about the inclusive education, first of all this curriculum should have been developed accordingly but unfortunately not (Teacher B)." "This curriculum was not developed for inclusion, it is not appropriate for those groups of children (Teacher B)." "This curriculum is not appropriate for inclusion; there is an urgent need of developing such a curriculum (Teacher A)."

In sum, PELC teachers explained the reasons of problems related to inclusion as lack of support from parents and school administration, lack of assistant PELC teachers accompanying to the inclusive child and not having a separate curriculum for inclusion. Despite PELC teachers found no alternative solutions to the reasons; lack of support from parent and school administration and inappropriateness of the curriculum for inclusion, they find some solutions when there is a lack of assistant PELC teachers: asking normally developed children to help their inclusive friends when the inclusive child is quite and don't give any harm to other children.

LIMITATIONS

Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, (2010), the sensitive nature of the information and responses obtained from the participants may have an effect on the responses. Participants may be unwilling to respond to interview questions relating to their competitive strategies and long term plans. As Private Early Learning Centres are in a competitive relationship among each other, the older principals may be unwilling to disclose full information, especially those relating to children numbers, class structure and staff salaries. The study assumes that teachers' perception of their principals and of their occupation contribute significantly to the explanation of the variance in job

satisfaction. However, teachers' perceptions are subjective and it may be that their perceptions are affected by other variables such as working conditions and salary packages Zepeda, (2012).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. In order to achieve educational progress, Private Early Learning Centres need an institutional structure (encompassing teacher pay, bursary programmes and other interventions targeting existing teachers) that promotes good teaching and that attracts and retains the best teachers.
- ii. Effective private Early Learning Centres require well selected individuals as principals together with management teams that understand and fulfil their roles as leaders of the curriculum, ensuring that an organised environment conducive to learning is present.
- iii. Private Early Learning Centres require an educational assessment framework that; empowers parents with information on their child's performance; informs teachers of correct assessment practices and highlights to them learning areas needing improvement, and; helps policy-makers and districts determine the rate and extent of progress in different sectors of the education system, reasons for under-performance and which schools require specific types of interventions.
- iv. Private Early Learning Centres older principals should be encouraged to take up training courses to improve their level of competencies to manage the centres properly and have higher sensitivities towards teachers and children. A certification scheme for private centres principals should be considered to raise the professionalism of principals in South Africa. The centre principals need to increase their own knowledge base, in order to respond to new challenges.
- v. Recommendations were made that the quality of education in Private Early Learning Centres can be enhanced in four areas: School Administration and Management, Curriculum, Pastoral Care and Home-School Cooperation. More supervision should be given by the Ministry of Education to deter errant players from tarnishing the image of Private Early Learning Centres.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could focus on a larger sample of Private Early Learning Centres from a wider variety of backgrounds. It would be interesting to interview parents and teachers from different centres to gain more insights into their perspectives on their assessment and opinions about these centres. In spite of the limitations, this study provides an important overview of the environment in which Private Early Learning Centres operate.

CONCLUSION

Teacher support, motivation and supervision are driving forces that would energize older teachers to show more commitment to work and improve the teaching effectiveness and Private Early

Learning Centres being profit-oriented enterprises and rely on high productivity which is a reflection of a high degree of commitment to duty. The most common for all Private Early Learning Centres is financial success a particular profit or return on investment. Other goals may include improving the educational curriculum, providing a conducive environment and developing good teachers and children relationship.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MASELLO HELLEN PHAJANE

Department of Early Childhood Education, University of South Africa
phajamh@unisa.ac.za