Essential Management Competencies of Principals at Early Childhood Development Centres

by

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood development (ECD) has gained much momentum since the headline policy, the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2015), was ratified with the mandate to a deliver a comprehensive package of services to children from birth to six years old. ECD centres are not only hubs of education for young children, but also function as small businesses in the communities which they serve. Business skills, leadership, and governance are concepts which are intertwined and necessary for effective management by a principal of an ECD centre. Management competencies are centred upon core leadership values, which are embedded in the supervision and monitoring processes of social workers or ECD managers.

A learning organisation approach (LOA), which is recommended in this study for ECD centres, maintains that people can learn the necessary skills and knowledge to function in a managerial role. This study presents empirical findings that showcase the essential management competencies of an ECD principal based on Engelbrecht's (2014) conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks, which depicts the interaction and complexity of a management role in any given organisation. A fairly ambitious timeframe is mentioned in the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) that by 2030, all practitioners and principals working with ECD services should have adequate knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and materials to support a comprehensive package of early learning services within an ECD centre.

Using a qualitative research approach, this study aimed to gain an understanding of the essential management attributes of ECD principals managing ECD centres in South Africa. A collective case study design was utilised to gain the reflections and lessons learnt from ECD principals and social work managers working in the ECD sector, by conducting semi-structured, telephonic interviews. Non-probability, purposive, and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Thematic content analysis was completed by reviewing the data in the transcripts of each interview with the intention of identify managerial competencies in the ECD sector as South Africa's Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Basic Education

(DoBE) move forward into a future of possibilities for collaborative learning and development.

This study highlights the importance of business planning, mentorship, financial and ECD principal management tasks, the quality of ECD principal management, principal management training programmes, and further policy developments targeting the promotion of ECD principals' professional development. Conclusions and recommendations towards government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs), and ECD principals themselves are offered to provide practice-relevant evidence for intervention moving forward. Key recommendations include incorporating a learning organisation approach to the support and training of ECD principals and the centres they manage, what the management competencies of ECD principals should be, and the optimal mechanisms needed to support the growth of this role in their organisations.

OPSOMMING

Sedert die Nasionale Beleid vir Geïntegreerde Vroeë Kinderontwikkeling 2015 (*National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015*) (Republiek van Suid-Afrika [RSA], 2015) bekragtig is, het vroeë kinderontwikkeling al hoe meer aandag begin geniet. Hierdie beleid het die mandaat daargestel om ʼn omvattende dienspakket vir kinders van nul tot ses jaar oud te bied. Vroeë kinderontwikkelingsentrums (VKO-sentrums) behoort nie net as opvoedingsentrums vir jong kinders beskou te word nie, maar moet ook as sakeondernemings in eie reg gesien word in die gemeenskappe wat hulle bedien. Sakevaardighede, leierskap en bestuur is dus vervlegde bekwaamhede wat noodsaaklik is vir VKO-hoofde om oor te beskik om hul sentrums effektief te kan bestuur. Sodanige bestuursvaardighede is gesentreer rondom kernleierskapwaardes, wat veranker is in die toesig- en moniteringsprosesse van maatskaplike werkers of VKO-bestuurders.

Die uitgangspunt van ʼn leerorganisasiebenadering, wat in hierdie studie vir VKO-sentrums aanbeveel word, is dat ʼn mens die nodige vaardighede en kennis om in ʼn bestuurspos te kan funksioneer, kan aanleer. Hierdie studie bied gevolglik die empiriese bevindinge aan oor wat die noodsaaklike bestuursvaardighede van VKO-hoofde is en behoort te wees. Dit is gebaseer op Engelbrecht (2014) se konseptuele raamwerk vir bestuursvaardighede, -funksies en -take, waarin hy die interaksie en kompleksiteit van ʼn bestuursposisie in enige gegewe organisasie uitlig. Die VKO-beleid (RSA, 2015) stel ʼn taamlik ambisieuse tydsraamwerk voor, waarbinne die doelwit is dat alle VKO-hoofde en -praktisyns teen 2030 oor die nodige kennis, vaardighede, infrastruktuur en materiaal moet beskik om ʼn omvattende dienspakket vir vroeë leer by ʼn VKO-sentrum te kan aanbied.

Deur van ʼn kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering gebruik te maak, het dié studie dit ten doel gestel om die noodsaaklike bestuurseienskappe van VKO-hoofde wat VKO-sentrums in Suid-Afrika bestuur, te bepaal. Daar is van ʼn kollektiewe gevallestudieontwerp gebruik gemaak om VKO-hoofde en maatskaplike werk-bestuurders wat in die VKO-sektor werk, se blik op die praktyk en wat hulle al daaruit geleer het, te bekom. Dit het deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde,

telefoniese onderhoude geskied. Doelbewuste, sneeubal- en niewaarskynlikheidsteekproefneming is ingespan om deelnemers te werf. Tematiese konteksanalise is gedoen deur die data in die onderhoudtranskripsies te ontleed, met die doel om bestuursvaardighede in die VKO-sektor te ondersoek. Dit het geskied binne die konteks van Suid-Afrika se Departement van Sosiale Ontwikkeling en Departement van Basiese Onderwys, wat tans die moontlikheid van samewerking ten opsigte van leer en ontwikkeling oorweeg.

Hierdie studie beklemtoon die belangrikheid van sakebeplanning, mentorskap, finansiële take, VKO-hoofde se bestuurstake, die gehalte van VKO-hoofde se bestuur, opleidingsprogramme vir hoofde en verdere ontwikkeling van beleide ter bevordering van VKO-hoofde se professionele ontwikkeling. Daar word tot insiggewende gevolgtrekkings gekom en aanbevelings word aan regeringsafdelings, nieregeringsorganisasies en VKO-hoofde gemaak deur praktykgerigte riglyne ten opsigte van intervensie te verskaf. Die vernaamste aanbevelings sluit in om van ’n leerorganisasiebenadering gebruik te maak om VKO-hoofde op te lei en hulle en die sentrums wat hulle bestuur, te ondersteun. Daar word ook aanbevelings gemaak ten opsigte van die bestuursbevoegdheid van VKO-hoofde en die optimale meganismes wat benodig word om die ontwikkeling van hierdie rol in hul onderskeie organisasies te bewerkstellig.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual general meeting
CBO	Community-based organisation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DESC	Department of Social Work Ethics Screening Committee
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
DoHE	Department of Higher Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
ECD	Early childhood development
HR	Human resources
LOA	Learning organisation approach
NGO	Non-government organisation
NNSWM	National Network for Social Work Managers
NPC	Non-profit company
NPO	Non-profit organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PBO	Public benefit organisation
REC	Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDGs	Sustainable development goals
SES	Socio-economic status
SMME	Small, medium, and micro enterprises
SONA	State of the Nation Address
SSO	Social service organisation
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF STUDY

Organisations respond to effective management practices initiated by sound leadership and governance, and managers are required to possess certain management competencies to fulfil their leadership role, particularly in a social development context (Patel, 2019). Defining *management* in social work requires multiple perspectives to be all encompassing, as it involves knowledge, skills, and values from both the business and social service sectors. Nevertheless, management in a social work and social development paradigm could be defined as the operationalisation of specific management competencies in order to accomplish goals. These skills, functions, and tasks can be operationalised by any social development practitioner (Engelbrecht, 2019) – not only social workers, but all social service professionals working towards social development in South Africa. Managers operate in contexts such as non-profit welfare organisations (NPOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), which require essential management competencies (Gamble & Soska, 2013; Wimpfheimer, 2004). Within this context, *management competencies* could be defined as a combination of attained skills, functions, and tasks (Hellriegel, Slocum, Jackson, Louw, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, Oosthuizen, Perks & Zindiwe, 2018), and are deemed essential for effective organisation management (Engelbrecht, 2019; Mashale, 2017).

Without essential competencies, managers of NPOs in the social development domain may struggle or fail to meet the requirements of the Department of Social Development (DSD), for instance, to register an organisation they manage. Early childhood development (ECD) centres, which are organisations in their own right, and their principals (managers) are an example of the highest position of leadership for such an organisation.

ECD is the term that describes the crucial developmental stage of a child from birth to six years, which requires a comprehensive range of programmes and social services in order to achieve optimal child outcomes (Britto, Yoshikawa, Van Ravens,

Ponguta, Reyes, Oh, Dimaya, Nieto & Seder, 2014; Meier, 2014; Rudolph, 2017). Research has found that the ECD phase is a crucial time and opportunity for early intervention in education, health, and social work (Lo, Das & Horton, 2017; Phillips, 2017, Shawar & Shiffman, 2017). ECD centres are sometimes referred to as a crèche, day care, edu-care, preschool, or after (school) care centre (Department of Social Development [DSD] & ELRU, 2014; Phillips, 2017) and the term "centre" or "ECD centre" may be used interchangeably with these terms in the context of this study. According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2006), an ECD centre qualifies as a partial care facility, which is an approved building providing care and protection to six or more children on behalf of their primary caregiver (Chapter 5, Section 76). The owner or manager of an ECD centre is usually termed the ECD principal (DSD & Economic Policy Research Institute [EPRI], 2014; Fourie, 2018).

Engelbrecht's (2019:16) conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks offers an interrelated conceptualisation of management, which is suitable for a social service setting such as a ECD centre. Management skills of an ECD principal, for example, include human skills, technical skills, and conceptual skills (Engelbrecht, 2019; Bush & Oduro, 2006). These skills might be considered abstract but are vital for ECD principals to perform their necessary functions and tasks. Management functions include planning, organising, leading, and controlling (Engelbrecht, 2019; Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2002). Following this categorisation, an example of management functions within this context would be when an ECD principal plans the allocation and orientation of ECD practitioners and staff to ensure the child-to-teacher ratio meets requirements. Principals would need to organise and control the budget constraints for each classroom and lead the staff as a team to achieve the organisation's aims for the year. Without essential management skills, these tasks would be challenging and may not be accomplished successfully. ECD principals' responsibilities furthermore include management tasks such as financial management, human relations with staff and parents, curriculum planning, advocacy for children, property maintenance, marketing of the ECD centre, supervision of staff, creating an organisational culture, as well as ensuring that health and safety procedures are implemented (Bloom, 2000; Biersteker *et al*., 2016).

Essential management competencies lead to behaviours that produce outputs and help achieve an organisation's goals. ECD managers play a crucial role in the social work field, particularly when fulfilling the mandate of ensuring quality service delivery in an organisation such as an ECD centre, which requires continuous monitoring and supervision (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019).

In this context, it was noted that social workers, with their strong theoretical knowledge of childcare and protection, are seen as suitable catalysts for the supervision of ECD services, as social work has a unique management and supervision approach. This role entails working closely with ECD principals to ensure adherence to minimum norms and standards. This supervisory function brought about by social workers, adds value to the comprehensive management competencies required in the ECD sector (Engelbrecht, 2019). The social work profession's involvement in the ECD sector is specifically ascribed to the fact that ECD is a multidisciplinary field in social service delivery, which has progressed over the last century in response to national policy developments in the area of social development (Britto *et al*., 2014; Davids, Samuels, September, Moeng, Richter, Mabogoane, Goldman & Buthelezi, 2015; Fourie, 2018; Zonji, 2018). Moreover, this multidisciplinary nature of the ECD sector also requires involvement of government sectors such as the DSD, the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) and the Department of Health (DoH).

In order to promote ECD centres as part of South Africa's social development approach towards social service delivery, the DSD has been taking the lead as the governing body and custodian of ECD centres, since 1994 (RSA, 2001). They oversee the registration of these centres and their funding allocations as non-profit organisations. The provincial DSD also allocates a social work manager or suitably qualified person to each registered ECD centre to monitor and supervise principals and to ensure centre compliance with DSD standards (RSA, 2007).

The quality of services and programmes provided at ECD centres and the management competencies of the ECD principals may vary from centre to centre. This variation in service delivery is usually dependent on the ECD centre's

management structure and the principal's qualifications (Atmore, 2013; DSD & EPRI, 2014; Fourie & Fourie, 2016). Furthermore, according to the DSD, there is a difference between a registered ECD centre, which complies with minimum norms and standards, and an unregistered ECD centre (DSD & ELRU, 2014; Ilifa Labantwana, 2017). ECD principals from low socio-economic areas tend to lack the basic competencies for effective management, which may be related to their own lack of education and absence of sufficient mentoring in a management role (Ebrahim, 2014, Fourie & Fourie, 2016; DSD & EPRI, 2014; Meier, 2014). A research report (Biersteker *et al*., 2016) revealed that poorly managed ECD centres result in poor quality of services delivered to children in those centres. Therefore, ECD principals require management support and mentorship from the social workers who supervise ECD principals and centres in order to be effective in their management roles (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014). Until now, much attention has been given to classroom teaching in the ECD sector, with little emphasis on the essential management competencies of principals at these centres. Patel (2019) suggests a learning organisation approach (LOA) to management, which is useful for understanding management functions, skills, and tasks as competencies that can be acquired through a learning processes within an organisation such as an ECD centre. Furthermore, the supervisory role social workers play in the ECD sector, gives ECD principals the opportunity to learn management competencies from them through developmental feedback.

Social workers are required to supervise the delivery and quality assurance of ECD services through a registration process, according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006). Without adequate management competencies, ECD principals struggle to manage their ECD centres (Govender, 2015). As an example of this, the lack of and need for governance, accountability, and management were exposed in the media in April 2019, when video footage of an ECD practitioner physically abusing a child repetitively in the classroom at an ECD centre in Carletonville, Gauteng, went viral (eNews Channel Africa [eNCA], 2019a; SABC News, 2019). This occurrence showcased the potential consequences of inadequate supervision in ECD centres. The media outcry warranted the closure of this ECD centre and eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) featured an interview with a social worker who shared her concerns regarding the high number of ECD centres in South Africa operating without adequate

management procedures (eNCA, 2019b; eNCA, 2019c). There is thus an overwhelming need for improved management in the ECD sector.

The National Integrated ECD Policy (abbreviated in this dissertation as ECD Policy) (RSA, 2015) endeavours to address the role of an ECD principal as an individual who provides "supervision and administrative services" to other staff at the ECD centre and who has a higher qualification than the rest of the practitioners or staff members (RSA, 2015:14). Although all ECD principals do not necessarily have tertiary qualifications, they are still regarded as leaders in the community with a level of influence and managerial responsibilities (Hyde, 2018). However, recent research by Atmore (2019) and Meier (2014) argues that low levels of literacy, which is a reality in South Africa, may hinder the management competencies of ECD principals to execute relevant policy documents and legislation such as the National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) and the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006).

Recently the South African ECD sector has received much public attention, not only through the media (eNCA., 2019d; Mtyala, 2019; Randburg Sun, 2019), but also by President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation (SONA) address on 7 February 2019. He identified ECD as a priority area (Mtyala, 2019) and, in addition, announced the migration of the ECD sector from the governing ownership of the DSD to the DoBE, which was later confirmed by the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga (Harrison, 2019; Kubheka, 2019; South African Government News Agency [SA News], 2019). This politically initiated transition sparked a need for the ECD sector to document the institutional memory of social workers supervising ECD principals prior to the migration. Not only will such documentation yield and assist with the transition from one department to another, but it will also prevent the possible loss of a body of knowledge with valuable lessons for the DoBE that can benefit future service delivery to ECD centres. Social workers may continue to play a vital leadership role in the ECD sector as they champion management lessons from practice.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Several international rights-based policy documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, Education for All, and the Sustainable Millennium Development Goals (SDGs) lay the foundation for prioritising education during early childhood (Department of Education, 2011; UNICEF, 1989; UNESCO, 2000; United Nations [UN] General Assembly, 2000). So far, ECD has struggled to define an ideal system of governance globally and in South Africa, as it is a complex sector involving health, education, and social services (Shawar & Shiffman, 2017). The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) calls for collaboration between sectors in order to deliver a comprehensive package of services to the children in the ECD sector. The policy set a fairly ambitious time frame for all practitioners working in ECD services to have adequate knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and materials to support a comprehensive package of early learning services within an ECD centre by 2030 (RSA, 2015:51). However, research by Atmore (2019) revealed that the ECD sector has been lacking implementation of policy in the classroom and management of ECD centres for a while now. Without adequate leadership and sufficient management capacity, ECD policy documents and relevant legislation will remain merely words without action. ECD practitioner training has been a priority intervention focusing on education practices in the past, but limited attention has been given to ECD principals' management training, specifically to enhance their management competencies (Atmore, 2013; Govindasamy, 2010).

ECD is currently a priority in social development (eNCA, 2019d), and political action became a driving force behind the development of the ECD sector (Fourie, 2018; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017; Zonji, 2018). As mentioned before, the DSD took the lead governing role of the ECD sector, which is now pending migration to the DoBE. For this to occur, there is a need for a transference of institutional knowledge from current social workers to the new DoBE monitoring team (Harrison, 2019; Kubheka, 2019). Managers from the DoBE will require an understanding of prior managerial processes and thus management competencies expected of ECD principals to manage ECD centres effectively and successfully. However, research regarding these essential competencies of ECD principals at ECD centres is limited in the unique South African social development context (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017). In

essence, no knowledge base exists on what the essential skills, functions, and tasks are that principals of ECD centres need to acquire to effectively manage these centres.

A clear transfer of knowledge is thus needed from one government department to another to cushion the migration of custodianship and to ensure that service delivery and compliance standards remain a priority. Further research is imperative to add to the academic knowledge base of the management of ECD centres. Applewhite, Kao and Pritzker (2017) emphasised this need for further research, specifically in the field of management competencies, at multiple levels of human service organisations.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

Resulting from the problem statement, the main research question in this study was: What are the essential management competencies of early childhood development (ECD) principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa?

The above research question can be understood through explicit reflection on the following sub-questions:

(a) What *skills* are required from an ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?
(b) What *functions* are required from an ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?
(c) What *tasks* are required from ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?

1.4 RESEARCH AIM

The research aim flowed from the research questions above. The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa effectively. This was achieved through exploration of the above research questions and the objectives below:

- To contextualise the management of an ECD centre in South Africa by:
  - Presenting the current framework of South African ECD policy and monitoring processes of the DSD for registration of ECD centres in South Africa;
  - Examining the ECD sector's challenges of partial care registration and management processes of an ECD centre;
  - Synthesising possible learning processes within an ECD centre; and
  - Analysing trends of the ECD sector.

- To synthesise essential management competencies of ECD principals by presenting a contextual framework of:
  - a learning organisation approach;
  - management skills;
  - management functions; and
  - management tasks.

- To empirically investigate and critically analyse the competencies essential for ECD principals to manage ECD centres.

- To present conclusions and recommendations regarding essential management competencies needed to manage ECD centres for government departments such as the DSD and DoBE, as well as for Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the ECD sector.

1.5 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

With a progressive movement in the formulation of policy, there is a need for active implementation, continued investment, and research into the sector. Therefore, relevant policy and previous research in the field of ECD established a background and served as context for this study, while legislative documents, which create a sectoral landscape that is directly influenced by policy both internationally, (UNCRC, 1989; UNESCO, 2000; UN General Assembly, 2000) and nationally (White Paper on

Education, 1995; Interim Policy for ECD, 1996; National Programme of Action for Children in South Africa, 1996; White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997; White Paper on ECD, 2001; National Integrated Plan for ECD 2005–2010; Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 [RSA, 2006]; National Integrated ECD Policy, 2015) furthermore served as a point of departure.

Organisational learning is a term used to describe an organisation which has an embedded learning culture and a learning structure (Lipshitz, Popper & Friedman, 2002). A learning organisation approach asserts that people can learn the required skills and knowledge in order to manage (Senge, 1990; Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2019; Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019). Social workers are ideally positioned to lead learning processes whereby ECD principals can gain management competencies – assuming that the social workers possess these competencies themselves. Supported by literature, a learning organisation approach was utilised as the theoretical lens for which the research processes were undertaken with the goal of understanding ECD management competences and how these competencies are developed (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Chiva, 2017; Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2019).

At present, the ECD sector is anticipating the transition from the DSD to the DoBE and this calls for immediate action by social workers and ECD principals to reflect on the management competencies carried out over the last few years. Engelbrecht (2019) presented a conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks, which depicts the interaction and complexity of a management role within any organisation. Bush and Oduro (2006) presented a model similar to that of Engelbrecht (2019), defining the responsibilities of African school principals and recommending an African model of leadership and management. Therefore, these authors' views in particular were used as a conceptual framework for the study.

Furthermore, relevant postgraduate research studies conducted in a South African context were identified, which formed a foundation on which this study continued to document empirical evidence and learning in the ECD sector. Of significance, was the recent PhD study conducted by Atmore (2019) with the title "An interpretive analysis of ECD Policy in Post-Apartheid 1994-2015". These ECD-related studies,

however, lacked a management focus (Bongoza, 2018; Clampett, 2016; Govender, 2015; Kirsten, 2017; Muswala, 2014), which furthermore emphasised the need for a study on management competencies in the ECD sector in South Africa.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research methodology selected for the study is presented below in the following sections: research approach, design, method, population and sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, and data verification. The complete research methodology is discussed further in Chapter 5, as the following only presents an introductory overview.

1.6.1 Research approach

A *qualitative research approach* (Bansal & Corley, 2011; Fouché & Delport, 2021) was adopted for this study to gain an understanding of individuals' beliefs, values, experiences, and situations to develop theories which seek to describe these experiences from the participants' perspective (Fouché & Delport, 2021; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Qualitative research topics should be relevant to current affairs, create interest, and encourage investment, for example, to understand political shifts or debates in a sector (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Foster, Rzhetsky & Evans, 2015). Qualitative research requires researchers to provide a clear understanding of the philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks, which inform their study and research process (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Creswell, 2013). Previous research demonstrated that a qualitative approach is a valuable pathway for understanding ECD practitioners' practices (Ebrahim, Killian & Rule, 2011), while quantitative analysis, utilising numbers and statistics, was deemed less suitable for the study based on the need for qualitative exploration and an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

A *deductive approach* was chiefly utilised, starting with the research question, followed by the literature study, which led to the collection of empirical data and,

finally, the analysis thereof. While this was the main approach, a movement between deductive and inductive logic of reasoning did occur during the research process. Flexibility and creativity are characteristics of a deductive approach, as identified by Teddlie and Tashakkorie (2003) and encouraged by Bansal and Corely (2011), which are needed within the qualitative approach paradigm. As mentioned above, data collected was of a qualitative nature based on the reflections from participants (Fouché & Delport, 2021; Grinnell, 1988).

A *collective case study method* described by Stake (1995), and subsequently endorsed by Yin (2009), Baxter and Jack (2008) and Dasgupta (2015), was utilised for the study as it aimed to explore a specific phenomenon from several different case studies. Insights were gathered from ECD principals and social work managers from different organisations to cover the broad scope of ECD centre management in South Africa. The use of case studies facilitates in-depth data collection according to Yin (2013).

Each ECD centre that was investigated represented a case study with both ECD principals and social workers within the ECD sector as embedded participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This allowed conclusions and comparisons between cases to be made, which is considered to be “robust and reliable” research by Baxter and Jack (2008:550).

1.6.2 Research design

In the study, a *combined exploratory and descriptive case study design* was deemed suitable. An exploratory case study is ideal to explore a situation or phenomenon where little is known in a field of interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). Complementing this design, a descriptive case study describes a phenomenon “within its real-world context” (Yin, 2013:321). Based on a theory, collective case studies similar to multiple case studies are used to draw comparisons and explore contextual differences between carefully selected cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008:548; Yin, 2009). Case studies characteristically focus on the “what”, “how” and “why?” (Yin,

2013). This deductive nature of a combined exploratory and descriptive case study presents the need for a strong literature foundation to be in place (Grinnell, 1988:220).

This design is noted to produce trustworthy and strongly grounded evidence, and collective case studies provide the opportunity for a richness of data to be explored within a particular field. However, there are also limitations to this approach, namely that the design is potentially time consuming and costly (Baxter & Jack, 2008:550). Despite this, this design was deemed suitable for the research question, which aimed to understand the lived experiences of ECD principals managing ECD centres in South Africa.

1.6.3 Research method

In the following sections, population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis for the study are detailed.

1.6.3.1 Population and sampling

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select participants. Fouché and Schurink (2021) recommend this as a sampling procedure as individuals are chosen specifically based on their link to the study focus. *Purposive and snowball sampling* allowed for access and recruitment of participants in order to collect information-rich data (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017:47; Strydom & Delport, 2021; Monette, Sullivan & De Jong, 2002:151; Patton, 1990; Hennick, Kaiser & Marconi, 2017:1). Thirty participants were recruited (n=30) of which 14 were ECD principals managing ECD centres and 16 ECD managers working in the ECD sector in South Africa. While the lived experiences of ECD principals were gathered to achieve the aim of the study, social work managers in the ECD field were included in the population as they hold a supervisory and mentoring role to ECD principals. A sample size of 30 is considered sufficient in order to gain sufficient thematic saturation (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006). Saturation was achieved after 30 interviews as no new themes emerged. According to the literature, no further data collection is needed if the data collected no longer yields new findings (Hennick, Kaiser & Marconi, 2016:1; Mason, 2010).

Participants took part in the study in their personal capacity, which negated the need for the names of the NGOs or businesses they work for to be known or published in the study; thus confidentiality was ensured. Criteria for inclusion in the sample were based on the following:

- Layer one: Social work managers working in the ECD sector:
  - Should be a qualified social worker in South Africa;
  - Should have or had a managerial or supervisory role in the ECD sector;
  - Should have at least two years of experience in their role; and
  - Should be proficient in English.

- Layer two: ECD principals of ECD centres**:**
  - Should have been a principal (owner or supervisor) of an ECD centre in South Africa for at least two years;
  - Should have been involved in an ECD centre, either registered or unregistered with the DSD as a partial care facility; and
  - Should be proficient in English.

Age group and gender were not considered as criteria for exclusion for either layer. Qualification status was also not added as criteria for exclusion in layer two as qualifications for ECD principals are seldom standardised and vary in a South African context (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Msila, 2014; RSA, 2017). Entry into the research field and recruitment occurred through the researcher's ECD network at a local ECD meeting, whereby contact details were obtained from principals and social workers in the ECD field. Participants were also asked to recommend other potential participants in their networks who were likely to be suitable for inclusion in the study. Recruitment processes and engagement in the field included emails and phone calls to secure and arrange interview appointments with the participants.

1.6.3.2 Data collection

Data was gathered from the sample population through individual, telephonic, *semi-structured interviews* with participants by the researcher, and a semi-structured

interview schedule was constructed based on literature-supported themes, with similar schedules applied to both layers (See Annexures A and B). Semi-structured interviews seek to avoid repetition, which could easily occur in unstructured interviews, by utilising wording to suit the varied nature of the interview (Greef, 2011:353; Rubin & Babbie, 2012:124). Reflection upon workplace learning was encouraged by the researcher through the use of flexible interview questions to collect in-depth data (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985:43; Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008:3; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2019:1; Pease, 2006:15).

The rationale for the use of interviews in the study (Greef, 2011) was that individual interviews encourage contextual dialogue and depth in a confidential environment, which cannot always be achieved in a focus group or telephonic interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, face-to-face interviews were not possible and changes to the study's intended data collection method had to be made to comply with national lockdown regulations (discussed further in Chapter 5), which resulted in telephonic interviews. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in English and these interviews were recorded on a recording device, with written permission from all the participants, and transcribed by the researcher. Written consent (Annexures C and D) to participate in the study was required by all participants. All decision-making and data collection procedures adhered to the ethical considerations discussed further in Section 1.7.

1.6.3.3 Data analysis

The use of tables and figures to present data provided a visual representation of the participants' biographical data, and interviews were transcribed and thereafter analysed using thematic analysis (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2021). Schurink, Fouché and De Vos's (2021) guidelines and steps to be taken during the data analysis phase were followed. In order to understand the multiple case studies as a collective voice, each data source was considered a piece of the broader researched puzzle (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Transcription of interviews required several steps. Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005:1275) recommend a naturalisation process whereby transcriptions are cleaned

of poor grammar and unnecessary speech, leaving the content and meaning remaining. The researcher endeavoured to change as little as possible to ensure that the fidelity of the spoken language remained intact. The denaturalised transcription describes the narrative but removes unnecessary or involuntary sounds (Mero-Jaffe, 2011:232). Many researchers are inclined to use a combination of both naturalisation and denaturalisation (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005) and this was opted for in this research.

Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2021) propose that data analysis is concerned with reducing the amount of data gathered, determining themes, and creating a framework for synthesising literature with the new data. Identification of patterns from data in the form of grouping themes and sub-themes is known as thematic analysis (Shank, 2006). Thematic content analysis was hence completed in this study by reviewing the transcripts of each interview, and data analysis occurred through a deductive coding process.

Yin (2009) identified five prominent modes of data analysis, namely pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Logic models and cross-case synthesis were deemed suitable for this study as they lend themselves to the descriptive and exploratory nature of the research question, the boundaries of a case study design, and the presence of multiple cases (Swanborn, 2010).

The narratives of the two layers of interviews were finally analysed and reported on in an integrated manner in the research report (this dissertation). Findings were compared with existing literature and the theoretical framework, and member checking was utilised, whereby the meaning of participants' data was checked to ensure preservation of data integrity. This process protected the true reflection of the data was carried through into the analysis and conclusions of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

1.6.3.4 Data verification

The intentional establishment of trustworthiness is characteristic of a quality research study. Initially, Guba (1981) as well as Lincoln and Guba (1986) initially presented models for promoting rigour by ensuring four criteria that are explicit in the research process. They proposed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness. The following strategies necessary for qualitative research studies, further detailed by Krefting (1991) and Schurink, Fouché, and De Vos (2021), were followed in this study:

- *Credibility* was enhanced through the use of member checking, the utilisation of a data collection tool endorsed by the literature, systematic data, an analysis process based on defined principles, and reflexivity (Baxter & Jack,2008; Kalu & Bwalya, 2017:50; Russell, Gregory, Ciliska, Ploeg, Guyatt, 2005).
- *Transferability* was achieved using a collective research design of multiple cases that linked data to the research findings (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017:50; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2021).
- In order to achieve *dependability*, well-documented, logical research processes, inclusion of supervision, and peer examination were prioritised throughout the study.
- *Confirmability* was also achieved by the integration of a methodological audit trail (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2021). In this study, the researcher's supervisor fulfilled the role of research auditor.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Ethical considerations are a fundamental element of ensuring quality research procedures and processes (Paradis & Varpio, 2018). Babbie (2011) defined certain ethical codes as professional principles for conduct, which are also strongly supported by Strydom (2021). The Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2011) was used as a guiding policy for this research, which the researcher as a registered social worker adhered to throughout the research process. In addition, the following procedures were followed:

- Informed consent was obtained from every participant to ensure voluntary participation (Strydom, 2021);
- Participants were provided with individual copies of their signed consent forms (Annexures C and D). All originals were securely filed;
- Participants were made aware of the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Strydom, 2021);
- Each participant had the right to privacy and confidentiality of their personal data (Strydom, 2021). Data was stored in a secure, password-protected computer;
- Due to the lack of emotional content and the nature of the research aim, the study was deemed low-risk research with the only foreseeable risk being that of discomfort or inconvenience. The study was furthermore considered a low ethical risk because it involved adult participants who are not part of a vulnerable group, nor was the topic of a sensitive nature; and
- Participants were recruited into the study in their personal capacity, which do not necessarily reflect their organisations' views or methodology. Care was taken to arrange interviews so that they would not interfere with the participants' work setting and obligations.

Ethical clearance for the study was applied for at the Department of Social Work Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) and Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC) prior to commencing the empirical study. The project was approved and the ethical clearance number is 13061.

1.8 EXPOSITION (OUTLINE) OF THE DISSERTATION

This chapter presented an introduction and the rationale of the study. The following are discussed in the rest of the chapters: Chapter 2 contains a literature review and contextualisation of the management of an ECD centre in South Africa, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the learning organisation approach (LOA) to managing ECD centres, in Chapter 4, the essential management competencies of ECD principals are comprehensively discussed, followed by the research methodology in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical investigation and findings of the study. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations are made in Chapter 7. A summary of the dissertation overview can be seen below:

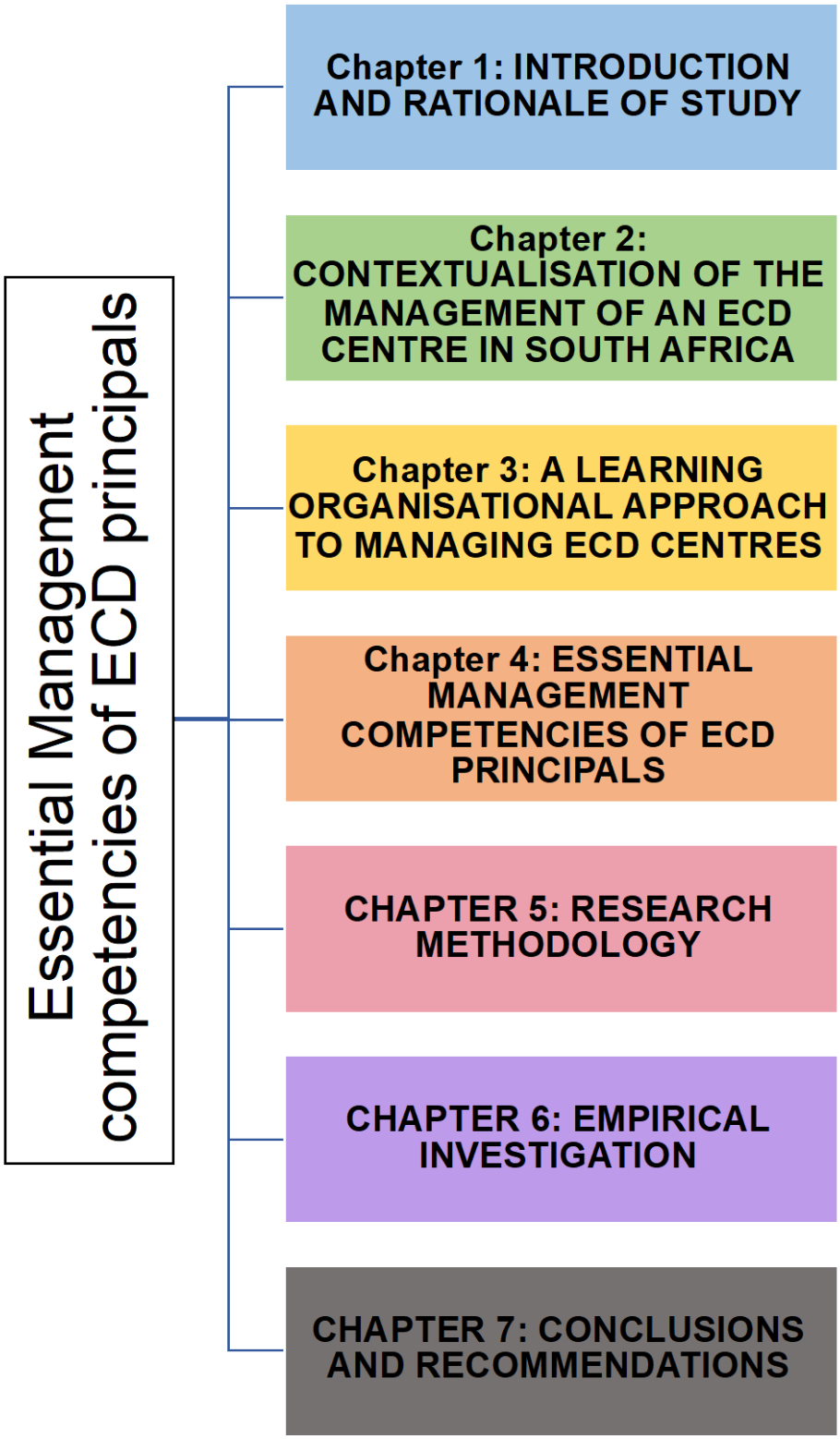

Figure 1.1 Graphical exposition of dissertation chapters

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE MANAGEMENT OF AN ECD CENTRE IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last century, there has been a noticeable trend globally for countries to prioritise the early years known as early childhood development (ECD), and the emphasis has been on the first 1000 days of a child's life (Meier, 2014). The importance of effectively managed ECD centres as sites that exemplify suitable child protection and act as incubators of child development, is at the forefront of discussion and debate amongst professionals, practitioners, policy makers, as well as the public. This chapter seeks to contextualise ECD centres as learning organisations within the ECD sector by systematically reviewing relevant literature related to the progression and context of the ECD sector, both nationally and internationally. Additionally, the current framework of South African ECD policy will be analysed, followed by a critical analysis of the registration process of the DSD for a partial care facility (ECD centre) and the challenges faced by principals when registering their centres. Finally, a detailed description of the stakeholders involved in an ECD centre will be discussed and an outline of future trends of the ECD sector relevant to the management of ECD centres will be given.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF THE ECD SECTOR

Historical events, significant contributors, and policy developments are relevant to the context of ECD, because the past terrain paints a pathway for us in the 21st century that can explain many of the current ideas and systems we see today (Ho, Wang & He, 2019; Pence, 2004). Traditionally, the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE), or ECD as it is currently termed in South Africa, started out informally in households and continued to be operated as such until the nineteenth century when kindergartens and day cares were established particularly in Europe and the United States of America (USA) (Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018). The predominant view during this time was that ECD practitioners were babysitters rather

than educators and principals were functioning as administrators rather than leaders or change agents (Ho, Wang & He, 2019; Walker & Hallinger, 2015).

Authors began to write about early childhood and literacy concepts as early as 1590 (Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018) and there were key leaders in the field of ECD whose life work became an integral part of the ECD history, internationally. In 1837, the first "Kindergarten", a German term directly translated to mean "children's garden", was opened by Friedrich Froebel, who believed that children could grow naturally like plants. In 1856, 20 years later, the first US (American) kindergarten opened with two agendas: the first to educate and the second to assist parents during work hours to look after their children (Aleksov, 2018; Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018). Over a number of decades, multiple disciplines influenced the understanding of ECD and ECCE, with research emerging from fields such as medicine, psychology, and education (Warner & Sower, 2005). Particularly in terms of leadership, curriculum development, and creating a school environment for children from birth to six years old, some noteworthy contributors identified by Nutbrown and Clough (2014), and Marais and Clasquin-Johnson (2018) are detailed in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1 Historic leaders and noteworthy contributors to the field of ECD

Name of author(s)	**Summary of noteworthy contribution/ achievement**	**Supporting reference**
John Amos Comenius (1592 – 1670)	• Proposed the link between children's ability to learn through exploration by using their senses • Authored the first early children's picture book • Introduced the concept of "grades" or age-appropriate levels • Advocated for poor children to receive education	Bonnay, 2017 Aleksov, 2018 Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018
Johann Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827)	• Considered education as an opportunity for community development • Highlighted the crucial partnership between school and home • Advocated for group work while developing the child as a whole	Nutbrown & Clough, 2014 Marais & Clasquin-Johnson 2018 Warner & Sower, 2005

Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852)	• Proposed that children learn through play • Founded the first kindergarten in Germany • Designed a teacher training programme emphasising observation and age-appropriate tasks	Bonnay, 2017 Aleksov, 2018 Marais & Clasquin-Johnson 2018 Warner & Sower, 2005
Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth (1804 – 1877)	• Established a training centre at Battersea (United Kingdom) which became the model for training school teachers • Advocated strongly for public education	Nutbrown & Clough, 2014
Robert Lowe (1811 – 1892)	• Introduced the "Payment by Results" grants to schools based on pupils' performance in reading, writing, and arithmetic. These grants lasted for 35 years until 1899.	Nutbrown & Clough, 2014
Charlotte Mason (1842 – 1923)	• Initiated the first home-schooling model	Davies, 2015
Rachel McMillan (1859 – 1917) Margaret McMillan (1860 – 1931)	• Pioneered an outdoor pre-school in England • Advocated for the first government inspections for health and safety in 1902 • Authored several significant books that included *The Nursery School* (1919) and *Nursery Schools: A Practical Handbook* (1920)	Bonnay, 2017 Nutbrown & Clough, 2014 Warner & Sower, 2005
Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925)	• Created the Waldorf education philosophy and schools that seek to develop strong social-emotional skills	Bonnay, 2017
Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952)	• Founded the internationally renowned Montessori Method, which is still used in present ECD settings • Emphasised the importance of a prepared learning environment and self-learning • Developed materials and resources designed to stimulate cognitive skills	Bonnay, 2017 Aleksov, 2018.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980)	• Created a theory of learning progression through stages for young children to adulthood • Advocated for direct interaction and contact within a stimulating environment for children	Bonnay, 2017
Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994)	• Renowned for his developmental theory on the stages of development, linking children's social and emotional development to age-appropriate stages	Bonnay, 2017 Louw & Louw, 2007 Dunkel & Sefcek 2009
Loris Malaguzzi (1920 – 1994)	• Founded the Reggio Emilia approach • Endorsed documentation of children's learning • Adapted curriculum tasks to meet the class's interests and abilities • Made outdoor tasks and nature the core of his approach	Bonnay, 2017 Warner & Sower, 2005
David Weikart (1931 – 2003)	• Founder of the HighScope Approach which was validated by a longitudinal study called the Perry Preschool Project in 1962 • The HighScope Approach to education utilises child-initiated tasks and teacher-initiated tasks	Bonnay, 2017

ECD is a multidisciplinary field which has progressed over the last century in response to international research and policy developments (Britto *et al*., 2014; Davids *et al*, 2015; Fourie, 2018; Zonji, 2018). Policy development is an important element of the historical narrative that should be viewed as one of the several streams that have been woven together to create the discipline termed "early childhood development".

Prior to 1994, many South Africans did not receive equal formal education due to the discriminatory apartheid system, and thus the educational divide within South Africa is a continual target for development (Atmore, 2013; Richter & Samuels, 2018). Policy has endeavoured to rectify the inequality woven into South Africa's governance and systems. Post 1994, there was a dramatic surge of investment into the education sector to promote equality and rectify the remnants of the apartheid education system, which hindered certain groups of the population from receiving adequate

education (Bush & Odudro, 2006; Richter & Samuels, 2018). Principals of ECD centres should have knowledge of the historical influencers of the sector in order to inform their own centre management and decision-making processes, as suggested by Marais and Clasquin-Johnson (2018). Only over the last decade, policy makers and researchers' attention has shifted form formal schooling towards the ECD sector (Atmore, 2013).

2.3 INTERNATIONAL ECD POLICY

Several international rights-based policy documents, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), Education for All (UNESCO, 2000), and the Millennium Development Goals (UN General Assembly, 2000), lay the foundation for prioritising education from the early years. Several international role-players, often referred to as "actors" have also paved the way, mostly in Europe and the USA, with a number of significant interventions and research projects completed by the World Bank, DFID, WHO, UNICEF, UNSECO, and USAID (Bassok & Engel, 2019; Shawar & Shiffman, 2017; UNESDOC, 2016). The Sustainable Development Goals also initiated a global trend toward prioritising education (Daelmans, Darmstadt, Lombardi, Black, Britto, Lye, Dua, Bhutta & Richter, 2017; Sotuku, Okeke & Mathwasa, 2016). These documents led to the African continental movement and ratification of the African Charter (Organisation of African Unity [OAU], 1990). Global trends in ECD and principal management may set the trajectory of the field and influence the South African ECD sector, however, the country has a unique context which should be considered and learnt from within an African perspective (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Atmore & Ng'asike, 2018; Bassok & Engel, 2019; Bush & Oduro, 2006).

2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN ECD POLICY

In response to global policy, South Africa progressively formed a range of national policies and legislative documents over a number of years (Martin, 2010; Richter & Samuels, 2018). Bray, Tladi and Meier (2018) identified legislative avenues which impact ECD centres, namely, education-focussed policies and child protection

policies (National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996; South African Schools Act 84 of 1996; the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 [RSA, 2006]), and significantly, the newly ratified National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), which will be discussed below, where the relevant sections of the Children's Act and the ECD Policy will be discussed and critically analysed.

ECD, aimed at the holistic development a child from birth to six years, is defined and positioned in the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2012) and The Constitution of South Africa and Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996), which emphasise the right to education and the financial commitment of government towards supporting and monitoring the education sector. Several significant policies have been influential in the development of ECD in South Africa, namely the White Paper 5 on Education (2001), the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development (2005–2010), the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006), and most recently the ECD Policy (Kotzé, 2015). Of significance to the research aim, is a focus on the last two policy documents regarding the management and effective functioning of an ECD centre.

Protection of children has been mandated and championed by social workers through the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006). Chapter 5 (Sections 76-90) is dedicated to the standards of a partial care facility where an ECD centre would be defined as a centre which "…takes care of more than six children on behalf of their parents or caregivers during specific hours of the day or night". An ECD service must, according to The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006), register as a partial care facility and ECD programme (Section 79). Chapter 6 of The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 RSA, 2006) adds an additional layer of guidelines to the ECD sector of social service provision in South Africa. As a result of this act, the DSD took over the governing role for the ECD sector, which is now migrating into the leading hands of the DoBE (Harrison, 2019; Kubeka, 2019). There is limited inclusion in this policy about education programmes or health intervention as part of children's rights to protection. This policy therefore placed responsibility on the DSD for governing ECD, which, in the current discussion, should be addressed to be more of a shared platform involving the DSD, the DoBE, and the Department of Health (DoH). It has been mentioned that collaborative efforts to link health, social development, and education

expertise can be effective and produce noteworthy outcomes for community-based programmes in the ECD sector (Steenkamp, Ronaasen, Williams & Feeley, 2019).

ECD in South Africa only gained its unique headline policy in 2015 when the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) was ratified and mandated as a policy with an intersectoral agenda. This calls for collaboration and synergy between departments in order to deliver a comprehensive package of services to children. According to the Joint Portfolio Committee presentation on ECD (2017), the purpose of the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) is to achieve the following:

- Provide an overarching multi-sectoral framework of ECD services, including national, provincial, and local government;
- Define the comprehensive package of ECD services and support in South Africa;
- Identify the role-players and the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of ECD services; and
- Establish a national ECD leadership structure.

(Joint Portfolio Committee, 2017)

Although the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) mentions a number of associated government departments, such as the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Higher Education (DoHE), and the South Africa Social Security Agency (SASSA), to name a few, the champion pillars of the ECD sector remain in the sphere of the DSD and the DoBE (RSA, 2015: 67-72 & 74). This requires both the DSD and the DoBE to have governance capacity, management skills, and an ability to collaborate and communicate effectively (Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019). A multisectoral partnership would be the ideal vision for ECD programmes in South Africa, however, there needs to be sufficient funding and political will behind each of these pillars (Richter & Samuels, 2018). And in reality, this political support has yet to be achieved (Atmore, 2019). Lack of government capacity, inadequate funding allocation, and inactive political will is noted despite the waves of policy pressure and media focus over the last decade (Atmore, 2019).

With a specific focus on management, Chapter 3 of the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) highlights gaps in the current system with particular reference to factors such as governance, institutional arrangement, leadership, and coordination. This policy states that securing political and financial support for ECD would assist in promoting the value of ECD services in South Africa (RSA, 2015).

Unique to South Africa, the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) aligns with the highly documented "market model" (Moss, 2009:3). This model views ECD centres as a response to the capitalist needs of parents, whereby ECD is a package to be purchased, despite the need for a democratic experimentalism, which is aimed at relationship building and values of community life (Moss, 2009). Furthering this idea, Atmore (2019:22) comments that "…with Cabinet approval of the ECD Policy in 2015, the South African government appears to have favoured a model encompassing elements of the market and of democratic experimentalism". This means that the South African government will provide subsidies for registered ECD centres, but the surplus of ECD financial needs is market dependant and needs to be sourced privately (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012; Johnson, 2017). With current political murmurs that two years of ECD education will be compulsory for every South African child (Richter & Samuels, 2018), this suggested model will need to be critiqued carefully moving forward as discussion continues regarding ECD programme upscaling and implementation (Richter & Samuels, 2018).

Considering the strong priority of ECD governance and monitoring, the ECD Policy (Chapter 8, RSA, 2015:82) suggests a funding model suitable for policy implementation. Notably, both social work supervision and management are itemised in the policy to allocate funding towards the system and workforce implementing the ECD Policy in the sector (Chapter 8, Section 8.2, RSA, 2015:82). The skill set and attributes required for these professional positions are not illustrated in the policy, which highlights a gap in the policy document. Funding is also noted to be allocated to ECD programmes, for management, supervision, and coordination of the multisectoral mechanisms recommend in the ECD Policy. Inadequate ownership and a vague allocation of leadership roles within the ECD sector has, so far, hindered the collaborative goal of the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), according to Shawar and Shiffman (2017) and Zonji (2018).

The legislative international and national frameworks, as discussed above, create the landscape for the ECD sector in South Africa. Management competencies of ECD principals are centred upon core leadership values, which are implemented though the supervision and monitoring process of social workers. Graphically, this landscape is represented in Figure 2.1 below:

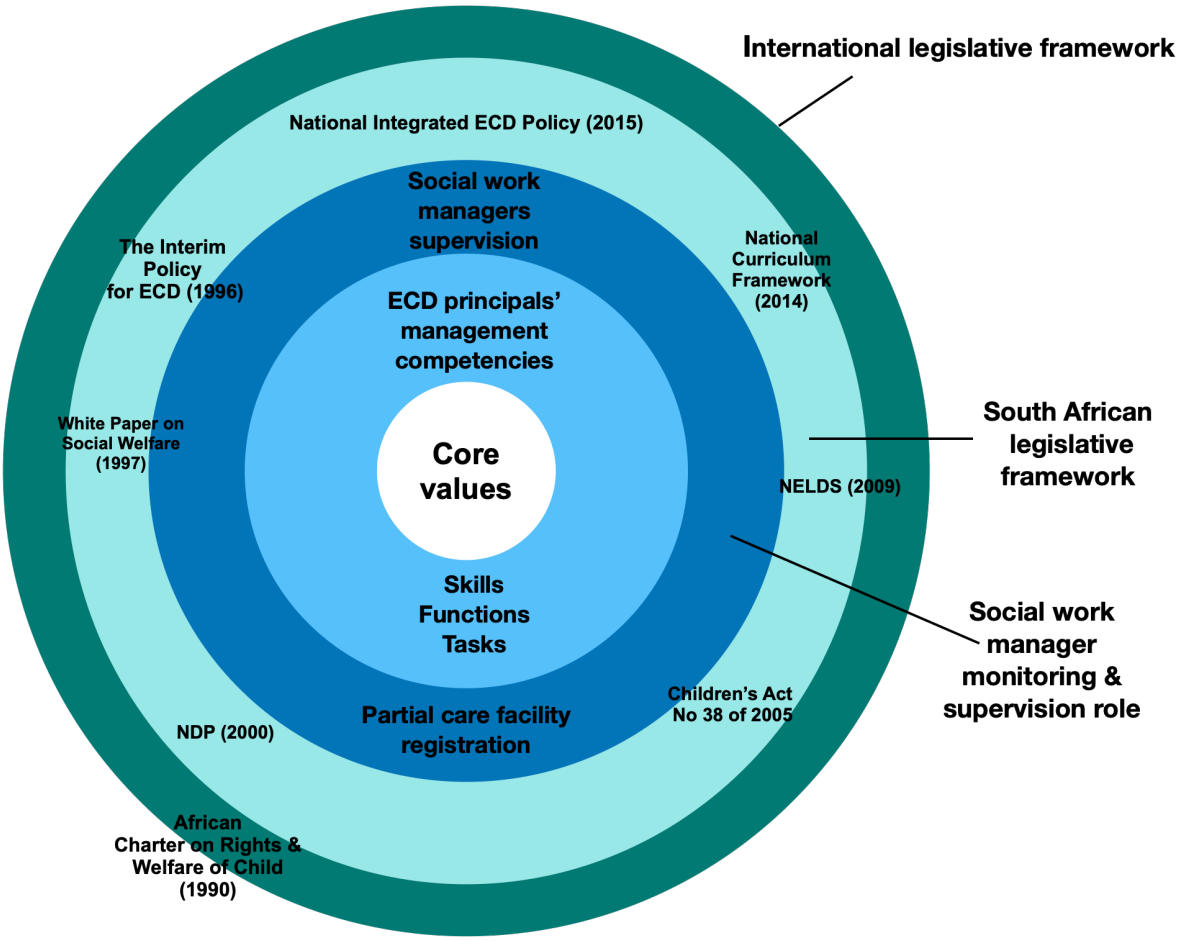

Figure 2.1 The landscape of ECD and the management competencies of ECD principals based on national and international legislation

The principals managing these ECD centres, particularly from low socio-economic areas, tend to lack the basic skills and attributes of an effective manager, which is largely related to their own lack of educational input and mentoring in a management role (Ebrahim, 2014, Fourie & Fourie, 2016; DSD & EPRI, 2014; Meier, 2014; Shawar & Shiffman, 2016; Woodhead, Feathersone, Bolton & Robertson, 2014). Little attention has been given to management, leadership, supervision, or monitoring of

ECD centres (Fourie, 2018; Phillips, 2017), and in order to present the context whereby ECD principals manage ECD centres, one needs to understand the political and socio-economic landscape in which these organisations are positioned.

2.5 THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN ECD

South African government departments have progressively taken steps towards collectively prioritising ECD (Atmore, 2019; Davids *et al*., 2015; Fourie, 2018; Rudolph, 2017). The need for both the DSD and the DoBE to be involved in the ECD sector is considered important as ECD and its target population do not "belong" to one sector only (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012; Britto *et al*., 2014; Meier, 2014). This, however, also poses a potential threat, as responsibilities of different role players may remain vague or shifted between sectors, without any action (Meier, 2014).

The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) is built upon several principles that underpin its agenda, of which *multi-sectoral and integrated responses to policy and service provision* are particularly relevant. Each department involved has outlined their role and responsibilities according to the "overarching framework", which assumes a collaborative effort is needed in South Africa (Martin, Richter, Aber, Mathambo & Godfrey, 2010:5) and the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) assigned Chapter 6 to outlining the *Responsible Role Players* in the ECD sector. In this chapter, several key actors in the system and relevant stakeholders, which include various governmental departments, are mentioned and throughout the document it is specifically highlighted that various departments need to work in collaboration with one another to implement the policy, and reach objectives, as well as fulfil various other roles (RSA, 2015). Lombard (2015), makes a strong argument for cooperation between stakeholders and departments if the intention is to honour the commitments found in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2012. Biersteker *et al*. (2016) wrote a significant article on ECD centre-based quality programmes, which placed strong emphasis on governments' interdepartmental responsibilities towards the ECD sector in supporting the ECD Policy-mandated principle.

Similarly to the decentralised governance structure for preschools in China, South African ECD centres are generally governed by the principal of the school and supervised by local municipal authorities (Ho, Wang & He, 2018). This system means that the principal becomes the designated authority in the school and decision-making power is assigned provincially for social service quality assurance through supervision by the DSD. Shawar and Shiffman (2016:120) mention that "dynamics" on national level may influence the government's ranking of the ECD agenda, which may hinder support to the sector on the ground. While sound management is a necessary competency of a principal, without support from local government, ECD centres may run into challenges when managing their finances and human resources (Bush & Oduro, 2006).

Despite policy progression in 2015, Meier (2014) pleads for increased attention to ECD if South Africa wishes to see policy be more than legislation, but also action. Richter and Samuels (2018:17) support this request, suggesting that publicly-funded ECD programmes require "political will", which should be part of a comprehensive ECD strategy. Fourie (2018:1056-1057) gives credit to the South African government for taking steps forward and remarks that "[t]he South African Government increasingly strives to embrace ECD as part of their education agenda". This statement acknowledges the efforts over the last 25 years since democracy, however, there are still several crucial sectoral challenges that would need to be addressed in order to reach intended outcomes and national goals. These challenges include, among others, inadequately qualified ECD practitioners, inadequate infrastructure, high levels of poverty and socioeconomic challenges, HIV/AIDS in communities, poor financial management, parents that do not pay school fees, lack of parental involvement, human resource issues, inadequate learning environments for children with special needs, poorly resourced classrooms, social mobilisation, supervision that lacks adequate monitoring and quality assurance, as well as a lack of credible data across different departments (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Fourie, 2018; Excell, 2016; Richter & Samuels, 2018). The complex nature of these problems warrants South African policy and programme developers to be aware of the growing innovative ECD evidence and knowledge in an evolving sector. Educational leaders highlight the need

to stay well informed about current best practice ECD research and policies to be able to instil this into practice to meet the demands of an emerging sector.

2.6 THE ECD SECTOR'S MIGRATION FROM THE DSD TO THE DoBE

The departmental migration of the ECD sector in South Africa from the DSD to the DoBE may be seen as a disruption by some, or a valuable learning opportunity by others. The transition could be viewed as a window of opportunity for the ECD workforce and those supervising centres to reflect on the management competencies of an ECD principal, such as core values, skills, functions, and tasks required (The Network for Social Work Management, 2018; Woolever & Kelly, 2014). As mentioned before, the fact that the ECD sector does not "belong" to one department in isolation (Britto *et al*., 2014; Meier, 2014; Martin *et al.*, 2010) creates a potential threat, whereby departmental responsibilities may remain vague or shifted between departments without action (Meier, 2014), but *coordination of services* between the DSD, the DoH and the DoBE are likely to support quality ECD services (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Britto *et al*., 2014; Davids *et al*., 2015; Fourie, 2018, Meier, 2014; Dawes, Biersteker & Irvine, 2008; Phillips, 2017). Subsequently, the collaboration of these departments in the sector would require a unique pool of knowledge whereby an integrated, multidisciplinary approach is needed to manage and monitor ECD centres and support ECD programmes (Richter & Samuels, 2018; Steenkamp *et al.*, 2019). The future of the ECD workforce in South Africa is at a crossroads and invites the need for actionable collaboration alongside innovation and financial investment. Clear recommendations for a national human resources (HR) workforce plan have been made to support the migration and the ECD sector in South Africa and should not be ignored by decision makers in the coming years (National Education Collaboration Trust, 2021).

Although ECD as a sector in South Africa has made progress towards a firm literature base of indigenous knowledge, little research has been done in the field to narrate and preserve specifically the lessons learnt in terms of management over the last decade (Meier, 2014). Kahn (2014) points out that social workers have a unique

contribution to make towards the early childhood education field, which has in the past been well documented by economists, neuroscientist, and developmental psychologists. By reflecting on the lessons from practice, it is possible to document the institutional memory of social work managers and ECD principals. The process of reflection encourages lesson sharing around the practicality of "how" to best supervise ECD principals and, similarly, "how" ECD principals effectively manage an ECD centre. Orthner, Cook, Sabah and Rosenfeld (2006) suggest that reflective conversations create shared learning. This is usually a leader-led process, which may encourage social work managers to share knowledge and promote inter-organisational learning between the DSD and the DoBE. This study aimed to provide a platform for reflection on the management processes and skills used by social workers and ECD principals and to start the documentation of these topics.

The DSD registration conditions require a new set of expertise from ECD principals, who now have to offer a range of "comprehensive essential services" for children birth to six years, in a range of domains from the ECD discipline, while complying with DSD regulations (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Bush & Oduro, 2006; Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011; Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014; Fourie, 2018).The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015:85) deems training of the workforce a necessary component of the development of the ECD sector. However, Chapter 8 of the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) does not mention ECD principals or principal management training as a focus for funding directed through any of the responsible departments. The lack of focus is a clear gap in legislation, as without the appropriate funding, training will remain geared towards the upskilling of practitioners in classrooms and less towards developing ECD centre principals' management and other necessary skills (Atmore, 2013; Biersteker *et al*., 2016). Furthermore, a vague description in the ECD Policy of supervision and management responsibilities, skills, and competencies needed by principals, and limited input from governing bodies such as the DSD, DoBE, and other ECD stakeholders leave ECD principals neglected (Biersteker *et al.*, 2016). This presents a timeous opportunity for learning and reflection as the ECD sector is receiving public attention and government investment in its transition from the DSD to the DoBE (Harrison, 2019; Biersteker *et al*., 2016).

2.7 ECD REGISTRATION CRITERIA AND REGISTRATION PROCESS TO BECOME A PARTIAL CARE FACILITY

ECD centre registration is the mandated requirement by the DSD to standardise and monitor the services delivered to preschool children. However, there is an ever-growing number of unregistered ECD centres which function outside of compliance standards (Johnson, 2017). The DSD expects compliance of ECD centres to meet an extensive list of requirements which allow them to complete the Partial Care Registration Process (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Harrison, 2019; Ilifa Labantwana, 2017). This registration process is rooted in business management expectations, which entails ECD centre supervision and governance procedures from the DSD to maintain their registration status (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011). While emphasis has been placed in the different policies on leadership and management skills, a severe disconnect is observed in implementation and practice (Fourie, 2018). A vague description of supervision and management responsibilities, skills, and competencies within the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) leaves ECD principals vulnerable to inactivity. Limited input from governing bodies such as the DSD, DoBE and other ECD stakeholders compounds this issue (Atmore, 2019; Biersteker *et al*., 2016).

According to the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), care at an ECD centre should include an ECD programme with learning and stimulation to develop the children holistically from the ages of birth to six years, prior to entering formal schooling. Regardless of registration status, quality of services and programmes provided at ECD centres can vary and this may be dependent on management and ECD practitioner's qualifications and training (Atmore, 2013; DSD & ELRU, 2014; Fourie & Fourie, 2016).

The ECD registration process is in place to ensure care and protection for the children within the ECD centre by requiring centres to have certain minimum norms and standards in place. Social workers' involvement is crucial from the initial stages of the registration process, however, delays in this process may be experienced because

of social workers' demanding workload. Govender (2015:108) found that South African ECD social workers' caseloads ranged between 60 and 200 facilities per social worker. This registration process is administratively rigorous and requires ECD principals to have a certain level of administrative skills, financial literacy, and record keeping procedures (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Clampett, 2016) to be able to complete it sucessfully. Emphasis has been placed in policy documents on such leadership skills, and yet there is a severe disconnect when it comes to the implementation and practice of such skills in reality (Fourie, 2018). In order to proceed through the registration, the ECD principal needs to progress through a series of steps depicted below in Figure 2.2:

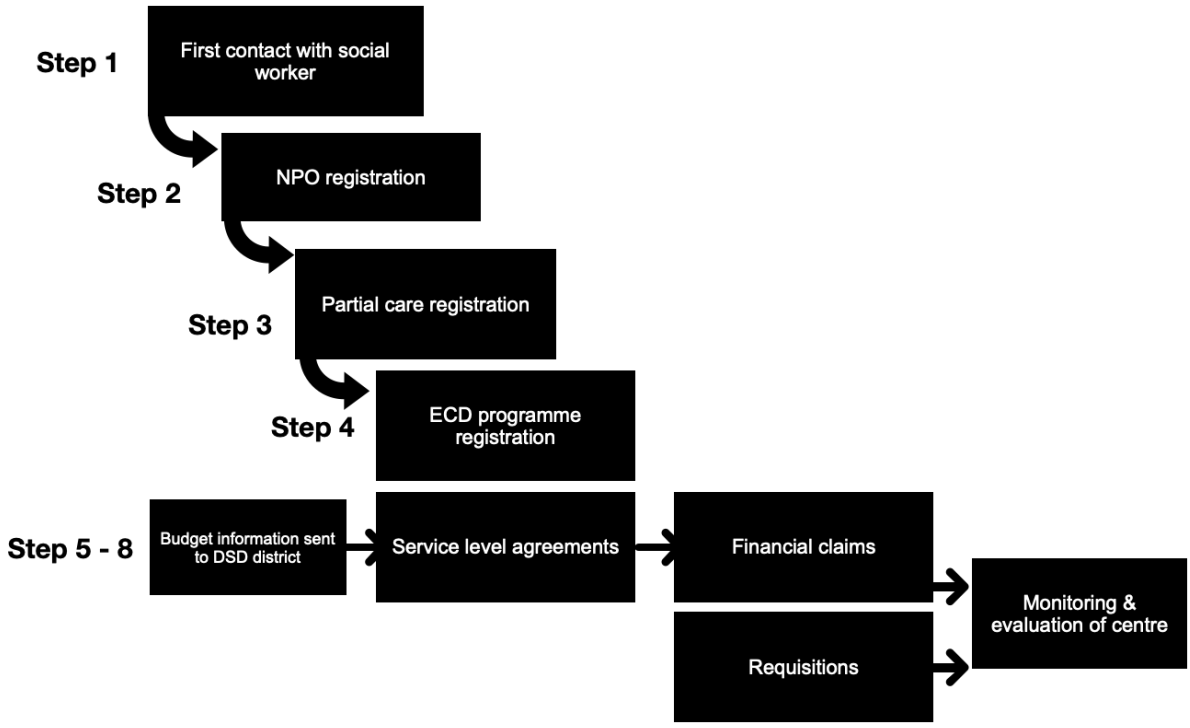

Figure 2.2 The ECD centre's process of registration from first contact to financial support by the DSD

Figure 2.2 above showcases the progression needed to access government funding through partial care facility registration. Regardless of whether the ECD centre would ideally like to apply for funding or not, all ECD programmes should complete the steps at least up to Step 4 in order for both the building (care facility) and the programme to be on the DSD's records. The third step, as depicted above, shows that partial care registration should be completed prior to programme registration or requesting

funding. Step 3 is also where many centres seem to be unable to meet the DSD requirements due to inadequate housing or building infrastructure, rendering them unable to access funding. Steps 5 to 8 are only necessary should the principal wish to apply for DSD funding. Management tasks and administration skills of ECD principals are vital to fulfil the requirements of the registration process. Figure 2.3 below provides a more detailed process for partial care registration, and again the need for management and administrative competencies should be noted with regards to each step in this process:

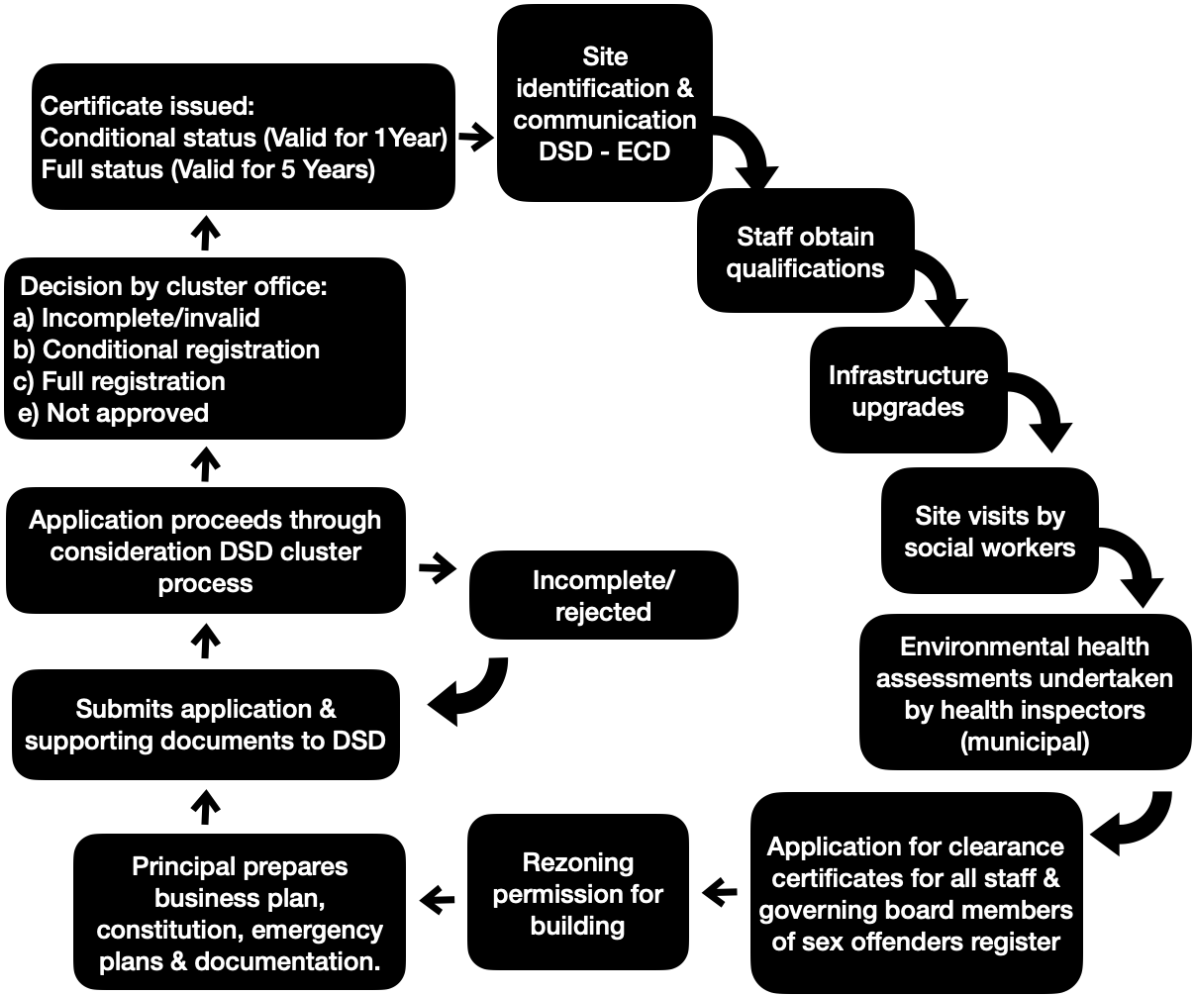

Figure 2.3: The process of ECD centres registration as a partial care facility (Adapted from TREE, 2013:4)

Practical documents have been written to assist ECD principals and social workers to better understand the registration process and to be able to tailor their centres' documentation accordingly (Allie, 2011; DSD & EPRI, 2014; TREE, 2013).

2.8 SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION OF ECD CENTRES

One of the tasks delegated to social workers is to initiate social change with vulnerable groups, such as children (Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2017; Knight & Gitterman, 2018; Azzi-Lessing, 2010), and in South Africa, social work managers are intended to fulfil a supervisory and mentoring role to support ECD principals (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Britto *et al*., 2014; Desmond, Viviers, Edwards, Rich, Martin & Richer, 2019; Kahn, 2014; Sotuku, Okeke & Mathwasa, 2016).

A social work manager or a "suitably qualified person" is allocated to each registered ECD centre by the provincial DSD office to monitor and supervise centre compliance with DSD standards (Children's Amendment Act No. 41 of 2007 [RSA, 2007]). Legislation and research should be the framework for these social work managers' practice, other social workers, supervisors, and others in leadership roles within the ECD sector (Desmond *et al*., 2019; Meier, 2014; Rudolph, 2017; Sotuku, Okeke & Mathwasa, 2016).

Social work management theory refers to a selection of professional leadership competencies required by social workers in the 21st century. Hellrieger, Jackson and Slocum (2002) outline the fundamental management functions as planning, organising, leading, and controlling. The National Network for Social Work Managers (NNSWM) has developed professional competencies associated with social work management (Woolever & Kelly, 2014), which are associated with professional skills, tasks, and functions designed to improve social service delivery implemented by social work managers (Engelbrecht, 2014; Kahn, 2014; Woolever & Kelly, 2014).

Authors encourage the inclusion of value-driven managers (Fowler 1997; Lewis, 2007; Marais, 2019), and therefore management knowledge is not seen as merely

common sense but a practice requiring dedication, leadership, and core principles, which may not be intentionally taught to managers (Tsui & Cheung, 2004). This idea was furthered by Engelbrecht (2013), who suggests a reflective supervision approach that would require "advanced competencies, such as leadership, administration, support and education". Niemann and Kotzé (2006) and Nienaber (2010) also mention that leadership is a core function that should be integrated in the conceptualisation of a manager, particularly in the education and development context. Some of these competencies would have to be learnt by a manager or supervisor in order to fulfil the functions and tasks involved with monitoring and mentoring an ECD centre (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

Besides management, a social worker in the field of ECD can function in a number of other roles such as supervisor, monitor, trainer, mentor, advocate, leader, administrator, and researcher (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Britto *et al*., 2014; Herman-Smith, 2012; Kahn, 2014; Moodie-Dyer & Collins, 2013). A summary of these functions can be found in Table 2.2 below, supported by sources form the literature and legislative documents.

Table 2.2 Functions and tasks of a social work manager in the ECD sector

Function	**Tasks involved**	**Literature support**
Registration support and guidance Registration supervision	• NPO registration • ECD centre registration and compliance • ECD programme registration and compliance	Children's Act No. 30 of 2005 Partial Care Section 79(2) (RSA, 2006) Municipal by-laws on the registration of ECD centres National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act 103 of 1997 National Health Act 61 of 2003 Sotuku, Okeke & Mathwasa, 2016
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	• Environmental standards upheld • Practitioner–child interaction • Age-appropriate ECD programme	Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006), Govender, 2015; Clampett, 2016 Desmond *et al*., 2019

	• Link activities to daily programme • Child participation • DSD funding allocations	
Training and capacitation	• Qualifications and training • Capacitation for staff • Curriculum support	The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) for children Birth – Four years, 2009 Atmore, 2013; Govendersamy, 2010
Advocacy for child protection	• Education regarding rights and responsibilities • Custodians of the Child Care Act No 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006)	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989 Children's Act No 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006) Azzi-Lessing, 2010
Business management	• Creating business plans • Financial literacy support • Promoting management skills and processes	Partial care in terms of Section 79(2) of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006) Applewhite, Kao and Pritzker, 2018 Corrinna, 2018
Linking to resources	• Donations • Resources for business administration and centre management • Links to DSD/DOH and Government services	Lau & Ho, 2018 Kadushin & Harkness, 2014
Mentoring and coaching	• Support • Encouragement • Role modelling	Azzi-Lessing, 2010 Moodie-Dyer & Karen Collins, 2013
Research in ECD sector and ECD policy development	• Identifying needs in the sector • Exploring social issues to inform practice, policy, and further research • Impact studies on ECD intervention	Kahn, 2014; Herman-Smith, 2012 Atmore, 2019 Lo, Das & Horton, 2017

Social workers are in a position to mentor ECD principals to fulfil necessary business-related functions, however, this is generally not their primary objective or area of expertise. Education and training of social workers that work in the ECD sector

should therefore incorporate the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and ECD-specific competencies (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Kahn, 2014). The NSWM (2018) provides a user-friendly model of management competencies for social workers, which includes the following core domains: executive leadership, strategic management, resource management, and community collaboration. These would be ideal competencies to integrate into a management curriculum or training programme.

ECD principals should have the market expertise to initiate innovation and improve service delivery, which in South Africa responds directly to environmental and market-related challenges. Social entrepreneurship has, for example, strongly been linked to community development as a suitable business model for organisations, such as ECD centres in low socio-economic areas (Lombard & Strydom, 2011; Shawar & Shiffman, 2016; Woodhead *et al*., 2014). Consequently, incorporating innovation and quality into ECD schools could, in turn, improve their profitability (Chew & Lyon, 2012; Chand & Misra, 2009). In South Africa, social service organisations (SSOs) have become prominent role-players and support structures to the ECD sector by offering training, mentorship, resourcing, and other ECD-specific interventions. In the Western Cape, SSOs have been outsourced by the provincial DSD government to offer registration support to ECD centres in localised areas. This is interesting to mention, because currently each province's DSD office handles the ECD registration process slightly differently, which means that ECD principals' experiences will vary, depending on their centres' location.

As can be seen from the discussion above, ECD centres are organisations that require training, supervision, funding support, and mentoring in order to grow into sustainable enterprises (Britto *et al*., 2015; Meier, 2014). Further research is, however, needed to add to the academic knowledge base, with a focus on ECD leadership and the role of a social work supervisor in these ECD centres (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Britto *et al*., 2014; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017).

2.9 ECD CENTRES AS BUSINESSES

An ECD centre is a business that requires financial income to deliver an outcome or service to clients, in this situation, the parents. Schools, by nature, differ from regular businesses due to their shared objectives, which include education of learners and employment possibilities for staff members. And especially because of that, success of ECD centres is difficult to define purely in relation to profit (Van der Bijl & Prinsloo, 2016).

Defined as *service organisations*, schools and ECD centres deliver services to the public by offering professional services within a formal system, governed by a hierarchy (Theron, 2018:84). As depicted by Fayol (1916), managers, such as school principals, are responsible for allocating resources, as well as planning, organising, controlling, and leading of an organisation. Particularly in South Africa, these layers of responsibilities necessitate ECD principals, who are the owners of these organisations, to have sound leadership skills, clear business plans, and entrepreneurial skills to manage their centre effectively (Clampett, 2016). In relation to the registration process, understanding the business types of ECD centres could assist in document preparation and financial strategising in the future.

There are commonly three types of ECD business models, which include for-profit or social enterprises, NPOs, and franchises. These will be discussed below:

2.9.1 Preschools for profit

For-profit organisations, or social enterprises, have the potential to be catalysts for growth in the NPO sector because of their legal characteristics to encourage business planning with a social mission. Perceptions from within the field of education, however, reflect a hesitation to link education with business, despite the importance of developing business skills and a suitable business strategy to accomplish school growth (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013). This hesitation comes from the fact that for-profit organisations tend to measure performance success through profitable gain rather than social impact or academic achievement (Hellriegel *et al*., 2018).

More recently, the term “social enterprise” has been a popular choice for NGOs and ECDs to encourage financial independence, while still seeking to fulfil a social goal. Social enterprises are, by definition, organisations that seek to generate income while positioned within a social development market. These enterprises seek to fulfil both a client and a commercial objective and tend to orientate themselves around self-funding operations, such as schools that charge school fees, or fund raisers (Dart, 2004; Luke & Chu, 2013). Social enterprises as a business model have been identified as a suitable solution to many of the sustainability challenges faced by traditional SSOs (Dart, 2004; Chew & Lyon, 2012). Benefits of a social enterprise are entrepreneurial growth, business and employment creation, financial rewards, innovative thinking, and positive social change on a community level. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, where economic growth is beneficial to communities. ECD centres could be classified as social enterprises due to their ability to be both a business and a charitable organisation. These businesses tend to register their ECD centre and programme but do not request state funding.

2.9.2 Pre-schools as non-profit organisations (NPOs)

Non-profits tend to take unique forms which allow for creativity and managerial freedom but this also renders it challenging to prescribe a standardised governance and business model to them (Mashale, 2017). NPOs are legal entities which operate with the purpose of common good. Performance is not directly linked to profits but rather to social impact and outcomes (Hellriegel *et al*., 2018). In order to gain access to register with DSD and onbtain government subsidies, an ECD centre is required to be an NPO, however, this funding requires a number of registration criteria, as discussed in Section 2.7, which means that even though the non-profit aims for funding, it may be left to rely on privately sourced funding for survival, due to lack of compliance with the required norms and standards. Most ECD centres in South Africa are, in fact, non-profits and are required to have a committee to assist with governance and decision making (Atmore & Meier, 2018; Clarke, 2012).

Mashale (2017) identified fundraising as one of the essential management tasks that is vital to the sustainability of an NPO. Non-profits therefore, by definition, require

fundraising to ensure an organisation's survival (Theron, 2012). Globally and in South Africa, some NPOs are employing fundraisers to assist in this task (Stead & Stead, 2014). Particularly in African schools, principals tend to manage their budgets and expenses poorly (Bush & Oduro, 2006), which can sometimes result in poorly resourced schools that continuously have to survive financial pressures without adequate funding (Fourie, 2018; Johnson, 2017). Managerial competencies could assist ECD principals to secure funds for their centres to ensure sustainability and growth.

2.9.3 Pre-schools as franchises

A franchise is a business model used to market and promote a business brand, product, and service with the intention of standardising business replication (Naatu & Alon, 2019). The benefit of the franchise model is that it has the potential to provide finance for start-ups, increase capacity of individuals, and create a marketable brand that is recognisable and can assure clients/customers of quality (Naatu & Alon, 2019; Alon, Boulanger, Misati & Madanoglu, 2015). In recent years, the social enterprise sector has consequently adopted a trend to favour social franchise start-ups as suitable catalysts to solve social problems. A strategically developed brand, promoting quality education, may be an innovative approach to addressing inequalities and ensuring excellence in upscaling ECD services in South Africa (Kistruck, Webb & Ireland, 2011; McBride, 2015). The movement to create an ECD package is similar to that of a "business in a box"-approach which has been used successfully in the healthcare sector (Cheema & Mehmood, 2019). Franchisee motivation seems to be a strong driving force for franchise success (Naatu & Alon, 2019) and reasons that ECD principals may choose to buy into the social franchise model include, firstly, their limited business knowledge or management background, secondly, the fact that they may possess knowledge of the local ECD market, but not enough funding or resources to market or advertise their service, and lastly, because the franchise agreement may agree to train staff and support ECD operations that the ECD principal may benefit from (Naatu & Alon, 2019; McBride, 2015). These ECD centres will still need to register as partial care facilities, but they may not need to apply for state funding due to their alignment with capital support from the franchiser.

Social franchising for playgroups from a South African perspective has been reviewed by Hickman (2014). According to Hickman (2014), ECD social enterprises have the potential to cultivate a sense of community, improve principal ownership, as well as enhance local capabilities and skills. There is, however, critique against a franchise model, namely that it can hinder owner autonomy and that there is a lack of individualisation of business operations (Alon *et al*., 2015; Naatu & Alon, 2019). Understanding the business models and challenges of an ECD organisation can potentially allow principals to navigate the details of the registration process relevant to each business type.

2.10 ECD CENTRE PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Another aspect of ECD management, is programme delivery from an educational perspective. Although building and centre registration is crucial, the teaching and learning that occur inside the centre also need to be registered as an ECD programme with the DSD. There are a number of programme types which are often linked to the types of business models operating as ECD centres. The following are considered types of programmes that occur within the ECD centre:

- Faith-based programmes;
- Home-based ECD centres;
- Day mothers;
- Playgroups;
- Programme franchises;
- Employee-sponsored programmes;
- Childcare (private); and
- Toy libraries

(Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018:51-53)

From the literature, no single curriculum or programme can be termed superior to another (Brink, 2016; Farran & Wilson 2014), however, a specifically African perspective on curriculums has been discussed by Awopegba, Oduolowu and

Nsamenang (2013). While the different types of business models assist an ECD principal to understand their role and the organisation that they are leading, it also provides insight into the needs of the staff and programmes that helps them to be effectively managed and administrated.

2.11 QUALITY ECD PROGRAMMES

The importance of quality service provision of ECD services has been well documented (Biersteker & Dawes, 2008; Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Engle, Fernald, Alderman, Behrman, O'Gara, Yousafzai, De Mello, Hidrobo, Ulkuer, Ertem & Iltus, 2011) in both developing (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Toth, Smees, Draghici, Mayo & Welcomme, 2012) and developed countries (Havnes & Mogstad, 2015). Quality services require leadership, monitoring, and supervision to ensure and regulate indicators of quality (Biersteker *et al*., 2016).

Bartlett and Zimanyi (2001) revealed a set of 16 indicators to be used in monitoring ECD programmes at international and national levels. The programs refer to an organised system of attention that includes “education serving children who are below the age of entry into formal primary school” (Bartlett & Zimanyi, 2001:46). The 16 indicators of quality are as follows: (1) child enrolment numbers, (2) parent education, (3) number of children per practitioner/caregiver (one adult for every four or five one-year-olds, to one adult for every 25 five-year-olds), (4) teacher qualifications, (5) physical environment, (6) curriculum or interaction, (7) policy, for example, presence of a national ECD policy and/or plan, (8) budget allocation, (9) costs of, or average expenditure by government per child on ECD, (10) costs of, or average expenditure by government per child on ECD programmes as a percentage of the gross national product per person, (11) average expenditure per child by family, (12) child development, (13) school readiness, (14) nutritional status, (15) health status, and (16) parental knowledge and expectations.

ECD principals are responsible for ensuring quality service delivery of ECD programmes, which can be measured according to these indicators. Effective

management competencies would assist a principal to ensure excellence and quality at the centre while continuing daily operations and administration tasks.

2.12 STAKEHOLDERS OF AN ECD CENTRE

All organisations require a number of stakeholders to support and create an effective enterprise. In business, an organisation requires staff, customers, and service users. In the NPO sector, organisations such as ECD centres have various stakeholders who contribute towards operations and governance as well as service delivery. The stakeholders most important for this study, include the ECD principal and the ECD practitioners and staff, followed by the management committee, support and non-teaching staff, volunteers, parents and community members, funders, and ECD forums. Each of these stakeholders are discussed below:

2.12.1 ECD principal

The owner or head supervisor of an ECD centre is usually termed the ECD principal. The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) defines the term "supervisor/coordinator" as the individual who provides supervision and administrative services to other staff at the ECD centre, with a higher qualification than the rest of the practitioners or staff members (RSA, 2015:14). Other terms utilised in the literature include "manager" (Marais, 2018), "early childhood director" (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013; Ismail, Hindawi, Awamleh & Alawamleh, 2018), and "ECD leader" (Hujala, Heikka & Halttunen, 2011 in Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013).

As explained by Marais (2018:6), principals must "…plan, organise, lead and control activities, maintain discipline," and manage the centre's strategic mission and direction. Bloom (2000) and Biersteker *et al*. (2016) elaborate further as they include processing professional education knowledge, legal and financial management, human relations, education programme planning, leadership, advocacy, property maintenance, marketing, supervision, organisational climate, as well as health and safety under the principal's responsibilities and tasks. Additionally, principals have been noted in literature to be communicators, problem solvers, mentors, motivators

of quality teaching, and lifelong learners (Filipović & Popović, 2019; Fourie, 2018; Marais, 2018; Niemann & Kotzé, 2006). Aubrey, Godfrey, and Harris (2013) note that globally, women predominantly occupy the role of ECD principal, which is in contrast with the business world, where men, historically tend to be the managers. ECD centre management therefore differs from management in the more traditional corporate world. Globally, the ECD workforce overall also tends to be female dominated (Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen (2015). Belgium, Norway and Germany have all made efforts to encourage males to enter the workforce (Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen, 2015).

Incentivised research funding from 2005 increased the number of studies into educational leadership, specifically within an indigenous African context (Hallinger, 2018). Although not all these studies were in an ECD context, their findings are relevant for the role of a principal in an African school, as they included studies on investigating, decentralisation of management (Bhengu & Gowpall, 2015), gender roles and management, management in small schools (Bush, 2014; Lumby & Azaola, 2014), rural schools (Mestry & Khumalo, 2012), and schools in challenging contexts (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). These above-mentioned studies offer contextual insight into the topic of principal management in Africa, however, limited focus has been placed on principals' management competencies specifically in an ECD context.

Principals are required to merge functions in an administrative capacity, professional educator capacity, as well as personal and interpersonal capacity. Notably from an African perspective (specifically in Kenya), ECD principals have been found to be crucial for fulfilling a school's objectives through management competencies (Wakhungu, 2019). In Africa, it has been found that ECD principals, however, generally learn managerial competencies through experience and tend to be "left unsupported after appointment" (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Wakhungu, 2019). Roles have been outlined by many writers who cover a broad range of managerial areas – from resource management and human resources to curriculum creation and ensuring health and safety on the school premises (Sigilai & Bett, 2013; Wakhungu, 2019). Management competencies of principals (managers) in ECD settings have been documented and noted by several authors (Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks & Tredoux, 2016; Bush & Oduro; 2006, Oduro, 2003) and Bush and Oduro (2006) presented a

model similar to that of Engelbrecht (2019), defining the responsibilities of African school principals and recommending an African model of leadership and management. These functions, tasks and skills will be further explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Principals are generally given the freedom to make decisions and solve problems related to the centre autonomously, such as staff appointments and child-teacher ratios (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2018). Further details and exploration regarding the management functions, skills, and tasks, as well as challenges of an ECD principal will be presented in Chapter 3.

2.12.2 ECD practitioners and staff

ECD practitioners, also referred to as teachers or early childhood educators (Whitebrook, Phillips & Howes, 1989), are the direct facilitators of the curriculum and daily childcare at the ECD centre. Broadly speaking, ECD practitioners are tasked with assisting and interacting with children while they encourage learning and development as the children prepare for formal schooling (Seṇkāne, 2014). This dynamic role includes lesson planning and implementation, assessments, reporting, as well as caring and providing for children's basic needs during the school day. Other countries such as Sweden and Holland require tertiary qualifications to fulfil an ECD practitioner position (Seṇkāne, 2014). South Africa, however, has a unique history and socio-economic climate, which provides no direct qualification path or professional career progression for ECD practitioners (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012; Desmond *et al*., 2019).

Known for operating in demanding work environments with poor remuneration, the role of an ECD practitioner often lacks status or respect from society (Carrasco, 2019; Ellis, Skidmore & Combs, 2017). Lack of employee benefits also tends to leave staff dissatisfied and, consequently, low staff retention rates in ECD centres are often reported (Carrasco, 2019; Ellis, Skidmore & Combs, 2017; Whitebrook, Howes & Phillips, 1998). Sometimes, seen by the community or parents as merely

"babysitters", ECD practitioners are, in fact, meant to be trained professionals with background knowledge and experience in childcare and education (Kile, 2018).

ECD principals should therefore endeavour to employ individuals who possess the qualifications and characteristics of a sound ECD practitioner (Shumba, Maphosa, Trevedi & Chinhara, 2019), which is someone who enjoys working with children, has a nurturing attitude, accepts diversity, and is a clear communicator. Practitioners, as staff members, should be good role models, while still being willing to continuously learn and develop themselves professionally and cooperate with other staff members (Meier & Marais, 2018).

2.12.3 ECD management committee

The management committee is tasked with furthering the goals of an organisation, which, for an ECD centre, is made up of individuals elected by staff members and parents at an annual general meeting (AGM) (Atmore & Meier, 2018). The committee seeks to fulfil the organisation's constitution as well as manage their funds and accounts. Members of a committee include the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer, and other committee members. In order for an ECD centre to receive state funds such as the DSD subsidy, the centre must be registered as an NPO and a public benefit organisation (PBO) (Atmore & Meier, 2018). An organisation's internal management endeavours are critical to its effectiveness, as highlighted by Jaskyte (2013a). This can be achieved through a proper decision-making processes, role clarification, increasing committee diversity, constructive committee meetings, and continual monitoring procedures, including evaluations, group reflection, and feedback from the committee members (Jaskyte, 2013a).

Conley and Van Deventer (2016:379) support this movement to increased community involvement and, according to them, positive community-school relationships may require a change in the "traditional views of roles and responsibilities in the community, the school and the parent body". Mbokazi (2012) highlights the need for effective school governance in an African context specifically, where leadership capacity may be low and communities are often burdened by a lack of resources.

Therefore, the management committees require sound leadership, which could potentially become an additional task for the ECD principal.

2.12.4 Support and non-teaching staff

ECD centres often employ support staff or non-teaching staff as part of their operations (Meier & Marais, 2018). These staff members allow the principal and ECD practitioners to focus their time and attention on the management of the centre and teaching of the children. Examples of support staff at an ECD centre would include kitchen staff, cooks, gardeners, cleaners, and administrative support staff (Meier & Marais, 2018). All support staff must be vetted against the National Child Protection Register in order to work at an ECD centre.

2.12.5 Volunteers

Volunteers, i.e., unpaid adults who offer their skills and/or time without payment or other forms of remuneration, are common stakeholders of an ECD centre (Meier & Marais, 2018). Often, these individuals, although generally without qualifications, have a passion and desire to help the school. Volunteers have been described as "mission-critical resources", particularly for non-profit organisations (Tooley & Hooks, 2020:1).

Volunteering has been reported to improve parent-teacher relationships and have proven to increase the social capital of the ECD centre (Vidal de Haymes, O'Donoghue & Nguyen, 2019). In South Africa, there is a need for training of individuals who would like to advance their interest in the field of ECD and childcare.

2.12.6 Parents, children, and community members

Parents play a crucial role in the ECD centre ecosystem as market consumers of the services for their children's education and protection, as well as the social capital supporting the centres' initiatives. Parents are obligated to provide their children with the right to basic education (Bray, Tladi & Meier, 2018; UNCRC; 1990; African

Charter, 1986), but are also intended to be viewed as active participants in their children's learning (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Furthermore, parental engagement is required to support and promote leadership within communities and school settings (Conley & Van Deventer, 2016:379; Halgunseth, 2009). School meetings and events, as well as volunteer committees have been recorded as opportunities for increased parental engagement (Marais & Johnson, 2018; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). There is a strong link between achievement at school, parenting styles, and quality of home learning environments – all which require active parental involvement (Baker, 2014a; Baker, 2014b; Casale, Desmond & Richter, 2014; Kaplan & Owens, 2004). Managing parental engagement and encouraging involvement from parents have therefore been mentioned as one of the roles of an ECD principal (Marais, 2018).

2.12.7 Donors and funders

Funders and donors became stakeholders in the ECD centre system to receive grants or funding subsidies from to ensure active operations and service delivery (Department of Social Development Western Cape, 2011), as these organisations are often positioned as NPOs. NPOs generally access either government funding, corporate social responsibility (CSR) investment, local or international donations, or generate private income (Mashale, 2017; Swilling, Russell & Habib, 2002). School fees are the predominant source of income for ECD centres, which are an unusual entity whereby they should also be able to qualify for government financial support in as an additional source of income, but without meeting requirements, this does not occur in reality (Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012; Johnson, 2017).

The benefits of an ECD centre holding an approved registration status from the DSD is assurance for parents that minimum norms are being met by that particular centre, and that it has the possibility of accessing the state subsidy (Department of Social Development Western Cape, 2011) There are, however, a number of NPOs aligned with relevant funders who choose to support and invest in ECD centres regardless of their registration status. The 2018 *Trialogue Business in Society Handbook* (2018), provides a bird's eye view of the current CSR situation in South Africa. The handbook

revealed that an estimated R9.7 billion was spend in CSR expenditure in 2018, of which education, social and community development, and health are among the top three benefiting sectors, of which the majority of the money goes to NPOs (*Trialogue Business in Society Handbook*, 2018). This is noteworthy as ECD is a field that encompasses all three of these sectors and thus has the potential to benefit from a great amount of corporate funding opportunities.

2.12.8 ECD forums

An ECD forum is a community gathering of principals or practitioners that provide social support and a platform for mentoring and supervision within local communities. Community ECD forums have been found to be transformative resources for ECD principals, particularly in fulfilling the management and administrative functions of a principal (Clampett, 2016; Wotshela, 2013). Generally initiated by ECD principals, these forums are gatherings with the intention of providing shared learning and support (Wotshela, 2013). Limited research exists regarding such forums, although community forums as a form of collaboration has been documented in other sectors in South Africa, such as political forums and primary education forums (Himmelman, 2002; Brouwer, 2014).

ECD forums create an opportunity for shared learning (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018; Pasamar *et al.*, 2019), and the known benefits of collaboration in NPOs include strength of collaborative identity, networking, cost-saving opportunities, and reduction of service duplication (Kusikwenyu, 2015). Noted to be useful for sharing ideas and resources, such as linkages to donors or training opportunities, these forums create a unique space for ECD principals to receive a form of peer supervision and coaching, while staying up to date regarding developments and opportunities in the sector (Kusikwenyu, 2015).

All stakeholders involved in an ECD centre contribute towards the functioning of the centre's ecosystem and thus create an opportunity to improve the programmes offered at ECD centres through innovation and creativity.

2.13 INNOVATION IN THE ECD SECTOR

The current climate in the field of education presents a timeous opportunity for learning and reflection as the ECD sector receives public attention and government investment in the pending transition from the DSD to the DoBE (Harrison, 2019; Biersteker *et al*., 2016). Should the ECD sector desire to innovate their social development programmes, Patel (2019) endorses the use of a learning organisation approach. Government departments, NPOs, and businesses alike can intentionally create environments whereby individual stakeholders and organisations share workplace learning through experiences and ideas in the hope of innovatively solving numerous social and economic challenges (Naatu & Alon, 2009).

From a South African perspective, Fourie and Fourie (2014) suggest that education management could utilise learning as an opportunity to improve planning, decision making, organisation, leading, and controlling of ECD centre operations and resources. Teachers and ECD principals are urged as educational leaders to be the driving force behind innovation in their schools by staying up to date with best practices and preschool research, and integrating findings into practice (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019).

In the 21st century, learning can take an innovative direction with the use of technology to record and preserve learnings (Cook-Craig & Sabah, 2009). Social workers have found online virtual communities to be effective for learning and for providing an accessible platform where shared knowledge and experiences can be turned in innovative actions (Cook-Craig & Sabah, 2009). In an American study, it was found that most early childhood educators viewed technology in the classroom favourably, however, with the current lack of professional development opportunities, there are challenges with implementation (Wilbur, 2017). Technology that could potentially be useful to principals include iPads or tablets, smart boards, smart tables, web access, and interactive mobile applications. In line with technological innovation, the trend of utilising social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, should be seen as a useful platform for ECD centres to market, promote, and advocate for the work they are doing and what they are achieving in communities (Guo & Saxton 2018; Xu & Saxton, 2019).

2.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to contextualise ECD centres as learning organisations within the ECD sector. This was achieved by reviewing literature related to the development and context of the ECD sector in South Africa. The registration processes for a partial care facility (ECD centre) required by the DSD was explored, with specific reference to the managerial role required to complete the process. Furthermore, the commonly-found business models in ECD centres were defined and analysed to provide an understanding of the management needed by principals to run these centres. Lastly, the role of stakeholders and innovation in the sector were discussed.

The departmental migration of the ECD sector in South Africa from the DSD to the DoBE may be seen as a disruption by some, but it can also be viewed as a valuable learning opportunity and a chance to reflect on management competencies, including core values, skills, functions, and tasks required by the ECD workforce (Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019; Woolever & Kelly, 2014). A significant amount of research has been conducted into school leadership, but limited research has been done on the management and supervision of ECD centres and the management within the ECD centres themselves (Biersteker *et al*., 2016). The nature of the ECD sector suggests that learning should be common practice inside the classroom *and* within the organisation. The ability for an ECD centre to adapt and learn how to manage effectively could be determining factors for long-term success as both an NPO *and* a business.

CHAPTER 3: A LEARNING ORGANISATION APPROACH TO MANAGING ECD CENTRES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Traditional organisations are founded on the assumption that hierarchical control is a specialised management task and that employees should survive in a competitive culture (Klopper, 2017; McPheat & Butler, 2014). Conversely, a learning organisation operates in a less structured manner with decentralised decision-making processes whereby strategy and growth are internally collaborative and innovative to the changing external market (Klopper, 2017). In an ECD centre, this would mean that all stakeholders (parents, teachers, NGO committee) involved in the functioning of the school would be part of the learning, decision making, and improvement of the services and programmes of the centre (Sabah & Orthner, 2007; Urban & Gaffurini, 2018). Patel (2019) presents a *learning organisation approach* (LOA) to management, which is useful for understanding management functions, skills, and tasks as competencies, which can be acquired through learning processes within an organisation such as an ECD centre.

This chapter seeks to present the theoretical framework of an LOA in order to further contextualise within this framework the essential management competencies of ECD principals in South Africa. Learning organisations will be defined and a historical overview will be presented to provide a background and understanding of the framework. Thereafter, the unique characteristics of a learning organisation will be discussed, followed by learning organisation processes, products of learning organisations, and barriers to principals creating learning organisations.

3.2 DEFINITION OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

“Organisational learning” and “a learning organisation” are interchangeable terms used to describe a business model adopted by any organisation that has an embedded learning culture and a learning structure that assumes shared leadership (Lipshitz, Popper & Friedman, 2002; Klopper, 2017; Vrba, 2018). A learning

organisation actively pursues collective learning of its individual members (Sabah & Cook-Craig, 2013) and can, in simple terms, be defined as an organisation that effectively practices organisational learning as part of its systems, practices, strategy, structures, and culture (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2019; Tsang,1997). Linking schools to organisational learning is not a new concept and should be considered in terms of learning of the school staff, students, and wider community (Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe & Fowler, 2011; Imants, 2003; Kools & Stoll, 2016). This theoretical approach is more than merely compliance oriented but also seeks to uncover new ideas within the system.

An LOA requires an organisation or enterprise to pursue the innovative characteristics of a learning organisation. Therefore, a school with an LOA could produce innovative and positive outcomes for both staff and learners as the system continually improves its practice and services (Higgins *et al*., 2012). Because of its planned and continuous processes, authors define an LOA as an institutionalised process which uses collective reflection, experimentation, integration, and sharing of internal and external knowledge as part of the intrinsic ethos of the business or organisation (Amitay, Popper and Lipshitz, 2005, Klein, 2016, McPheat & Butler, 2014; Urban & Gaffurin, 2018). Also noted to be “facilitated learning”, an LOA has the potential to transform both the individuals and the staff as a whole (McPheat & Butler, 2014).

All conceptual definitions of learning within a developmental context at some point encounter power dynamics, which is why leadership and learning should be understood by managers who hope to intentionally improve all team members (Kontinen, 2018). This could be applicable to the ECD sector as well, as qualifications often create a hierarchy, thereby asserting power. In some countries, such as Greece, this hierarchy has historically been to the benefit of the services delivered by the ECD centre (Argyropoulou, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, an LOA will be defined as an approach utilised by an organisation that has an embedded learning culture and a learning structure (Lipshitz, Popper & Friedman, 2002).

3.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LEARNING ORGANISATION APPROACH IN NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

Over time, the functioning of organisations has been documented and researched for the purposes of improvement and understanding of organisational behaviour. In terms of organisational effectiveness and performance, Sorgenfrei and Wrigley (2005:29) noted that "there is a shortage of theoretical frameworks to be applied and tested in the NGO arena," as most of the frameworks hold business-oriented traditions. Historically, an LOA has been vaguely defined as an organisation which builds a learning culture. This approach is a result of a number of advances which seek to promote the individual members and not only the goals of the organisation (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Chiva, 2017; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018). There is a prominent gap in the literature in terms of ECD and NGOs using the LOA, particularly in South Africa.

Traditional management theory would assume that workers require rigid instruction in order to perform, however, authors increasingly note that the development of organisational learning can be derived from the disciplines of behavioural psychology, organisational sciences, and the practice of management (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Dutton, 1984). In 1978, the idea of correcting internal errors through learning emerged and was dubbed "double-loop" and "triple-loop" learning (See Section 3.4.4; Argyris & Schön, 1978). This instituted the idea that learning processes could be corrected, improved, and documented. Argyiis and Schon (1978), Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne (1989), as well as the highly reviewed Senge (1990), who all contributed toward the components of a learning organisation, added to the conversation that facilitated learning is possible for both large and smaller-sized organisations.

Gould (2000) introduced the concept of learning to social work research and highlighted the importance of adapting organisational practice to both global and local demands. Traditionally, hierarchical business culture has tended to be "anti-learning" and "anti-training", however, in a modern economy the concept of learning is not reserved only for management but deemed vital for employees at all levels (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). Translated, the time has come and gone for only the ECD principal to

be qualified and it is necessary for all staff and stakeholders involved in the running of an ECD centre to be continually learning and developing themselves.

The idea that learning should thrive within an organisation, that individuals can learn, as well as the whole system, transforms the way SSOs view service delivery (Hafford-Letchfield, 2009; McPheat & Bulter, 2014). Furthering this idea, subsequent authors have identified this approach as suitable within a social development paradigm (Patel, 2019; Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2019; Wang & Amed, 2003). Although ECD is a newly emerging field in South Africa within with the social development and education sectors, the potential for facilitated learning within management structures and individual centres is at the forefront of this discussion.

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION APPROACH

In his book, *The fifth discipline,* Senge (1990) wrote about the learning organisation and challenged the traditional “top down” approach to organisational behaviour by identifying five competencies which can result in innovative learning. These are (1) viewing cyclical processes within the organisational system, (2) commitment to lifelong learning, (3) challenging embedded assumptions, (4) creating a shared vision with employees, and (5) ensuring shared learning within teams (Senge, 1990; Vrba, 2018). As a result, these competencies became the predominant concepts that have been used to narrate and explore the possibility of this idealised framework for organisations.

Other core concepts which have evolved within organisational learning include shared learning, leader-lead learning, concrete learning processes, communication, creativity, reflection, and change management (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Chiva, 2017; Garvin, Edmondson & Gono, 2008; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018; Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019; Wang & Ahmed, 2003). In a 21^{s} century, South African economy, utilising technology, the pursuit of collaborative innovation, and internal assimilation of goals have been found to be best practice for

small business. These elements are all associated with an LOA (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019).

Within a school context, school structure, shared commitment and collaboration, knowledge creation, leadership, feedback, and accountability have been noted as crucial dimensions of a school as a learning organisation (Imants, 2003; Marks & Louis, 1999). These concepts can be integrated into an NGO, ECD centre, or a government department, in order to foster learning. This has been proven effective in the child welfare field and could be true for the ECD sector as well (Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018; Woolever & Kelly, 2014). An LOA is deemed suitable for a social development context whereby a strengths-based and developmental attitude towards service delivery is required in contrast to more authoritative or economic driven models (Patel, 2019). The interrelated building blocks depicted in a learning organisation are applied within an ECD context in Figure 3.1, with cognisance that ECD centres are systems aimed at being both educational services as well as economically sustainable businesses.

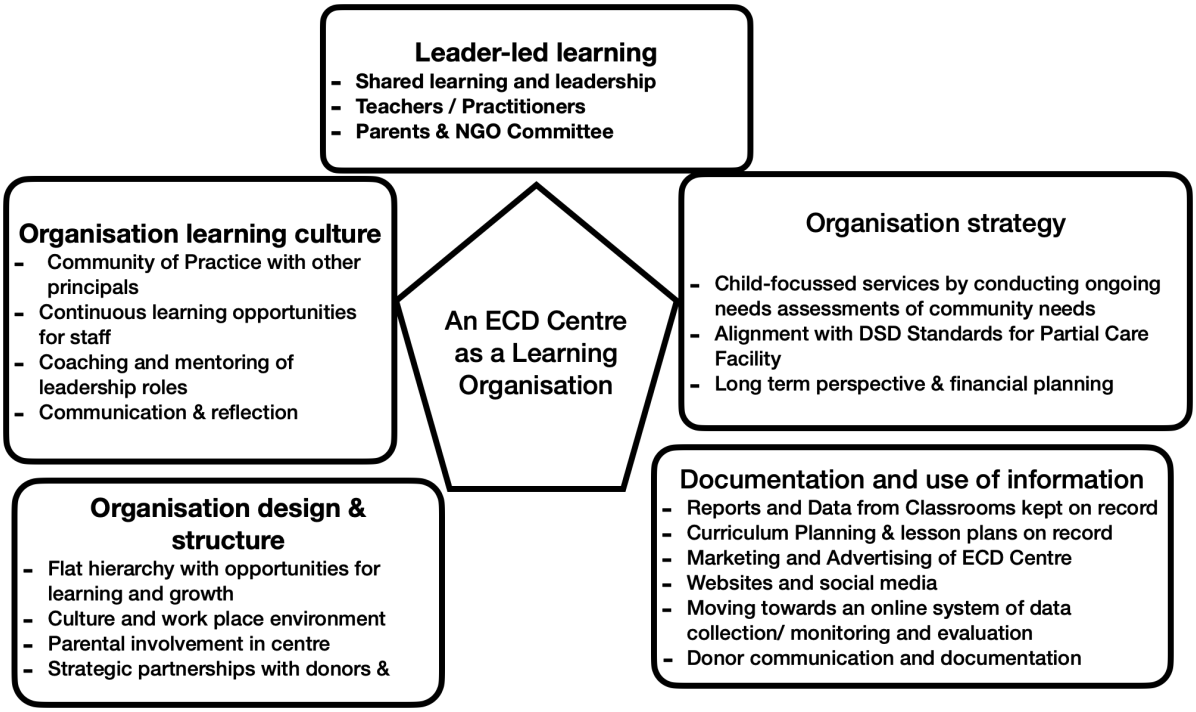

Figure 3.1 Building blocks of an ECD centre as a learning organisation (Adapted from Klopper, 2017)

Applying Kloppers' (2017) building blocks for a learning organisation to a school context (as seen above in Figure 3.1), links the theoretical framework of a learning organisation to the unique characteristics of an ECD centre. These building blocks are discussed below.

3.4.1 Leader-led learning

Shared learning within an organisation is not an outcome often discussed by managers, as the tendency is for managers to be output and performance focussed. However, placing emphasis on collective learning, is a crucial aspect that identifies a business or organisation as a learning organisation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). One example of a practice that could lead toward individual learning within an organisation, is staff training, although it is not the only mechanism or tool that can be used to cultivate shared learning. Waniganayake, Morda and Kapsalakis (2000) suggest that ECD leadership (social workers, educators, and health practitioners) should strategically partner with one another to ensure that ECD programmes are benefitting from specialist input and are not confined to isolated decision making. The implementation of shared learning is thus encouraged (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018). The idea of knowledge moving freely throughout an organisation goes against the typical the "power struggle" or "survival-of-the-fittest" mentality that often creeps into modern business cultures (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008). Collective knowledge cultivated through an LOA should therefore be shared for maximum impact on the organisation and its beneficiaries or clients.

A distributed leadership model is typically suggested for ECD settings such as ECD centres and ECD NGOs (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Grarock & Morrissey, 2013; Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007). Despite the challenge of laying down status, this model calls for no direct "boss" but rather a collective leadership structure (Coleman, Sharp, Handscomb, 2016; Leithwood, *et al.*, 2007). A principal who does not wish to delegate or distribute leadership authority is an example of a possible barrier to learning, which should be removed from an organisation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003) to ensure growth and success. Other barriers to the LOA will be discussed in Section 3.11. Ideally, shared learning would include the

ECD principal, ECD practitioners, support staff, parents, the NGO committee, and possibly the wider community. Using the LOA, employees are encouraged to actively be involved in the decisions and trajectory of the organisation, which, for an NGO, can lead to staff retention and optimal performance (Weldy & Gillis, 2010).

Practices and activities that encourage shared learning could include group decision making, and debriefing platforms such as group supervision or team-building opportunities (Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018). Additional shared learning platforms could include online databases and a library or resource centre where literature or organisational documents could be stored for future use. The opportunity to collectively share knowledge creates a socially constructed network within the organisation which promotes the idea that learning is a collective group value (International Federation of Social Workers: IFSW, 2014). The experience of shared learning is included in the international definition of social work; therefore this building block becomes inherent for social workers and practitioners working in a social development context (Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2016).

Learning processes within organisations can similarly model this approach through shared learning opportunities and reflection (Garvin, Edmondson & Gono, 2008; Patel, 2014). And this approach suits an educational and social developmental frame of reference as it is people centred, and encourages a shared vision, participation, and dialogue (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014; Fourie, 2018). Therefore, utilising an LOA is a useful developmental strategy for management and leaders in the ECD sector (Tekleselassie, 2002). Since an ECD centre can also function as a learning organisation, it requires a collective philosophical positioning in order for it to be perceived as a hub of individuals learning for the greater good of society (Fourie 2018; Zonji, 2018).

Should an ECD centre become a learning organisation, there would be the potential to learn and benefit from the expertise of a multitude of disciplines. The ECD sector has for long been regarded as one that is multidisciplinary, involving the necessary expertise of multiple disciplines (Alvargonzález, 2011; Moodley, Phatudi & Mavuso, 2019). Instead of viewing organisations within this sector as closed systems, ECD centres should be viewed as dynamic hubs of learning whereby communities and

stakeholders can input and improve the services through collective feedback and innovation. The shared learning within these hubs would, however, need to be leader led as leader-led processes may encourage social work managers to share knowledge and to promote inter-organisational learning, which echoes the multisectoral collaboration between the DSD and the DoBE.

3.4.2 Organisation strategy

ECD principals may not always view themselves as entrepreneurs, however, their role still encompasses all the business principles needed to ensure a sustainable enterprise within an education context. Attitudes surrounding business strategy and entrepreneurial models have been hesitant in the ECD sector (Senkane, 2014), as mentioned in Section 2.9.

Strategic thinking as a skill set has been identified as a necessary competency for principals to successfully lead their schools (Hallinger & Walker, 2015). Louw (2017) indicates that as a competency of management, strategic action includes understanding the industry, understanding the organisations and services, and creating achievable goals to promote growth of the organisation. Understanding of the market is necessary to formulate an organisation's strategy and for ECD principals, this would be possible by maintaining a child-focussed programme while considering the DSD partial care facility requirements and foundations for ECD services, as described in the ECD Policy 2015 (RSA, 2015; Shumba, *et al.*, 2019). Navigating the dynamics of the structural, programme, caregiver, and process variables of delivering ECD services should be considered as part of the strategic planning of an ECD centre (Shumba, *et al.*, 2019). Organising and planning can be seen as operations of strategic management.

The processes of learning and change are not achieved instantaneously (Klopper, 2017; Marais, 2018) and principals who are able to adopt a long-term vision for their centres, place themselves in a better position to achieve their goals over time. Financial stability is a long-term goal for any organisation, but, without adequate planning, this may not be achievable, particularly in the modern economic climate.

Financial planning becomes a significant task for any ECD principal if they hope to achieve sustainable programme strength (Marais & Clasquin-Johnson, 2017). Lack of these management skills would have negative consequences for their financial and long-term strategic planning (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Nicholson & Kroll, 2015) of an ECD centre.

Existing literature on ECD principal management, however, tends to focus on leadership, centre operations, and ECD programme interventions, with limited emphasis on management or business-related topics, despite the practical needs that exist (Dawes, Biersteker & Irvine, 2008; Fourie, 2018). In a South African context particularly, poverty in low socio-economic areas influences the livelihood and entrepreneurial know-how of principals, resulting in possible low levels of financial literacy and inadequate budgeting processes for ECD centres (Engelbrecht, 2008; Engelbrecht, 2010; Filipović & Popović, 2019; Mathwasa, Ntshuntshe & Duku, 2019). The financial future of ECD centres rests heavily on the ECD principals' ability to create and manage their centres strategically. Centres with strategically planned budgets have the potential to be categorised as high-quality programmes, regardless of their geographic position or the economic climate they are operating in (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019). Social workers have the platform to coach ECD principals through financial literacy training and mentorship (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Corrinna, 2018; Moodie-Dyer & Karen Collins, 2013) and should therefore play a leadership role in the sector to help ECD principals acquire these skills.

3.4.3 Documentation and use of information

Learning organisations thrive on the ability to generate, preserve, and put into action knowledge and information to improve their services and workplace. Information should be timeously and accurately recorded and in order to determine new trends, measure outcomes, share problems, and propose collective solutions (Klopper, 2017).

Managing an ECD centre requires oversight of the operations of indoor and outdoor play, the curriculum, the programme, resources, policy implementation, and health

and safety regulations, as well as ensuring quality care and education for the children (Greyling, Excell, Olusola & Adu, 2019). In order to effectively manage these tasks, principals should have access to documentation and information from carefully organised filing systems, either electronically or on hard copy, for example, admission information and school fee payment records (Greyling, *et al.*, 2019). Other information that should ideally be recorded and used by ECD principals are centre policies, job descriptions of staff members, the code of conduct, lesson plans and curriculum content, enrolment information, fundraising plans and achievements, as well as centre budgets (Orr, 2018; Van Staden & Meier, 2018). Documenting these items is an administrative task of an ECD principal that falls under the management functions of planning, organising, leading, and controlling, which will be detailed in Chapter 4. Technical and conceptual skills are deemed necessary to administer information relevant to managing an ECD centre and Greyling, *et al.*, (2018), as well as Miller and Cable (2010) note that traditional management functions and administrative skills are no longer adequate in the modern economic climate and within the context of technological demands and shifts in family structures. Without documenting the learning and development of an organisation, one fails to preserve the lessons learnt for future employees to access as a form of institutional memory (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2019; Imants, 2003). The succession plans of NGOs (for example, ECD centres) should be founded in a culture of learning to ensure that future staff are able to understand the history and design of the organisation and ensure its sustainability.

3.4.4 Organisation design and structure

Learning organisations tend to have an organic-flat organisational structure, which places emphasis on teams and alliances (Klopper, 2017). The term “boss” loses its traditional, authoritarian position and instead teams require to be led through clear learning structures (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Chiva, 2017). There is often a need to differentiate between a “leader”, who sees value in their team members, and a “manager”, who delegates and emphasises the tasks that need to be completed. The decision-making structure of an organisation matters greatly in this regard. Learning organisations are identified by:

- Limited status symbols;
- Trust amongst staff;
- Long-lasting relationships with clients/customers;
- Encouragement to experiment;
- Endorsement of partnerships by the organisation's structure;
- A culture of cooperation and equality between staff members;
- Coordination of regular team meetings;
- Multi-step conflict resolution steps taken by staff;
- A safe environment for growth and reflection;
- Emotional support, personal life, spirituality, and acknowledging internal fears viewed as necessary for staff; and
- Encouragement to provide feedback on the development of the organisation's vision and values.

(Chiva, 2017; Tosey, Visser & Saunders, 2012)

Hierarchical views on management reject a flat-hierarchal structure and an organic self-management approach to organisational behaviour (Chiva, 2017; De Bruyn & van der Westhuizen, 2018). This means that shared decision making is a priority for a business utilising an LOA.

Structured learning processes may not be purely focussed on staff positions, but can also refer to the concrete learning processes embedded into the daily operations of the organisation. This will require ECD principals to consciously create concrete feedback processes for their staff and stakeholders to learn and develop individually and as a whole (Reese, 2019). Utilising feedback for improvement of SSOs (such as ECD centre) can prevent failure of goals or outcomes, particularly in a complex governance system (Lewis, 2007).

Since the term "single-loop learning" emerged in the 1970s, learning organisation theory has progressed to model both double-loop and triple-loop learning (Vushe, 2018). Single-loop learning refers to learning, procedures, or policies within an ECD centre that are not questioned and that demand compliance. Double-loop learning introduces the idea of feedback and has been found to promote organisational

progress. Lastly, triple-loop learning assumes that tasks should not only be completed and questioned, but that the attitude and motivation of the person completing the task should also be examined (Vushe, 2018). An adapted summary of the characteristics of single, double and triple-loop learning can be found in Table 3.1 below, with reference to ECD-contextualised examples.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of single, double and triple loop learning loops

	Single-loop learning	**Double-loop learning**	**Triple-loop learning**
Theoretical assumptions (Adapted from Vushe, 2018)	Requires procedural rules and criteria-driven tasks to be completed. Reactive responses to problems. Underlying organisation issues rarely questioned. No innovative problem-solving processes. "Business as usual" is deemed the safest method of learning	Questions rules and procedures. Explores possible underlying causes of workplace problems. Innovative thinking is present in problem-solving processes.	Core values and context are relevant to problems and organisational design. Core principles and purpose of organisation are deemed relevant to decision-making processes. Innovative problem-solving present. New ways of achieving goals are highly probable.
Intentional outcomes (Adapted from Vushe, 2018)	Rules and procedures are implemented by staff and organisation. Workflow is predictable. Decision makers are usually top-level management.	Improved rules and procedures are a result of feedback and reflection. Ongoing engagement with staff.	Open dialogue, accountability, and participatory decision-making present. Vision and mission are continually questioned to meet changing needs, goals, economy, and environment.
Unintentional outcomes (Tagg, 2010)	Resistance to change.	Transformation of beliefs and purpose.	Transparency and unity amongst staff members.

	Limited long-term impact on problem. Scarcity of information and preserved knowledge.	Deeper understanding of organisation's values. Actionable knowledge easily available to staff and clients.	Institutional transformation and adaption to client needs Working documentation of vision and mission. Preservation of institutional learning
Contextual ECD examples	ECD centre policies (HIV policy, admission policies, handwashing policies) and rules are stated and rarely trained or critiqued as a staff collective. Parent meetings are erratic and limited active learning and open dialogue occur.	Ongoing engagement with staff, parents, and community members on various platforms. Community needs and problems are discussed and explored by staff.	Reflection opportunities for stakeholders and theory of change. Staff are able to actively develop professionally while improving the ECD centre's service delivery. Multiple platforms for community and sharing of knowledge and information are created between the ECD centre and stakeholders.

Most NGOs tend to utilise the traditional single-loop learning process as it is perceived to require the least time and money, with social enterprises being challenged to take up triple-loop learning in order to transform their interventions and meet global economic demands and community needs (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018). ECD principals would need to understand how to intentionally create a learning structure and process within their centre in order to embody a learning organisation. That being said, ECD principals should aim for a double or triple-loop learning approach in their centres.

3.4.5 Organisational learning culture

While it should be noted that a learning culture is an ideal framework for an ECD centre, a learning culture is also something that can only be established with the

understanding of what constitutes "culture" within the working environment. Shared learning requires a supportive culture and a leadership structure that is open to innovation (Garvin, Edmondson and Gino, 2008; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018). Julien-Chinn and Lietz, (2018) speak of a collaborative "spirit" toward learning among staff members. In this context, it would mean that ECD principals would need to be intentional about using their leadership role to create the conditions necessary for learning (Hesbol, 2019; Leithwood, Leonard & Sharratt,1998). There is, however, little in-depth research on how leaders might influence organisational cultures (Lumby, 2012).

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the aspects involved in an organisational culture in an ECD centre. This information is relevant to assist ECD principals or managers to be able to effectively drive change and understand what is contributing toward their business culture and, ultimately, to collective learning.

Table 3.2 Aspects of an organisational culture in an ECD centre (Adapted from Swanepoel, 2003; Xaba & Jaxon, 2018; Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, Coetsee, 2005)

Intangible factors	**Tangible manifestations**	**Contextual ECD examples**
• Beliefs and convictions • Philosophy • Mission • Vision • Aims and objectives • Assumptions • Ethos • Values • Norms	Verbal manifestations: • Language • Stories • Heroes and leaders • Curriculum • Rules and regulations	• Alignment of lessons to the NCF (2015) document to ensure a baseline • ECD centre has role-model staff who lead by example
	Behavioural manifestations: • Rituals • Ceremonies • Traditions • Discipline • Principal's leadership style	• Graduation ceremonies at the end of each year celebrate the yearly transition of classes and progress of the children • Discipline styles of the ECD managers and practitioners
	Visual manifestations: • Facilities • Symbols • School uniform	• Cleanliness and hygiene of the ECD centre • Facility compliance with health and safety regulations

	• Branding of centre	• Centre branding: professional and appealing to parents • Not all ECD centres require formal uniform

3.5 COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

An outcome of shared learning is often the formation of communities and forums. In the ECD sector in South Africa, community-based, collective, principal ECD forums, have been established, which are community-based gatherings of local principals and owners of ECD centres. According to Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper and Atmore (2017:271), "ECD forums are vital for effective ECD provisioning in a community. They serve to spread knowledge of training opportunities and intervention programmes and form a network for support and the sharing of skills. If a formal forum does not exist in an area, it should be explicitly encouraged".

In Africa, it has been found that ECD principals generally learn through experience and tend to be "left unsupported after appointment" in their management role (Bush & Oduro, 2006). There is therefore a need to intentionally create collaborative communion within an ECD setting (Walker, 2011). By taking an LOA, opportunities will naturally be initiated to create communities of learning (Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe & Fowler, 2011; Imants, 2003; Klein, 2016; McPheat & Butler, 2014), through which principals can learn and be supported. Social workers are uniquely skilled to facilitate the building of communities, lead forums, and establish teams in a supportive and conducive learning environment (McPheat & Butler, 2014).

In South Africa, one needs to be aware of the importance of using technology for promoting learning in small enterprises (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018). Social media has changed the way communities gather online, and currently there are hundreds of ECD-related groups on Facebook alone for individuals and organisations to freely join (Facebook, 2019). Individuals are able to ask questions, exchange advice and knowledge, as well as share information about training and funding opportunities. The

South African NPO Network is a similar online community of practice that has opened a platform for managers and staff members running an NGO to ask about compliance, leadership, management issues, and other sector-related topics (The SA NPO Network, 2019). Using technology to encourage knowledge conversion, handle risk management, encourage organisational dialogue, and participative activity, would be helpful for a learning organisation trying to establish an online community of practice. Using technology could be the key to leveraging dialogue between community members on a number of topics without needing to physically be in the same building (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018). Positive outcomes of online communities include improved connections with members, building of trust, and mutual responsibility for the group and for the development of a communal platform and language (Cook-Craig & Sebah, 2009; Lesser & Stork, 2001).

3.6 COMMUNICATION AS PART OF THE ORGANISATION

Effective communication is a skill that has the potential to set an ECD principal apart as both an excellent school leader as well as a leader of learning (Habaci, Çelik, Habaci, Adigüzelli, Kurt, 2013; Marais, 2018). Promoting dialogue should therefore be the desired outcome of collaborative learning processes, particularly in a social service environment where supervision and peer support is the norm (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018). Dialogue is becoming more and more vital for social enterprises such as NGOs with a social and education vision, for both internal (within the staff and parent networks) and external (in the wider community and ECD sector) communication to ensure a circulation of knowledge and to foster unity (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018).

Communication is a notable management competency, which can develop self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and improved intrinsic motivation (Ahmetoglu & Acar, 2016; Botez, 2019; Parker, 2017), and lines of communication can include face-to-face conversations, emails, letters, mass cellular messaging, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others. Oral communication has been found to be

recalled most by employees as an important competency of a manager (Coffelt, Baker & Corey, 2016).

Effective communication skills are especially vital within the ECD context, since there are multiple barriers to communication. Both verbal and non-verbal communication have the potential to be misunderstood (Marais, 2018), and cultural differences could impact messages sent and received (Habaci, 2013). Regardless of the type of communication platform, particularly from a management perspective, communication must always be clear and effective and should be easily understood (Botez, 2019; Martin, 2019; Habaci, 2013; Parker, 2017) by all. ECD principals have the opportunity to role model effective communication in their organisations and create a culture that encourages interaction and sharing, which will benefit their ECD centres and the ECD sector and community as a whole.

3.7 REFLECTION

Initially linking organisational learning to SSOs, Orthner *et al.* (2006) highlighted the use of reflective conversations in a collaborative context to create shared learning. Reflection, either written or verbal, is the mental process of making sense of an experience, problem, or existing piece of knowledge (Imants, 2003; Korthagen, 1999; Ward & McCotter, 2004). It is seen as a desirable attribute of any employee, and particularly as a competency of a manager (Bridgstock, 2009; Elm & Nordqvist, 2019). Learning loops, particularly double-learning and triple-learning loops, require reflection on actions and values within the workplace (Chiva, 2017; Tosey, Visser & Saunders, 2012). Allowing time for reflection should therefore be a part of the fabric of a learning organisation, which means that scheduled time is assigned to reviewing processes, activities, and outputs of employees (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008). Reflection can also be a useful tool in a supervisory setting, where ECD staff, for example, can reflect on the school term or a situation with a particular child in a supportive environment with the principal (Elm & Nordqvist, 2019).

3.8 CREATIVITY

Organisational learning should encourage creative thinking (Wang & Ahmed, 2003; Zindiye, 2017), and this creativity should not only be seen as a skill, but also as a workplace value and a precursor to experimentation and innovative thought. Unique capacity-building exercises, such as brainstorming or collective brainstorming of ideas to find new solutions to problems, can be noted as a creative platform for learning within an NGO setting (Zindiye, 2017). Sources of individual creativity stem from stable mental health, a conducive environment, adequate time, sufficient motivation, as well as curiosity and continuous knowledge building (Ngambi, 2018). ECD principals should tap into these sources when tackling the challenges presented to them or their staff, especially within South Africa's socio-political climate where poverty and other social challenges are a reality for many ECD centres (Urban & Gaffurini, 2017).

3.9 PRODUCTS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

A product of learning is a physical item or outcome created by an organisation through some kind of learning process. Managers are often required to produce these outcomes as evidence of the work completed by the organisation. Typically, in an NGO or community development enterprise, staff would be trained to "direct, advise, facilitate, coordinate and manage" (Kontinen, 2018). These staff members also hold meetings, and workshops, implement mandates, conduct baseline research studies, monitor and evaluate services, and complete statistic feedback, and, generally, all NGOs write reports of some kind (Kontinen, 2018). In an ECD context, written products of learning or organisational decisions and progress are usually preserved in the following forms:

- Minutes of meetings;
- Attendance records;
- Annual reports;
- Stock controls and asset registers;
- Budgets and accounting records;

- Policies;
- Children's files with registration forms;
- Building and maintenance files;
- Research documents and training materials; and
- Year books.

(Greyling, *et al.*, 2019; Meier & Marais, 2018)

These documents form part of the products that preserve organisational memory, which showcase the return on investment into an LOA, create value for work completed, and allow future employees to understand the journey of the organisation (Chand & Misra, 2009). Practically, this would involve the acknowledgement of employees' work and offering further learning opportunities for employees to reflect meaningfully on completed documentation with the goal of improving service delivery. A useful example of such a document would be the annual narrative report that is generated by NPOs for the DSD. Should an ECD centre take on the challenge of being a learning organisation, actively maintaining records of the ECD centre's history should be at the forefront of all activities and actions.

Within a school context, documenting and creating products of learning and innovation can be categorised into organisational innovation, service innovation, device innovation, teaching innovation, and sales innovation, all of which lead to improved service delivery of the organisation (Tseng, Wu, Wu & Huang, 2016).

Private and public preschool teachers tend to view leadership and innovation differently because of their different levels of access to resources. This would be something to note as an ECD principal aiming to establish a learning culture. Learning cultures are predominantly determined by the type of leadership present within a system and is not a guaranteed to be present in every organisation. According to Tseng, *et al.*, 2016:16) demographic factors such as "gender, age, highest [level of] education, years of service and job responsibilities" do not significantly alter the way staff view an ECD centre's leadership roles or organisational innovation, which means that in order to pass on innovation to future employees and managers, products of learning are essential.

3.10 SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION EDUCATION

The supervisory role social workers fulfil in the ECD sector presents a need for an intentional learning structure from which ECD principals can learn management competencies through developmental feedback opportunities. It is important to understand that social work supervision is a learnt skill which may require input from ECD principals during the learning process in the future, should the DSD remain the custodians of the Partial Care Facility Grant for registered centres. Principals could be invited to participate in the mentoring and training of new social workers who will be entering the field, initially under supervision. Social work practice education/training should include exposure to ECD, to equip social work students with the understanding of the dynamics and role-players in the ECD sector as well as the contextual issues impacting ECD centres in South Africa, in order to effectively contribute to this sector.

3.11 BARRIERS TO CREATING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

NGOs may have to admit that the pace at which services are delivered, often leave SSOs in a predicament where there is failure to preserve learning. Some organisations also tend to record only the successes due to the need to secure future donor funding. However, acknowledging weaknesses and failures are crucial for an LOA to stay authentic.

Edwards (1997:9) boldly points out that "…we all know that, in practice, learning in NGOs is very difficult. Often the characteristics and behaviour of NGOs are not favourable to the requirements of learning". Barriers to learning may be either external or internal and challenges could include inadequate funding towards implementing a learning culture, competition for funding, organisational structures, unequal nature of the aid relationship between donors and NGOs, requiring the organisation to project only the positive outcomes and not the weaknesses or challenges experienced, and political requirements which alter donor priorities (Vushe, 2018).

3.12 CONCLUSION

Organisational learning should encourage managers to utilise a strengths perspective to motivate shared learning and placing value on employee contributions towards the organisation as a whole (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014; Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019). Preserving learning requires time, funding, motivation, support, reflection, documentation, celebration of successes, and acknowledging lessons learnt. ECD principals should therefore aim to generate, disseminate, and preserve institutional memory to ensure sustainability. The ideal would be to collaborate and solve social and economic challenges by learning from history and to create an innovative and viable future, which is most definitely possible in South Africa's social service and ECD sector.

CHAPTER 4: ESSENTIAL MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES OF ECD PRINCIPALS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Governance of ECD centres has become a contemporary issue in the NPO sector with growing pressure to professionalise the sector and keep up with market-related competition, even in the helping sector of social development. Social workers are currently the supervisory mechanism to ensure quality service delivery and protection of children in ECD centres, and the DSD, DoBE, and SSOs may continue to play a supportive and supervisory role in the management of ECD centres across South Africa. They all have a mission to improve the education of children in the early childhood phase before entering formal schooling, yet they still require principals to ultimately lead and manage these centres independently. ECD principals often battle to reach sustainability through adequate funding models and reliable human capital in the form of centre staff and volunteers. And, ECD principals in South Africa especially, are faced with a number of contextual and business-related challenges that could be made easier through the acquisition of management competencies.

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa effectively. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide an in-depth guideline about the management competencies but rather to identify and describe the core components of ECD principal management competencies, based on major authors and sources in the field of principal management. In this chapter, the definitions of management will be presented, followed by the selected theories of management. Thereafter the definition of competencies and a competency model suitable for understanding principal management in an ECD context will be discussed. The essential management competencies comprising of the management skills, functions, and tasks will be synthesised to provide a theoretical foundation for the study. The chapter will be concluded by presenting the challenges experienced by ECD principals, particularly in South Africa.

4.2 DEFINITIONS OF MANAGEMENT

Managers are, by definition, tasked with the supervision and oversight of a team or area of work (Staude, 2018). The definition of the term “management” has expanded ongoingly since 1890 with insights from business and societal points of view (Louw, 2018). Over time, the conceptual understanding of management has emerged to be known as a science of universally accepted knowledge – an art through the use of creative application in real life (Hurst, 2013; Louw, 2018). Authors were forward-thinking when they claimed that management is a discipline and a profession in its own right, which means that an individual has the ability to not only learn and practice management principles and skills but also progress and grow through an intentional process (Louw, 2018; Schermerhorn, 2012). The integration of these perspectives creates a rich scope of practice for managers, regardless of their field, adding to the multi-disciplinary nature of management.

The terms “efficiency” and “effectiveness” are relevant for understanding the management of an organisation’s productivity and the overall achievement of its goals (Schermerhorn, 2012; Staude, 2018). Managers are generally responsible for fulfilling a number of core functions and in order to fulfil this role effectively, they should possess multiple skills and competencies (Ebrahim, Killian & Rule, 2011).

Niemann and Kotzé (2006) and Nienaber (2010) suggest that the term “leadership” should be integrated in the conceptualisation of a school manager, particularly in an education and development context. From a school and principal’s perspective, Connolly, James, and Fertig (2019), however, contest the difference between educational management and educational leadership, highlighting that the less-favoured term “educational management” implies delegation, whereas “leadership” implies influence and position within a system, both assuming certain responsibilities at the school. The literature denotes the title of “manager” in the context of social work as someone who utilises their expertise, knowledge, and skills to manage case work, group work, as well as community work (Coulshed & Mullender, 2006; Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). A distinction is being made in this study between ECD principals who manage the ECD centres and ECD managers who are practitioners working with centres in the capacity of supervisor. In the case

study (Chapter 6) specifically, a distinction is made between “ECD principals”, who manage ECD centres as “headmasters”, and “ECD managers”, who are external practitioners, appointed by the government, who act as supervisors and quality controllers for these centres. For the purposes of this study, an integrated definition of management is utilised, whereby an ECD principal is defined as the head of their ECD centre and ideally functions as a manager and a leader within their school and community context.

4.3 THEORIES OF MANAGEMENT

Management theories have evolved over time while adjusting to the demands of the modern workplace and the changing global climate. It should be noted that different management approaches and theories call for different management competencies (Louw, 2018). There are a number of classical approaches to management, starting from 1890 onwards, including the behavioural approach and the systems approach, as well as contemporary approaches, which are all relevant to this dissertation because of the foundations they provide for the theoretical frameworks of principal management. Table 4.1 clarifies the progression of the schools of thought around management theory.

Table 4.1 Management theories and key principals

	Management theory	Description and key principles
Classical approach to management (1890 onwards)	***Bureaucratic management*** (Mills & Gerth, 1958)	Rule-driven approach with clear role delegation within a hierarchy. Limited freedom, creativity, and autonomous employee thought. Goal orientation is of the upmost importance, bound within rigid staff structures and levels of command.
	Scientific management (Taylor, 1911)	Focus is placed on productivity, with precise measurement and costs. Machinery and tools become vital for increased performance. Measured outputs serve as the driving force. Supervision is determined by field specialisation.

	Administrative management / universal management principals (Fayol, 1916)	Management is seen as a skill which can be taught based on Fayol's (1916) basic functions of management. These management functions are still utilised by organisations and managers today. Administrative motive for upper management levels remains a high priority. Division of work is vital and centralised power ascribes responsibility to higher levels of management. Clear managerial principles guide this approach.
Behavioural approach to management (1930 onwards)	***Human relations approach*** (Follett,1919)	Emphasis is placed on the individual people within the organisation. Social needs become important as employees' work satisfaction could improve productivity. Participation increases social capital.
	Human resource and needs approach (Miles, 1965)	Social system within an organisation requires support. Investment in human capital reaps organisational rewards. The strengths of the employees and individuals within the organisation are seen as valuable.
	Quantitative approach (Louw, 2018; Vrba, 2018)	Statistics, programming, and numerical data are used to determine performance, thus computers and mathematical models are necessary to see success in this approach. The idea of feedback loops was introduced. Research techniques and programme evaluation were greatly influenced by this approach.
Systems approach to management (1945 onwards)	***Systems and information approach*** (Von Bertalanffy, 1959)	Acknowledges the interrelatedness and relationship between organisations and their environment. Managers view organisations as a whole with many parts. Management is process oriented rather than structural. Networking with other organisations improves the strength and stability of the whole sector. Inputs and outputs are noted within the system.
	Learning organisation approach (Senge, 1990)	Integrating a systems approach to management. This theory creates learning processes and structures to share knowledge and generate innovation within the organisation. This approach is people centred and encourages participation

		and feedback. Management skills can be learnt and developed with intention and support.
	Contingency (situational) theory (Louw, 2018)	This approach seeks to solve managerial problems. Utilises a combination of traditional approaches to address external environmental issues.
Contemporary approaches to management (1975 – Present)	***Quality approach*** (Jones & George, 2017.)	Concerned with service delivery and quality. Market-related demands showcase the importance of managers to prioritise quality and standard of output.
	Flexible approach (Vrba, 2018)	Notes that change should be integrated into managers' understanding and approach to work. Globalization pressures organisations to adapt to changing needs and technologies. Learning becomes an integral part of this approach requiring managers to have self-leadership and model high levels of performance.
	Principle (value) led approach (Pohlman, 1997)	Newly conceptualised approach to management. Ethics within business is the driving force behind this approach. Sustainability is considered by both managers and employees. Commitment to vision and mission from top management is crucial. Employees should also buy into the vision. Lifelong learning is important for encouraging improved performance. Identity within the workplace is an outcome of successful management within a principle-led organisation.

Contemporary management theory can be best understood by keeping the traditional theories that preceded today's practices in mind. The idea that managers would need business knowledge in ECD settings and social work fields is presented by Lombard and Strydom (2011), who suggest that community development can strongly be linked to social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is a suitable business model for ECD centres, as they are often situated in low socio-economic areas (Meier, 2014; Shawar & Shiffman, 2016; Woodhead, Featherstone, Bolton & Robertson, 2014). Government departments, NGOs, and businesses alike can intentionally create environments whereby the individuals and organisation can share

workplace learning through experiences and ideas (Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019).

Engelbrecht (2019) suggests that managers should utilise a variety of theoretical approaches to best manage their teams and organisations. As mentioned before, a learning organisation approach (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Chiva, 2017; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018; Wang & Ahmed, 2003) was utilised as the theoretical lens through which this study was viewed and whilst Chapter 3 provided a theoretical overview of the LOA, this chapter seeks to conceptualise this specifically within a management context.

4.4 DEFINITION OF COMPETENCY

Competency is defined as "a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge, and skills that enable a person (or an organisation) to act effectively in a job or situation which indicates sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations" (Business Dictionary.com, 2020). And research has shown that certain skills such as cognitive, emotional, and social intelligence competencies are particularly linked to leadership roles (Billings, Bernard, Caffery, Dolan, Donaldson, Kalp, 2019; Boyatzis, 2009; Mau, 2017; Swanson, Kimb, Leec, Yang, Lee, 2020).

Competencies can be developed from literacy and knowledge as well as by practicing and gaining confidence in a certain skill, which then becomes a skilled competency. Several competencies in life are shared, such as social skills, however, one would also obtain specific professional and role competencies. Historically, work was assessed based on task completion, however, a future-focused method within a learning organisation would suggest that work should rather be assessed according to a skill set and the competency to fulfil strategic roles and apply certain behaviours in a workplace setting (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006). Management should be considered as a multi-layered role with multiple facets and Staude (2018:21) defines a managerial competency as "…a combination of knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, attitudes and values to high performance". Entrepreneurial

competencies have been noted to be a particular set of competencies relevant to the activities of successful entrepreneurship (Al Mamun, Fazal & Zainol, 2019; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013). A competency is therefore a "…complex combination" of assets, with the added emphasis on creating a strong sense of power to create action and a value set to complete a task with specific standards (Hoskins & Crick, 2010:112).

ECD principals as well as social work managers should possess an array of professional competencies and the NNSWM has developed a set of professional competencies associated with social work management that should be integrated into social workers' daily practice (NNSWM, 2018; Woolever & Kelly, 2014). For the purpose of the study, the term "management competencies" will be utilised as the term to describe the tasks, skills, functions, and core values of a manager (Engelbrecht, 2019).

4.5 COMPETENCY MODELS

There are a number of competency models for the business, agriculture, and higher education sectors (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Sanghi, 2007). For ease of use and application, models have been developed to cluster and narrate management competencies relevant for use in practice. Such models can assist with providing a generalised expectation for staff, in this case managers, and should also give clarity regarding how an individual could learn these competencies. Manxhari, Veliu, and Jashari (2017) reviewed international literature on management competency models from 1986 to 2015 in a variety of formats of which three will be discussed that can be applied to ECD centres or SSOs. These models include: (1) the essential management competency conceptual framework (Engelbrecht, 2019), (2) the head teacher capacity model, and (3) the managerial competency model (Hellriegel *et al*., 2018).

4.5.1 The Essential Management Competency Conceptual Framework

Management is an interrelated concept involving skills, functions, and tasks. In his book, *Management and supervision of social workers: Issues and challenges within a social development paradigm*, Engelbrecht (2019) presents a conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks, which depicts the interaction and complexity of a management role in any organisation (Figure 4.1). This model is founded upon Fayol's well-documented management functions, which are discussed in Section 4.8.6. Mashale (2017) also refers to Engelbrecht's (2019) competency model, while solely focusing on the tasks fulfilled. In Parker's (2017) study on supervision, she also narrates the competencies of a supervisor, specifically a social work supervisor. There is a noteworthy gap in the literature as such a practical framework is not provided specifically for ECD principals. Therefore, this model can be learnt, modelled, or integrated into any learning organisation.

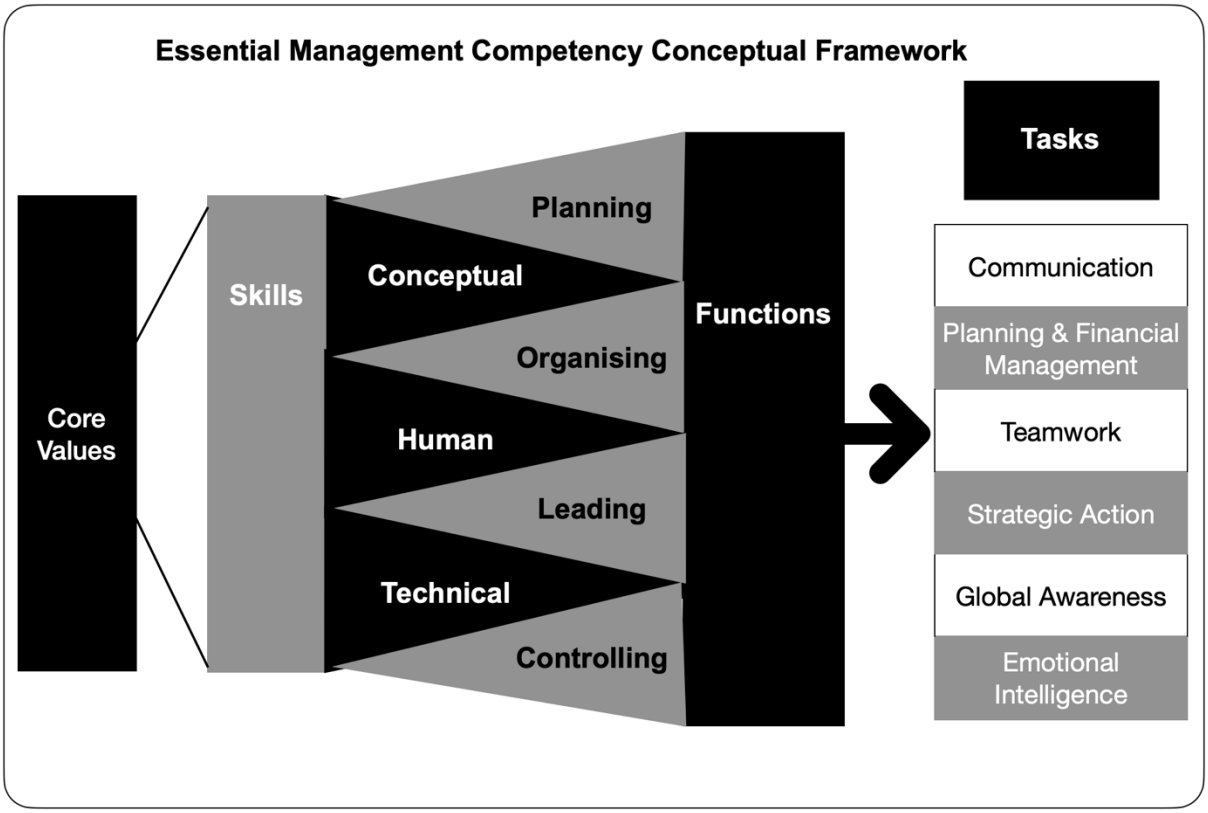

Figure 4.1 A depiction of Engelbrecht's (2019) conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks (adapted)

4.5.2 The head teacher capacity model

From an African perspective, it is enlightening to have a background of work done by Oduro (2003) and Bush and Oduro (2006), who present a management model defining the responsibilities of school principals from Ghana and Kenya. They recommend an African model of leadership to step away from the Western schools of thought. Principal competencies in South Africa, despite being named in the article, were not presented in the same detailed manner. The key competencies highlighted in this model are summarised below in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2 Head teacher capacity model in Ghana

Head teacher management capacity	Description/indicator within an ECD context	Supporting literature
Administrative capacity	The ability to effectively coordinate school records, financial records, logbooks, documents for compliance, and school registration. Policy formulation for the centre operations is relevant to this capacity.	Berry, Jamieson & James, 2011 Clampett, 2016 DSD & EPRI, 2014
Professional capacity	Ability to manage the leadership role while ensuring quality standards. Desired professionalisation of the sector. Learning and ECD-specific knowledge for curriculum input.	DSD & EPRI, 2014 Fourie, 2016 Meier, 2014
Personal capacity	Showcasing character which is fair, firm and patient, as well as commitment to the mission of the school. Value-driven behaviour and ethics are important.	Dato, Hussein & Ahmad, 2009 DSD & EPRI, 2014
Interpersonal capacity	Relatable and genuine engagement with the staff, children, parents, and community members. Good communication, conflict management and presentation skills are necessary.	Clampett, 2016 DSD & EPRI, 2014

This model again encourages the interrelatedness of management and the need for empirical evidence into the structures and processes that enable principles to increase their capacity. This model, however, does not incorporate an entrepreneurial

capacity nor does it make mention of a business capacity for crucial tasks such as strategic planning, marketing and fundraising (Atmore, 2013). Furthermore, this model negates to include the capacity for intentional training, mentoring, and the supervisory capacity of the principal.

4.5.3 Hellriegels's model of managerial competencies

The highly reviewed Hellriegel's model of managerial competencies is deemed appropriate in many sectors and disciplines as a global perspective on management, seeking to integrate 21st century demands of the workforce with evidence-based theory. The six competencies presented by Hellriegel (2018) include communication, planning and financial management, teamwork, strategic action, global awareness, emotional intelligence, and self-management. Below, Table 4.3 showcases these competencies in relation to possible ECD management tasks and the associated management functions.

Table 4.3 Managerial competency model (Hellriegel et al., 2018)

Managerial competency	**ECD management tasks**	**Associated management functions**
Communication competency	• Communication skills • Public relations (PR) and marketing • Technology	Leading Organising
Planning and financial management competency	• Strategic planning meetings • Policy writing • Vision, mission, goals • Financial record keeping • DSD funding allocations • Stock and asset control • Linkage to DSD/DOH/DOBE • Managing donations • Bookkeeping (school fees) • Budgeting • Managing donations	Planning Organising Controlling

Teamwork competency	• ECD management committee leader • Staff training and capacitation • Role-model professional behaviour • Networking and community engagement • Link to community resources • Team building • Student records and staff record keeping	Leadership Organising
Strategic action competency	• Registration • Business plan creation • Research in the sector • Change management	Leadership Planning Organisation Control
Global awareness competency	• Rights and responsibilities of staff and children • ECD agenda • Advocacy of child protection	Leadership Organising
Emotional intelligence and self-management competency	• Time management • Self-reflection • Conflict resolution and negotiation	Leadership Organising Planning

Similar to Hellriegel's managerial competency model, Man and Lau (2000) present six distinct competency areas namely: opportunity, relationship, conceptual, organising, strategic, and commitment competencies. This assures the field of management that the dynamic role requires more than just knowledge, but also an integration of knowledge, ability, creativity, and skills. Should a manager assume a learning approach to skills acquisition, the organisation could support the process of experiential learning, training, and feedback opportunities to improve competencies of their staff.

4.6 DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCY IN ECD SETTINGS

Learning and training programmes require a level of assessment in order to establish competence. Improved competency has been found to have certain links to managerial performance (Bucur, 2013), and several studies present management indicators and competencies in ECD settings that are similar to Engelbrecht's (2014:16) conceptual framework of management skills, functions and tasks (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Bush & Oduro, 2006). Bush and Oduro (2006) describe the indicators for each competency, however, these definitions are vague and fail to demonstrate how a principal would acquire such competencies.

4.7 QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ECD PRINCIPAL

While early childhood education qualification frameworks have been linked with quality and credible programmes, South Africa has taken an unchartered road where most ECD practitioners and principals are often functioning in their role prior to obtaining any qualification (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Msila, 2014). There is much uncertainty regarding the minimum National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level expectation of a principal's qualifications in South Africa, which has been identified as a need by many SSOs and training programme providers (Strydom, 2011). South Africa, as mentioned, has structured its accredited training programmes and qualifications in association with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2019) and the NQF, as depicted in the Table 4.4 below:

Table 4.4 Scaffolding of ECD qualifications in South Africa (SAQA, 2019)

Qualification title	NQF level	Credits
Unaccredited workshops and training programmes	N/A	N/A
National Certificate: N2 Educare / Child Development	NQF level 02 - 3	120
Occupational Certificate: ECD Practitioner	NQF level 04	131
Higher Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education	NQF level 05	120

Higher Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education	NQF level 05	133
Higher Certificate in Pre-School Education	NQF level 05	124
National Diploma: ECD	NQF level 05	240
Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Teaching	NQF level 06	120-132
Diploma in ECD Montessori Teaching	NQF level 06	365
Diploma in Grade R Teaching	NQF level 06	360-390
National Diploma: Child and Youth Development	NQF level 06	360
Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching	NQF level 07	508
Bachelor of Primary Education: ECD	NQF level 07	480
Higher Diploma: Education: ECD and Foundation Phase	NQF level 07	480
Postgraduate Certificate in Foundation Phase Teaching	NQF level 07	130
Bachelor of Education Honours: ECD	NQF level 08	120
Master of Education: Early Childhood Education	NQF level 09	180 - 240
Doctor of Philosophy: Early Childhood Education	NQF level 10	360

Recently presented statistics show that 110 000 practitioners are currently employed at ECD centres and that 35 210 of these practitioners have at least an NQF Level 4 qualification (Samuels, 2019). Stretch (2013) and Atmore (2013) found that training did lead to improved child developmental outcomes and improved centre management. International research points out that leadership qualifications should be created to ensure clear progression pathways for practitioners and teachers into principal management roles, which may not be occurring in reality (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Biersteker *et al.*, 2016). In terms of qualification outcomes and quality control, training at every NQF level warrants debate, and standardisation is challenging as courses tend to be offered in different formats, depending on the provider or tertiary institution (Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2013).

South Africa is in a unique position where the majority of the workforce is not able to afford or gain access to tertiary education, despite the push for professionalisation in the sector. In addition to this unique situation, many of these training programmes are focused on ECD classroom practices and theory and do not necessarily cover leadership or managerial competencies as an in-depth component or outcome of the training (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014; Thornton, 2010). Below in Figure 4.2 is the current pathways model for ECD practitioners in this sector, which was presented at the 3rd NQF Research Conference as the Sectoral Plan Update for ECD (Samuels, 2019). This is relevant to managers and social workers, who should be able to intentionally join the pathway to obtain credible credentials to manage an ECD centre.

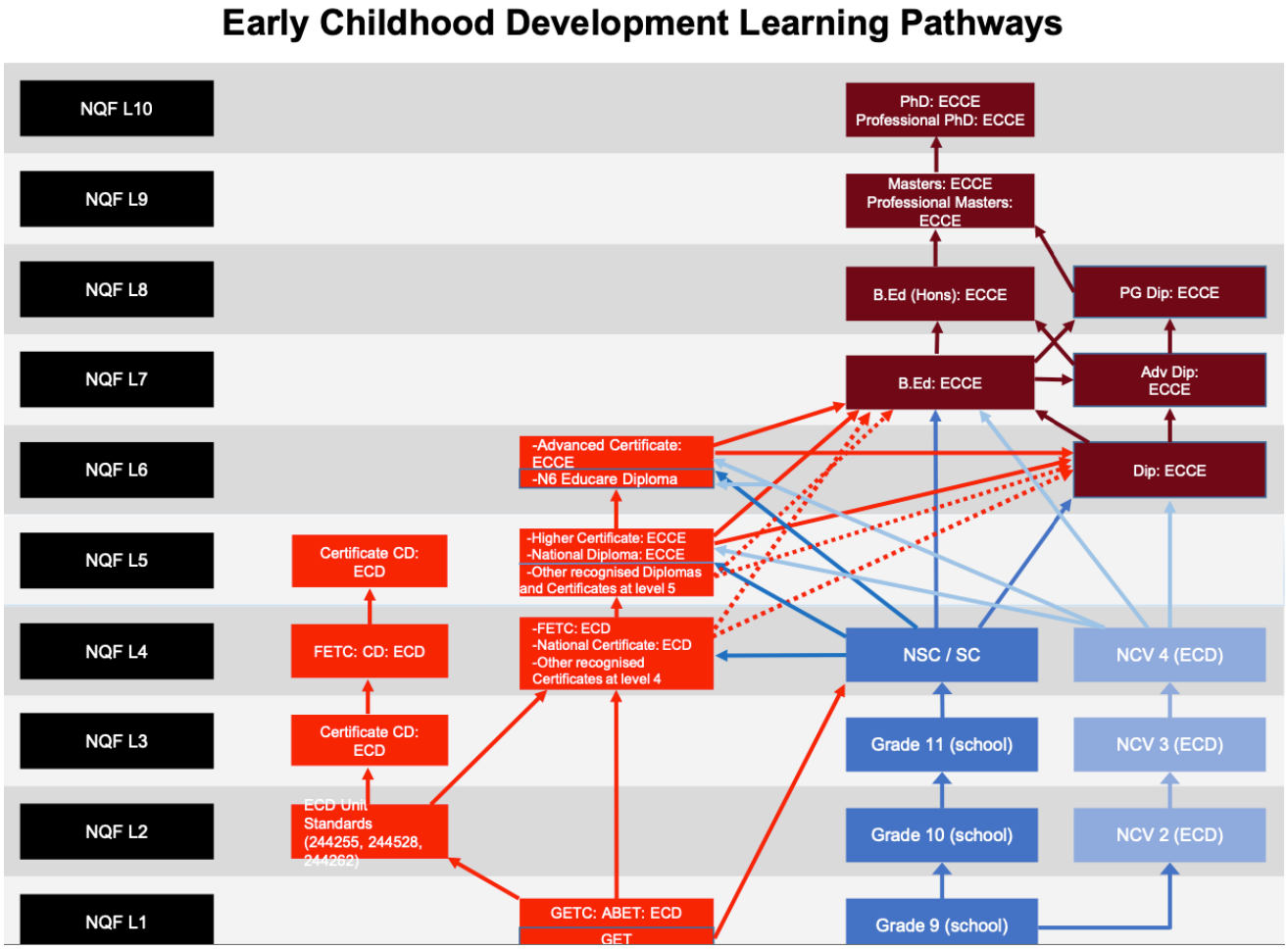

Figure 4.2 Learning pathways for ECD professionals (Samuels, 2019)

In additional to the formal routes of learning, many NGOs, learning institutions and SSOs have begun to offer a wide variety of non-accredited training programmes to

further support, mentor, and improve the service level standards and skills of principals (Moorosi, 2012; Msila, 2016). Desmond *et al*. (2019) mention the financial implications to be considered should the pathways for training be improved in South Africa, and also note the role of Government to subsidise the hard-to-reach areas where private institutions do not yet operate. Accreditation with the Department of Education (DoE) and SAQA becomes important for qualifications as the sector is saturated by staff with varying levels of training, and often with no training at all (Richter & Samuels, 2017). Authors (Bantwini, 2012; Harwood *et al*., 2013; Moon, 2014; Msila, 2016; Motlanthe, 2011) emphasise the importance of mentorship, particularly for improving management competencies of an ECD principal, who may not have a formal qualification, and place responsibility on the principal as an individual to pursue professional development, learning, and growth opportunities in order to meet the needs and market demands of a rapidly expanding sector.

4.8 ESSENTIAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS PERFORMED BY ECD PRINCIPALS

Skills are a direct result of the intentional investment into education, training, and work experience in a certain task or action (Chell, 2013; Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017; Unger, Rauch, Frese & Rosenbusch, 2011). Discipline-specific skills, as well as generic management skills and self-management skills are specifically necessary for managers. The term “skills” is mentioned 21 times in the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), which speaks to the expertise required in order to fulfil the mandate of the legislative document. Three skills specifically identified in the policy are the need for (1) human resource skills, (2) effective management skills of ECD programmes, as well as (3) coordination skills to implement the multisectoral thrust of the policy (RSA, 2015:61). The new policy requires ECD principals, practitioners, researchers, policy writers, private and public sector organisations, and stakeholders to acknowledge the need for effective ECD management at several rungs of the departmental and ECD principal implementation ladder (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Fourie, 2018).

While teachers have the responsibility to care and develop young children, ECD principals are required to oversee their centres, manage the business as

entrepreneurs, and support centre staff, all of which require a unique set of skills. As categorised by Katz (1974), managers can possess technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. These three essential skill sets are discussed in the sections below.

4.8.1 Technical skills

Technical and specialised skills often require the individual to possess industry-specific knowledge, ensure quality, and encourage continuous innovation in their chosen market (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). Several authors link technical skills to operations, incorporating technology, and managing supplies (Chang & Rieple, 2013; Chell, 2013; Narkhede, Nehete, Raut & Mahajan, 2014). ECD principals would require a unique set of technical skills associated with education, as well as entrepreneurial business skills specific for running a school, which are further detailed below.

4.8.2 Entrepreneurial skills

Entrepreneurial skills are defined as the ability to generate new business ideas into strategic plans and actionable solutions, which can be in the form of services or products (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). In addition to this definition, authors suggest that start-up skills are also embedded in the competencies of an entrepreneur (Fatoki, 2014; Loué & Baronet 2012; Wasdani & Mathew, 2014; Wise, 2013). Some of the skills linked to starting a new ECD centre would involve planning for growth, environmental needs assessment, encouraging innovation, and seeking strategic risk and opportunities (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). In a social development context, an ECD centre would be considered a business delivering a social service of care and protection as well as education programmes to a marketplace that places value on these services. Leaders who are seen as business oriented are praised for possessing the necessary characteristics to build and grow such an enterprise (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013). Thus, social entrepreneurship would be encouraged as a skill necessary for an ECD principal (Urban & Gaffurini, 2018).

4.8.3 Business management skills

Business management skills involve organising and effectively managing the daily functions and strategic goals of the organisation (Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2001; Loué & Baronet, 2012). Administration and auditing, operational business planning, marketing skills and negotiation skills all become desirable for managers to possess. Mamabolo, Kerrin and Kele (2017) created an extensive framework for core business skills and distinguish between business and financial management skills, which are detailed in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Core business skills of entrepreneurs in an ECD context (adapted from Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017)

Core business skill	**Subset of skills**	**Example in an ECD centre context**
Business management skills	Problem solving	Identifying and solving problems related to the ECD centre, which may include the staff, children, or parents.
	Strategic competence	Creating goals to achieve the ECD centre's full earning and impact potential.
	Legal skills	Understanding and implementing the DoE and DSD registration requirements and legislative standards.
	Planning and organising	Arranging the activities and programme requirements of the ECD programme and curriculum.
	Negotiation	Managing staff salary discussions or parent-teacher disputes.
	Delegation	Assigning tasks for health and safety checks to teachers for monitoring.
	Distribution modelling	Ensuring the centre is positioned with ease of access to parents who need childcare and for staff to reach work.
	Managing change	Leading the orientation and introduction of new teachers or volunteers to the ECD centre.
	Partnerships	Forming accountable relationships with possible sponsors, for example nutrition or resource donations.

	Business development	Expanding the ECD centre offerings to include diverse services such as aftercare, parent education, reading clubs, and homework assistance.
Financial management skills	Pricing skills	Establishing the best prices for ECD services per age group.
	Raising capital	Generating finances to assist with the start-up, and growth of an ECD centre, or to cover unforeseen costs.
	Managing cash	Handling the income and expenses of the ECD centre with an audit trail.
	Calculating costs	Working out curriculum, nutritional, and staffing costs for the term. Establishing margins for unforeseen expenses.
	Interpreting financial results	Understanding the accounting documents of the ECD centre in order to calculate operating costs.
	Filing taxes	Registering as a Public Beneficiary Organisation (PBO) for tax exemption and Section 18A Tax Certificates.
	Using financial software	Utilising MS Excel or financial software to create electronic financial reports for an NPO narrative report.
	Managing billing	Creating invoices and collecting school fees from parents each term.
	Bookkeeping	Creating a paper trail for the ECD centre's finances for auditing purposes.
	Selling or buying shares	Not common in an ECD setting, however, privately run centres (not NPOs) could share ownership and share profits.

The skills listed above can be applied for any business or NGO, however, in a social development paradigm, particularly in a South African context, one must take into consideration the educational and systemic inequalities which may hinder individuals such as ECD principals from processes or learning these skills, personally or professionally (Rugimbana & Oseifuah, 2010). Dealing with issues surrounding funding and financial accounts have been found to be a top concern for small business owners (Brown, Saunders & Beresford, 2006; Fatoki, 2014). The idea of building financial literacy skills within NGO governance structures may be a more realistic expectation for individuals who are starting up or managing their own ECD

centre and have little background in financial or business management (Pointer & Stillman, 2004; Rugimbana & Oseifuah, 2010; Wise, 2013). Negative consequences of being financial illiterate, from an organisational perspective, is financial stress, employee inefficiency, time wasting, poor performance in the market, and potential for fraud (Braunstein & Welch, 2002; Chen & Volpe, 2005).

In response to this need, South Africa has taken the trajectory towards improving financial literacy, and ultimately financial management, through education and training offered by government initiatives, the financial industry, NPOs, and the housing sector through fund allocation and private companies (Fox, Bartholomae & Lee, 2005; Piprek, Dlamini & Coetzee 2004; Van Nieuwenhuyzen, 2009).

4.8.3.1 Understanding of registration and compliance

As discussed in Chapter 2, ECD centre registration and DSD compliance are mandated expectations for all ECD centres in South Africa (Johnson, 2017). A principal should therefore be able to understand and interpret registration and compliance policies and documentation. To assist with this process, useful documents have been compiled with systemic guidelines for social workers, SSOs, and ECD principals who need to register centres and progress through the DSD's registration process (DSD & ELRU, 2014; TREE, 2013).

ECD centre administration skills are linked to this skill of understanding registration and compliance.

4.8.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation

The DSD has a specific supervisory role to play through the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of funding allocated to registered ECD programmes (Britton *et al*., 2014; Clampett, 2016; Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, 2014; Excell, 2016; Meier, 2014). The management role of an ECD principal and the role of a social work manager within the service delivery model is mandated by the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015). This governing role requires strong leadership skills, sound ECD knowledge, and technical expertise to successfully account for and achieve the intended impact that the policy envisages (Hodgson, Papatheodorou & James, 2014; RSA, 2015).

ECD principals need to learn how to monitor and evaluate, which often requires statistical feedback (e.g., number of children in attendance, number of staff, and average age of children). The DSD requires M&E and reporting on the following: DSD funding use, environmental and building compliance, practitioner-to-child ratios, staff interactions, age-appropriate ECD programmes offered and implemented in the daily programme, and child-development milestones. These statistical outcomes are documented in the form of reports, assessments, or registers (Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 [RSA, 2006]; Desmond *et al*., 2019; Govender, 2015; The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015). These M&E skills take time to develop and certain staff members and principals may consider it to be irrelevant data tracking that lacks engagement with the actual programme successes and needs (Herbert, 2015; Meagher & Healy, 2003). Mtshali (2015:81) suggested that an "integrated and standardized M&E guideline for implementation of ECD services" should be developed. The benefit of collecting this data is that ECD centres would have evidence of their services and outcomes for measuring success. There is also the added benefit of being able to identify where the centre could improve its service delivery outcomes.

4.8.3.3 Green environmental skills

A fairly new concept in the business sector is the green agenda, whereby businesses and individuals seek to operate with the environment in mind. "Every job can potentially become greener," writes Cwele (2019). Sustainability and low carbon footprint become value-added factors to the organisation's reputation and role in the community (Kozlova & Volkova, 2019). Therefore, organisations should deliver services and programmes that are cognizant of protecting the environment and that contribute positively to the social values and attitudes around global issues. An environmental leader would encourage an eco-friendly culture, promote social values linked to recycling and sustainable thought, and praise innovative thinking and leadership to carry forward the green agenda within the organisation, in this case, an ECD centre. This agenda can be integrated into the ECD curriculum, staff training, as well as kitchen and overall waste management of the centre. The use of water and sound handwashing practices is also noted as an environmental concern, particularly

for ECD centres in underprivileged communities (Melariri, Steenkamp, Williams, Mtembu, Ronaasen & Truter, 2019). Authors passionately advocate for active citizenship and environmental education from preschool to higher education (Kozlova & Volkova, 2019; International Labour Office, 2019) and innovative classroom activities linked to the themes of recycling and caring for the environment have already begun to be implemented, specifically within a South African context (Captain Fanplastic, 2020; Earth Kids Org, 2020; Hero in My Hood, 2020; The ReTrade Project, 2020).

4.8.3.4 Using technology

Technology should be a driving force for learning in SSOs as online business becomes common practice for creating platforms to promote engagement (Cook-Craig & Sabah, 2009). Cellular technology, computer skills, online communication platforms, website design, graphics creation, and the ability to use online project management tools will continue to be technical skills needed in order to innovate and lead in a growing market. Social media also presents a marketing opportunity for ECD centres but is still a largely untapped resource in the ECD sector (Guo & Saxton 2018; Xu & Saxton, 2019). Technology can also be a useful tool for preserving data and documents that are important to the ECD centre. Computer skills can be learnt through workshops, courses, or trial and error.

4.8.4 Human skills

Dealing with human relations, whether internally and externally, is a predominant task of an ECD leader (Hujala, 2013; Fourie, 2018). This skill involves the ability to interact with people, effectively communicating while building relationships, understanding diverse cultures, political awareness, networking ability, showcasing active listening, and a variety of human resource management skills (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). Due to the expectations that a principal should be able to engage with staff, parents, children, and the wider community, human skills should be critical to management success despite findings that suggest that principals do not always showcase effective communication skills (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014; Fourie, 2018). Key human skills include communication, parent engagement, human resource skills, team

building, mentorship, self-management, and marketing and are particularly significant for ECD management, as discussed below:

4.8.4.1 Communication

Effective communication has long-term benefits to the ECD centre staff and wider community through the formation of meaningful relationships (Aceron & Guerrero, 2018; Marais, 2018; Greyling, *et al.*, 2019). The role modelling and maintenance of effective communication within an ECD setting is predominantly the responsibly of the ECD principal (Habaci *et al.*, 2013). Reyneke (2020) and Prinsloo (2016a) make a distinction between several ways in which people communicate, such as one-on-one communication, writing reports, and electronic communication, such as emails or text messages (SMS). In addition to these, newsletters, online methods of communication such as social media Facebook, Twitter etc., and Skype are also considered common business communication platforms when paired with face-to-face contact (Marais, 2018; Wilke, 2019). Holmes (2012) utilised Wiemann's Communication Competence Scale in his study to present a measurement of the principal's ability to be understood, to be easy to talk to, to deal with others, to build trust, to show empathy, to be honest, to show transparency, and to offer praise. Offering praise was also deemed relevant by other studies (Rous, 2004). The use of humour, sharing work experience, and being friendly to one another have also been identified as constructive, caring leadership in the workplace (Bøe & Hognestad, 2016).

Habaci *et al*. (2013) present an extensive list of the proficient communication qualities of an ECD principal, which include:

1. Planned communication;
2. Appropriately timing for sending information;
3. Engaging self-confidence;
4. Messages and behaviours free from prejudice;
5. Selecting messages appropriately for employees;
6. Holding sufficient knowledge on pertinent topics;
7. Providing precise information for staff;

8. Communication without discrimination;
9. The use of a variety of communication networks;
10. Ensuring communication is consistent with real life;
11. Dressing appropriately;
12. Abstaining from any act hindering communication;
13. Listening to others;
14. Being able to empathise with employees;
15. Correctly transmitting messages;
16. Paying attention to feedback; and
17. Analytically analysing messages after communication.

ECD staff may express the desire for training and professional development, particularly for creating their communication skills (Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai & Austin, 2012). From an LOA perspective, ECD centres should embed the art of listening and learning from one another, as well as encourage feedback regarding communication styles within the organisation (Belle, 2016; Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005). In addition to training, ECD principals should examine possible communication barriers, both internally with staff and externally with parents (Habaci *et al*., 2013; Van Deventer, 2016a). Prinsloo (2016a) suggests that clear communication and conflict resolution skills are also useful for tackling barriers and disputes in a school environment.

4.8.4.2 Group facilitation and team-building skills

The ability to encourage participation and create belonging within groups is a useful skill in a learning organisation because of the value placed on a shared vision and collective learning (McPheat & Butler, 2014). An ECD principal needs to be confident in their ability to manage and facilitate a meeting, whether this is a staff meeting, parent meeting, or community gathering. The art of facilitation allows for free-flowing communication where the designated facilitator leads and guides the agenda and discussions, but ultimately seeks to elicit maximum contribution from the participants. A facilitator should understand group values, roles, and tasks (Prinsloo, 2016b; Smit, Cronje, Brevis & Vrba, 2011). Understanding of Tuckman's stages of group development, namely forming, norming, storming, and performing, is also helpful for a facilitator when dealing with groups (Smit *et al*., 2011). Group decision making skills

should be cultivated by the principals and can also be used in an ECD context in the case of committee meetings or staff task teams (Marsh & Farrell, 2015; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). Facilitating meetings, decision making, conflict negotiations, and training opportunities are likely to improve staff morale and increase job satisfaction (Van Denventer, 2016a). Ultimately, an organisation is a group of people with a common task at hand and this requires the leader or manager to also prioritise team building and opportunities for the staff to relate to one other through purposeful tasks or activities (Forsyth, 2006; Prinsloo, 2016b).

4.8.4.3 Mentoring and coaching

Mentorship is a unique process whereby an exchange of knowledge, skills, and experience between mentor and mentee exist. A practical definition would be: a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and support for wellbeing that may be relevant to career or professional development (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). This transfer of expertise is helpful for a developing sector like ECD where staff, and particularly leaders, may lack confidence in their skill set or qualifications and require support as they form their own professional identity as a principal (Harwood & Tukonic, 2017; Moyles 2001). In the ECD sector, centres have been known to fail their human resources when there is a lack of time and space made for intentional mentorship (Slimmer, 2012). Group mentorship has also gained some appreciation for the platform allows for professionals to reflect, discuss dilemmas, and share their views and values (Eriksson, 2017) with others. While higher education institutions are increasingly integrating mentoring programmes into their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for teachers, in South Africa many practitioners and principals may not have benefited from this style of investment into their growth and career development (Mathipa & Matlabe, 2016). ECD principals also require mentorship to successfully run and grow a small business, however, many mentors struggle to create time, despite being willing to mentor new entrepreneurs (Botha & Esterhuyzen, 2012). Mentorship is required for ECD principals, but also ECD practitioners or teachers who are growing in their own professional capacity and may desire to start their own ECD business in the future (Botha & Esterhuyzen, 2012). Positive relationship-building skills, amongst other characteristics, are associated with a healthy and effective mentor (Idemudia, 2013).

4.8.5 Conceptual skills

Considered to be skills required by higher rungs of the management ladder, conceptual skills are defined as a manager's mental capability to handle and understand ideas and complex questions (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2003). Conceptualisation can include the ability to inspire and encourage staff and community vision and aspirations for the organisation (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The responsibility lies on the individual to seek personal growth in their own skills for transferability between business environments (Bratianu & Vatamanescu, 2016). In line with other characteristics of an LOA, the literature suggests that one would purposefully desire the mindset of "learning to learn" for the workforce of the future, which can increase employability and promote lifelong learning (Bratianu & Vatamanescu, 2016:102). Servant leadership has been found to intrinsically exhibit many conceptually oriented qualities (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The use of data, problem solving, creative thought, improving ones' ability to learn, and strategic thinking are examples of generic conceptual skills (Bratianu & Vatamanescu, 2016). Directly related to small business growth, these skills should become a priority for managers, particularly in their early professional years (Benzing, Chu & Bove, 2005). ECD principals would be required to develop this skill set, either during their studies or experientially while running an ECD centre. In the sections below, several conceptual skills specific to an ECD principal are discussed.

4.8.5.1 Policy development skills

The written documentation guiding the regulations and standards of an ECD centre can act as a protective mechanism and a valuable teaching tool for employees. Suggestions regarding policies include that they should be accessible and that there should be a variety of policies on key matters (Clampett, 2016). Examples of the types of policies that an ECD centre in South Africa should have in place, include:

- Medication management policy;
- Discipline policy;
- Admission policy;
- Special needs education policy;

- Health and safety policy;
- HIV/Aids policy;
- Transport policy; and
- Staff employment / HR policy

(DSD & EPRI, 2014)

The significance of these policy focus areas links strongly to the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) and speaks to the advocacy priority for children's rights and protection (RSA, 2015). Community leadership calls for ECD principals to be able to assess and make changes to polices should the market, needs, or organisation require change (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014). Establishing a shared vision, mission and growth trajectory is a conceptualisation skill required of a manager that could also be integrated into the constitution and founding document of the NGO or its business plan (Banutu-Gomez & Banutu-Gomez, 2007; Fourie, 2018; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Critique of policies in school settings is the temptation for managers to utilise polices in a manipulative manner, enforce rules, initiate trivial processes, or show favouritism to certain staff through their political power or command of the policies (Ozen, 2018).

4.8.5.2 Decision making

Principals are constantly required to make decisions, whether it be about operations, resources, staff, or children at their centre. As part of a business strategy plan, a leader should be assigned to make executive decisions and involve staff when necessary. Transformational leadership is often exhibited through participatory decision making, led by the manager or the principal, resulting in staff job satisfaction (Lee, Kwan & Walker, 2009). That being said, studies have found that principals tend be wary of sharing decisions with staff members, particularly regarding possible changes in the school (Chow, 2013; Hallinger & Walker, 2015).

Decisions in the workplace often involve problem solving, which can be time consuming. Collaborative decisions and problem solving often take place informally within an organisation (or school setting) and less frequently and more formally between organisations (Mowrey & King, 2019). These decision-making processes

are not without dynamics, politics, and biases, which often require clear communication and leadership to navigate (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Stasser & Abele, 2020). Social work managers would refer to this kind of collaboration as an empowerment-oriented approach to managerial decision making (Hardina & Montana, 2011). Principals have also been assigned the job of diagnosing problems and leading collective governance to find a solution (Portin, Schneider, De Armond & Gundlach, 2003). Marais (2018) contextualises decision making of an ECD principal and suggests that creativity should also be incorporated into decision making processes, which require evidence gathering as well as managing decision-making teams such as a committee.

4.8.5.3 Designing a learning culture and process

As discussed in Chapter 3, an LOA to management requires the leader to intentionally create a workplace culture and systematic process for employees to learn and preserve learning (Garvin, Edmondson & Gono, 2008). ECD principals are required to intentionally create and model shared learning as part their leadership (Hesbol, 2019), which calls for a unique set of conceptual and interpersonal skills in order to execute a change in workplace culture. A community of practice or an ECD principal forum is an example of a designed gathering intended for shared learning (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). By making use of design thinking as an innovative conceptual skill, involvement, emotional intelligence, teamwork, creativity, experimentation, and having fun could be integrated into the conceptual skills toolbox of an ECD principal (d-school, 2018; Seoane, 2016). In order to conceptualise and lead the growth of a sustainable ECD centre, a principal would need to actively seek to become competent in these skill sets.

4.8.6 Essential management functions needed as a principal

Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum (2002) outline the fundamental management functions (which were originally denoted by Fayol [1916]) as planning, organising, leading, and controlling, which Fourie and Fourie (2018) suggest would also be necessary for managing an ECD centre. This is even applicable in an area of low

socio-economic status (SES) such as a township. While these are stand-alone functions, they can also be seen as a process whereby one function can lead to the next. These are discussed in the sections below.

4.8.6.1 Planning

The planning function of an ECD principal would involve setting goals and planning these goals appropriately for execution. Decision-making skills are important for this function. Strategic planning of finances, resources, and daily operations ensures that the ECD centre may continue to offer a wide range of desirable services to the community (Agasisti, Bonomi & Sibiano, 2012; Alameen, Male & Palaiologou, 2015). Other examples of planning responsibilities could include programme planning, budgeting, and staff and curriculum planning (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Tekleselassie, 2002), of which the latter has been noted to be an area in need of much attention in South Africa, if quality of ECD services is to be achieved (Hoadley, Christie & Ward, 2009, Lumadi, 2012; Steyn & Wolhuter, 2010). Lastly, there is succession planning, which tends to be neglected by principals and could be an area for further research and training (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). An example of ECD planning, over the life cycle of an ECD principal, could be applied to Gitman and Joehnk (2002) and Scott and Bruce's (1987) planning model depicted in

Age of ECD Centre (years)

Figure 4.3.

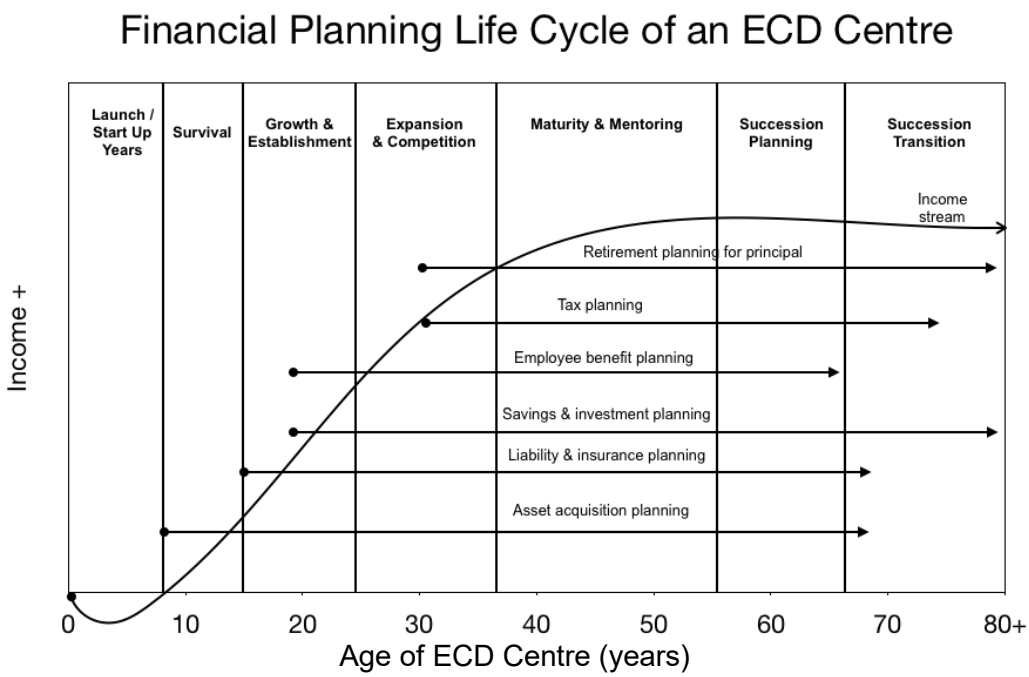

Figure 4.3 Financial planning life cycle of an ECD centre (Adapted from Gitman & Joehnk, 2002; Scott & Bruce, 1987).

One must be willing to adapt and plan for the changes and demands of each age stage of the ECD centre's life cycle, particularly in South Africa's erratic economic climate (Rugimbana & Oseifuah, 2010). Van Nieuwenhuyzen (2009) suggests that without financial literacy skills, financial management and planning will not be possible.

4.8.6.2 Organising

Organising directly involves the development of organisational structure and hierarchy as well as the implementation of planning for the business's financial and human resources in order to deliver the organisation's outputs (Fourie & Fourie, 2018; Nel, 2019). Organising is closely linked to delegation and assignment of responsibility and relies strongly on resources and internal motivation to maintain delivery standards (Connolly, James & Fertig, 2019). Often workload and authority delegation need to be handled strategically with regards to financial resources to ensure that implementation is possible (Connolly, James & Fertig, 2019). Creating departments or task teams would be part of the organising function of a principal, often dependent on expertise and the assigned chain of command (Smit *et al*., 2011). For CBOs such as ECD centres, which operate within an influencing community system, there are also external organisation management strategies such as gaining support through

marketing, event organising, and encouraging stakeholder investment through partnerships (Jaskyte, 2013b). Chiva (2017) talks about learning organisations as being more people oriented than task oriented in order to facilitate a sense of belonging in the organisation.

4.8.6.3 Leading

It is apparent that business skills, leadership, and governance are concepts that are intertwined and necessary for effective principal management of an ECD centre (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013). Leadership has been identified as a skill set and a quality-ensuring variable of management, necessary for organisational success and organisational learning (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Bush & Glover, 2016). ECD principals are not explicitly defined as leaders in the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), yet they function within a leadership position, managing the ECD centre at grassroot level (RSA, 2015; Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013). Other terms used in the literature to refer to ECD principals are early childhood director (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013; Ismail *et al*., 2018) and ECD leader (Hujala, Heikka & Halttunen, 2011 in Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013).

Lack of research in the field fo ECD centre management, unfortunately, means that ECD principals lack the “know how” to implement the necessary leadership (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011; Meier, 2014; Shawar & Shiffman, 2016). The consequence of inadequate knowledge means that management practices are ineffective and lack capacity for sustained growth.

Organisational learning is the theoretical approach that can be applied to an ECD centre or any organisation that not only deliver education but also transform the learning culture among staff and the wider community (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014; Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & Dolores, 2019; Senge, 1990). An LOA facilitates the learning of necessary skills and knowledge needed to manage. The following statement by Lombardi (2001:2) is well referenced in many leadership contexts: “Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.” This quote holds much weight in a developmental approach which is necessary in South Africa, where

the ECD sector is striving towards increased capacity of individuals in order to enhance the sector as a whole (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014). Lombardi (2001:2-3) concisely explains that "[l]eadership is not just one quality, but rather a blend of many qualities; and while no one individual possesses all of the needed talents that go into leadership, each man can develop a combination to make him a leader".

The function of leading involves using the ECD principal role as a source of influence towards achieving the organisation's goals (Soria-Garcia & Martínez-Lorente, 2014). While leader-led learning and workplace culture have been discussed, an ECD leader would also be considered a role model in the community for promoting positive child development and prioritising the ECD agenda in their own sphere of influence. Lastly, self-management is also a sign of great leadership capacity whereby an ECD principal is able to motivate themself, reflect often, and function independently without supervision or unnecessary instruction (Aceron & Guerrero, 2018).

4.8.6.4 Controlling

Management control in schools is not a new concept in the literature (Silva-Domingo, 2015) and the primary motive of management control, is measuring and ensuring that the organisation's outcomes and activities meet standards (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014). Smit *et al*., (2011) depict the general control process (Figure 4.4) in a systematic manner whereby standards are created, measured, and evaluated, and action is taken based on the results.

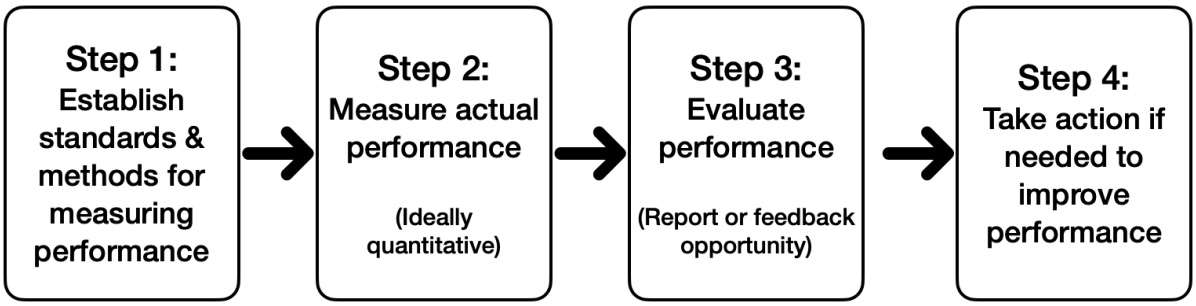

Figure 4.4 The control process (Smit et al., 2015 in Van Deventer, 2016b)

Within a school context, there are four focus areas of control which are noted to be relevant for managers to assume responsibility. These include (Van Deventer, 2016b):

1. *Physical resources*: Control through inventory, stock registers, and quality controls;
2. *Human resources*: Staff allocation and development of employees through training opportunities. Controls could include payroll, attendance, leave rosters, performance appraisals, and other related controls;
3. *Information resources*: Updating data regarding the centre's building, environment, and programmes presented, in reports and feedback documents on meetings; and
4. *Financial resources*: Internally and externally audited to ensure accountability of funding allocation, which is crucial to the sustainability of an ECD centre.

M&E is a key component of the DSD registration process to ensure service delivery norms and standards, which would not occur without planning and control directly overseen by the ECD principal as the manager of the organisation (Jaskyte, 2013b).

4.9 TASKS PERFORMED BY ECD PRINCIPALS

The interrelated nature of the essential management competencies of an ECD principal means that a collection of tasks are included in their role (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). Managers are presented with the opportunity to link daily tasks alongside the functions executed, with the help of core skills. In Table 4.6 an inventory is presented of possible ECD-related tasks ordered into clear groups according to Hellriegel *et al.*'s managerial competency model (2017), followed by a short description of each group below.

Table 4.6 Managerial competency model showcasing an inventory of ECD management tasks (Adapted from Hellriegel et al., 2018)

1. Communication tasks

• Communication via emails, face to face, newsletters, and phone calls • Meetings • Public relations, networking, and marketing
2. Planning and financial management tasks
• Strategic planning meetings • Policy writing • Developing vision, mission, goals • Financial record keeping • Fundraising and donations • Allocating DSD funding • Managing stock and asset control • Meetings to engage with DSD, DOH, and DoBE • Bookkeeping (school fees) • Budgeting
3. Teamwork tasks
• NPO committee leader and meetings • Staff training and capacity building • Encouraging workshop attendance of staff for networking • Community engagement • Creating team building tasks • Updating and managing student and staff records
4. Strategic action tasks
• Registration • Business plan creation • Research in the sector • Change management
5. Global awareness tasks
• Promoting the rights and responsibilities of staff and children • Furthering the ECD agenda within the centre and publicly • Encouraging advocacy of child protection • Attending principal forum meetings
6. Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
• Use of time management for curriculum and programme scheduling • Creating self-reflection and staff reflection opportunities • Conflict resolution and negotiation meetings where needed

4.9.1 Communication tasks

Using communication skills and having the ability to promote the vision and mission of the organisation, the ECD principal should be tasked with marketing and public relations activities with the intention of growing their network, encouraging participation, and furthering stakeholder support. The use of emails, face-to-face interactions, newsletters, and phone calls (to name but a few tasks) may be necessary to achieve the functions set out for the principal. In addition, innovation in the direction of enterprising, business-oriented ECD centres could be impacted and improved if management and workplace culture allow for creativity and learning, particularly with the use of technology (Chew & Lyon, 2012; Seṇkāne, 2014).

4.9.2 Planning and financial management tasks

A large amount of time and energy goes into identifying, engaging, applying for, and securing funding to keep an NGO in business running, and ECD centres are no different. The South African government has committed to ECD funding through the DSD Partial Care Facility subsidy and Grade R classrooms being supported by the DoBE (Desmond *et al*., 2019; Biersteker, 2012; Richter & Samuel, 2018). However, there is a disconnect between financial need and resource accessibility in South Africa and there is a high percentage of ECD centres unable to receive adequate support, despite receiving some levels of funding (Johnson, 2017; Meier, 2014). One should not assume that increased funding will directly impact children's quality of education or improve ECD indicators. The pursuit of sound governance of funded programmes with quality and value-based decision making should not be underestimated (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019).

Despite the benefits of government funding, delays in subsidy payment and administrative challenges have a negative knock-on effect for ECD centres and NPOs alike (Lu & Zhao, 2019; Wakhungu, 2019). Scarcity of funding can be the downfall of many ECD centres' business operations and can negatively impact the quality of services delivered (Meier, 2014; Richter & Samuels, 2017).

Similarly to what was initiated in Kenya, budgetary processes and incentives should be instituted in South Africa and the National Treasury should be at the forefront of investment into ECD services (Britto *et al*., 2014; Wakhungu, 2019). Supporting this, effective principals have been found to spend a considerable amount of time and energy considering how to collect fees and raise money from sponsors (Lumby, 2003; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). Due to the management skills needed to access funding, it would require competencies uniquely crafted to understand financial management, funding processes, and systems for accessing funds from both government and private donors. Innovative funding opportunities are being created in collaboration with large organisations working toward supporting the ECD sector globally and locally.

4.9.3 Teamwork tasks

In addition to the employed staff in South Africa, volunteers often become involved at ECD centres, for various reasons. Managing these volunteers is one of the tasks of ECD principals. This requires team-building tasks to orientate and train individuals who would like to offer their time, gain field experience, or demonstrate their competency in childcare without remuneration. Volunteers should be carefully selected, trained, and assigned clear tasks by the principal or manager who oversees the volunteers (Meier & Marais, 2018). Volunteers also require orientation regarding the rules and procedures of the ECD centre. The organisation's rules and norms may need to be repeated since volunteers are not usually trained or held by professional standards. A further challenge for ECD principals, is volunteer retention.

In order to address the challenges often experienced with volunteers, technology has been found to be a useful tool for managing and promoting volunteer opportunities in the NPO sector (McNutt, Guo, Goldkind & An, 2018; Xu & Saxton, 2019). Examples of this could be an online database for volunteer posts in a certain area or online advertisements for centre events.

Challenges of volunteering include time or working hours, issues with transportation, limited personal childcare, or possible cultural differences, which can create

misunderstandings between parents and teachers, such as language barriers, eye contact preferences, or differences in parenting practices (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Managing parents is another task of the ECD principal. ECD principals are required to engage with parents as part of their job description (Whitebook *et al*., 2012) and parent engagement is a priority for a comprehensive ECD programme. Through increased parent involvement, principals may feel more supported and improved organisational outcomes may be result from that. Parents and ECD principals should therefore maintain clear lines of communication in order to establish an effective partnership (Davin & Orr, 2018). South Africa has a unique history, which still impacts families and parents to the present day, as poverty and inequality have created a number of social issues placing pressure on parental responsibility (Baker, 2014a; Baker, 2014b; Mwansa & Kreiter, 2012; Scott, Arney & Vimparni, 2010). ECD principals should therefore engage in a variety of family support initiatives providing holistic care to the children at their centre (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019; Halgunseth 2009).

While volunteers and parents are usually within close proximity to the centre and often become the direct support base for the centre, working alongside the community should also be a priority for principals (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010).

4.9.4 Strategic action tasks

Strategic decisions could be made on a number of levels, particularly tasks regarding acquisition and allocation of resources such as assets or personnel (Rugimbana & Oseifuah, 2010). In order to be strategic, meetings, workshops, and training should be a regular occurrence in a learning organisation. Technology could be a useful tool for managers to use to enhance this strategic approach. There are, however, barriers to the use of technology in schools, which include lack of funding, lack of time, poor departmental support, and older teachers' resistance to technology (Seņkāne, 2014; Wilbur, 2017).

Innovation is seen as a creative process which leads to improved designs and the implementation of new ideas (Henriksen & Mishra, 2015). In the ECD context, this can be achieved by creating a digital marketing strategy to encourage online engagement and donor relations. Interestingly, the size of an NGO governing board and the age of the organisation are noted to be significant predictors of innovations as larger boards offer additional human capital to the organisation (Jaskyte, 2013a).

4.9.5 Global awareness tasks

In an ever-changing global economy, Lombard (2015) makes a strong argument for cooperation between stakeholders and departments if the intention is to achieve the commitments proposed in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (Lombard, 2012). The international definition of social work (IFSW, 2014) speaks to the importance of a global community where the experience of the individual has an impact on the wider collective (Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2016). ECD is making progressive leaps as a sector in countries across the world towards achieving this goal, which can filter down to ECD centre management tasks, as social work managers and ECD principals can be seen as catalysts for the greater good of the sector as a whole (Zonji, 2018).

One needs to view both ECD principals and social workers in the ECD field as the workforce and stakeholders behind the social work agenda and ECD mission. Furthermore, encouraging communities to interact meaningfully with local governments has been on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development since 2012, which informs social workers in ECD management positions to be actively engaged with ECD principals (International Federation of Social Workers, International Association of Schools of Social Work & International Council on Social Welfare, 2012; Lombard, 2015). Global challenges and developments impact local ECD centres, and a developmental approach is necessary in South Africa where the ECD sector is striving towards the capacity building of individuals in order to enhance the sector as a whole (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014). Shared knowledge globally, nationally, and locally becomes important for the preservation and promotion of management skills, particularly in Africa as an

emerging economy (Tchamyou, 2017), and advocacy tasks could include promoting the rights and responsibilities of staff and children, furthering the ECD agenda within the centre and publicly, encouraging advocacy of child protection, and attending principal forum meetings.

4.9.6 Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks

A newly desirable competency for managers, is emotional intelligence. In addition, prioritising self-reflection and staff reflection offer opportunities for sharing and participation as well as learning. Conflict resolution and negotiation meetings are also necessary tasks for management to help operate with the understanding of emotional impact and to prioritise human capital.

Self-management requires principals to be able to arrange their time for maximum efficiency and Pretorius (2019) emphases the importance of learning to manage time well in a social service setting. Organised tasks and goal-oriented schedules are encouraged for optimal productivity, and therefore the use of time management for curriculum and programme scheduling is a key task for principals

4.10 MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ECD PRINCIPALS

South Africa's schools face a number of uniquely contextual challenges, including poor skills, a discrepancy between principals and teachers knowing best practices but not following this knowledge through in implementation, tensions between teachers and students, and red tape often hindering schools receiving necessary support (Bisschoff, 2009). A South African study by Fourie and Fourie (2016) highlighted the red-flag concerns for principals, namely poorly managed finances, inadequate administration, absence of managers from the centre, poor communication with parents and practitioners, sub-standard record keeping, lack of resources, and little or no professional development of staff.

Limited professional training often hinders principals' ability to fulfil their role to their full potential (Onguko, Abdalla & Webber, 2012). The lack of qualifications that could add credibility to the quality of services remains a big hurdle to the professionalisation and quality assurance of the ECD services in South Africa (Fourie & Fourie, 2016), as ECD principals require management development support and mentorship in order to be effective (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Tsui and Cheung (2004) presented the idea that management knowledge is not merely common sense but a practice requiring experiential opportunities, dedication, leadership, and core principles which may not be taught to managers. As a sector, ECD should be creating a supportive environment, especially for those in management-level roles, whereby learning and leadership can be fostered and utilised to improve the services and programmes being delivered (Garvin, Edmondson & Gono, 2008). Difficult working conditions are also noted to be a challenge to the ECD workforce (Carrasco, 2019), as well as understaffed centres, limited benefits, and shockingly low salaries (Whitebook, Phillips & Howes, 2014).

Aside from environmental and workplace challenges, issues with supervision and centre monitoring have been identified, should ECD scale up in South Africa towards the idealised comprehensive package of ECD services (Desmond *et al*., 2019). Several barriers have been highlighted that prevent individuals from becoming entrepreneurs, which include family challenges, poor educational background, inability to gain access to financial resources, scarcity of physical resources, lack of potential customers, social cultural challenges, as well as rigid rules and regulations (Gorji & Rahimian, 2011). The preservation of knowledge on *how* principals overcome these challenges would add valuable indigenous knowledge, particularly in South Africa.

4.11 CONCLUSION

ECD is a national government priority due to the large-scale impact it has on society. It creates the platform for better educational outcomes, provides many employment opportunities, serves as a driving force for local economic development in poor communities, and has the potential to promote economic growth. Ensuring that

human resources are adequately trained, designated, and mentored, will determine the success of the government's agenda to see ECD principals running and managing sustainable centres by 2030. Regardless of their training, the majority of principals believe they have learnt the skills they needed while on the job, and, in general, lacked mentorship (Portin *et al*., 2003).

This chapter presented the intricate mosaic of skills, functions, and tasks, collectively termed as the essential management competencies fulfilled by an ECD principal. The core components of ECD principal management competencies were identified and described, referring to the major authors and sources in the field of principal management.

In the next chapter, the research methodology will be presented.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past, narrating one's research methodology often offered readers only terms and definitions and not necessarily the in-depth scientific understanding that is required from academic research. Over the years, research methodology has improved in rigor and trustworthiness over the time (Tracy, 2010). The approach taken in this chapter seeks to add value to the methods selected for this study and to serve as a reflection on the process followed during the research.

The aim and objectives of this study called for a qualitative inquiry as research methodology. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa effectively. Through a series of four objectives, this aim was achieved: The first objective was the contextualisation of the management of ECD centres in South Africa by presenting the current framework of South African ECD policy and the monitoring processes of the DSD for registration of ECD centres in South Africa, as well as examining the ECD sector's challenges of partial care registration and the management processes of an ECD centre. The second objective involved a literature review synthesising the essential management competencies of ECD principals with the use of a contextual framework. The learning organisation approach (LOA) was found to present a practical approach for ECD centre management to follow, with the incorporation of competency frameworks for management skills, functions, and tasks. The third objective was achieved through an empirical investigation into the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage their centres. And lastly, the fourth objective was to present conclusions and recommendations for ECD principals, SSOs, and government departments such as the DSD and the DoBE.

This chapter discusses the decision-making process that took place during this study. Paul and Marfo (2021) mention that a scientific research process should prioritise sound research processes, behaviours, and ethical principles. The scientific research processes implemented in the study will be detailed in the sections below under eight

main topics namely: (1) the research dimensions, (2) the research approach, (3) the research design and method, (4) the literature study (research skills), (5) population and sampling, (6) method of data collection, (7) data management and analysis, and (8) research ethics. The limitations of the study will also be discussed.

5.2 RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

5.2.1 Philosophical dimensions

A research paradigm is a series of underlying beliefs that influence our interpretation of the world around us. This is important for researchers, because different philosophical dimensions will position a researcher and their study, influencing the way a problem is viewed (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). Sound research procedures require carefully made decisions: We should be questioning the decisions and assumptions upon which research is based in order to understand the breadth and depth of the research process and our ability to trust the knowledge generated and presented (Neuman, 2011).

The way one views science continues to develop as our philosophical understanding, perceptions, implementation, dissemination, and arguments for sound research change (Paul & Marfo, 2001). Social science tends to adopt certain beliefs and dimensions dependent on the research question and the researcher's chosen modus operandi in terms of their practice. Below is a summary of the philosophical dimensions: ontology (see Table 5.1), axiology (see Table 5.2), epistemology (see Table 5.3), and methodology (see Table 5.4), as they relate to social research. In each table, the shaded text indicates the chosen paradigm for this study.

Table 5.1 Definitions of ontology with associated paradigms

Research Dimension: Ontology		
Definition	One's position on how reality is constructed	
Paradigms		
Positivism	**Interpretivism**	**Pragmatism**
Reality is objective, independent, and external to social constructs	Reality is subjective and socially constructed	A combination of objective and subjective viewpoints to be answered by the research question

(Raveneck & Rudman, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012)

Ontology is the position taken on how reality is constructed (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013). For the purposes of this study, *interpretivism* was chosen as an oncological perspective because of the subjective nature of the interpretation of qualitative narratives.

Table 5.2 Definitions of axiology with associated paradigms

Axiology		
Definition	The value set underpinning a researcher's beliefs	
Paradigms		
Positivism	**Interpretivism**	**Pragmatism**
Value-free research perspective	Value-rich research perspective	Value embedded into researcher and research

(Schegloff, 1997; Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005)

While axiology is the prevailing value set underpinning a researcher's beliefs, this would be important to formally establish from the outset of the research, because the researcher would need to follow certain design processes to ensure their beliefs are upheld throughout the study. For example, in an *interpretivist* study, such as this one, the research should pursue methods and procedures which allow the study to elicit depth of understanding and value behind the data gathered. This involves both

deductive and inductive reasoning, as well as self-reflexivity to ensure that the data, in this case narratives gathered by the researcher, remain true to the participants' answers (Oliphant & Bennett, 2020; Tracy, 2010). A value-rich perspective was adopted by the researcher to allow the participants to convey their social world with their chosen value set.

Table 5.3 Definitions of epistemology with associated paradigms

Epistemology		
Definition	One's position on knowledge generation and understanding	
Paradigms		
Positivism	**Interpretivism**	**Pragmatism**
Only objective, observable data is considered credible data	Data collected is subjective Value, meaning, and motives of a participant are considered valid	Combination of data and subjective meaning Data is applied and integrated

(Adapted from: Wahyuni, 2012)

Epistemology is defined as one's position on acceptable knowledge generation and understanding (Wahyuni, 2012). An interpretivist paradigm is often utilised in social science research endeavours and assumes that subjective meaning, value, and motivation of the participant are considered valid. With this in mind, this study was constructed within an *interpretivism paradigm* due to the reflective nature of the topic that deems the findings to be subjective. Subjective, rich-in-meaning views and data from the participants are viewed as acceptable knowledge contributing towards a deeper understanding of the research problem and, ultimately, the research question.

Table 5.4 Definitions of methodology with associated paradigms

Methodology		
Definition	A structured process or technique through which something is researched.	
Paradigms		
Positivism	**Interpretivism**	**Pragmatism**
Quantitative inquiry	Qualitative inquiry	Mixed-methods inquiry

(Adapted from: Sarantakos, 2005; Wahyuni, 2012)

The methodology chosen, whether it is a quantitative, qualitative or a mixed-methods inquiry, is dictated by one's research paradigm and the data you wish to collect. Methodology includes three dimensions, which provides a clear foundation upon which a research method, approach, and design can be based. Sefotho (2015) rightly notes that without a philosophical route, much like a roadmap, the direction of research and the researcher may become lost. While research methods should be systemic, the decisions made prior to the methods are important for the philosophical foundation and scaffolding of the study. Due to the interpretivist paradigm being best suited to achieve the objectives of this study, a *qualitative methodology* was employed.

5.2.2 Philosophical decision-making process

There is a process in place to progress from theory, to new data acquisition, to, ultimately, new knowledge. As depicted in Figure 5.1, a researcher will need to decide on their ontological stance, which determines their epistemological dimensions, upon which an axiology role is assumed. With this in mind, the decision-making journey can continue, and the research strategy chosen. This process not only ensures that the researcher is adopting the correct perspective on reality, but also ensures that the methods that are used, are ideally crafted to obtain data that suit the philosophical dimensions of the research and ultimately assist in answering the research question.

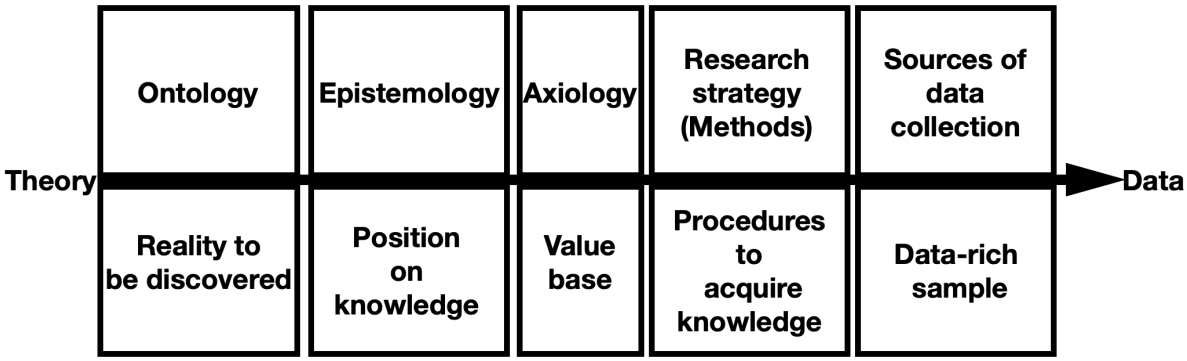

Figure 5.1 The philosophical decision-making process of a research study, adapted from Huff (2008)

Ensuring that your audience make similar assumptions about the nature of reality is significant, particularly in social research, as the intended outcomes should aim to contribute meaningfully to the researched field, both in theory and in practice (Huff, 2008). Communicating one's decision-making process becomes crucial for the understanding of the knowledge generated. In essence, the research process is just as relevant as the research product.

This study aimed to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage centres in South Africa. A subjective, interpretivist position was taken with the belief that sufficient knowledge would be gained through the participants' narratives that are value rich from both their own and the researcher's perspective.

5.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach deemed suitable for the study was a qualitative research approach (Bansal & Corley, 2011; Fouché & Delport, 2021), used for obtaining an understanding of individuals' beliefs, values, and experiences, and to view situations from the participants' perspective (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Primarily drawing upon the work of Lincoln and Guba (2005), the advantage of the qualitative approach is that it allows for the researcher to gain deeper understanding and interpretation of thoughts, attitudes, experiences, and narratives of individuals, which cannot be gleaned from numerical data obtained by quantitative inquiry.

Conversely, there are a few criticisms of the qualitative approach, which include the inherently subjective analysis of data, the time-consuming nature of the research process, and the resource-intensive techniques such as interviewing and transcribing (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Authors have also noted that qualitative data analysis may be challenging for novice researchers who lack experience in the interpretation of narrative data. Lastly, due to the smaller sample size characteristic of qualitative inquiry, findings cannot be widely generalised but are context bound and should be viewed as such (Mason, 2010).

5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Qualitative research using a case study design should ideally be undertaken through multiple cases (Wahyuni, 2012). This requires a researcher to make a clear distinction between case samples, particularly in interpretivist, qualitative research, with small populations, where specific characteristics of each case would need to be considered carefully to be able to generalise findings (Wahyuni, 2012).

The research design, often likened to an architect's building plans, sets in motion the way a researcher should pursue answers for their research question.

The scope of the study, demarcated in the research goal, was specifically to focus on the management competencies that are essential for the principal of an ECD centre. This research study utilised a combination of exploratory and descriptive research to investigate the lived experiences of ECD principals from various provinces around South Africa to achieve the aim of the study. Social work managers in the ECD field were included in the population as they hold a supervisory and mentoring role to ECD principals. Through the in-depth exploration of each particular case, understanding of the "what", the "why", and the "how" of ECD principals' performance of essential management competencies was achieved. Upon reflection, the combination of research designs was fitting for a qualitative study that needed to first ask more broadly *what* the management competencies of ECD principals are and then expand

that conversation into *why* they are important. Further research could explore *how* ECD principals are acquiring these competencies.

An exploratory case study (Figure 5.2) investigates a situation or phenomenon where little is known in the particular field of interest (Yin, 2009), which in this case is the management competencies of ECD principals.

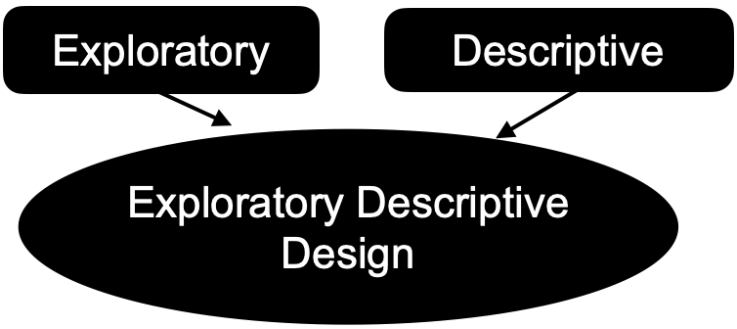

Figure 5.2 Combination of design methods

This exploratory descriptive design allows for the exploration of research phenomena by letting researchers establish and explore the "why" behind the research responses.

With the goal of gathering an in-depth understanding of the research topic, a case study design with multiple cases was considered ideal (Yin, 2012; Yin, 2013) for this study. Exploring contemporary research topics is another factor that motivates the use of a case study (Wahyuni, 2012). Each ECD principal and manager became a case which was rich with insights and experiences that relate to the research question. The division of participant cohorts is graphically demonstrated in Figure 5.3.

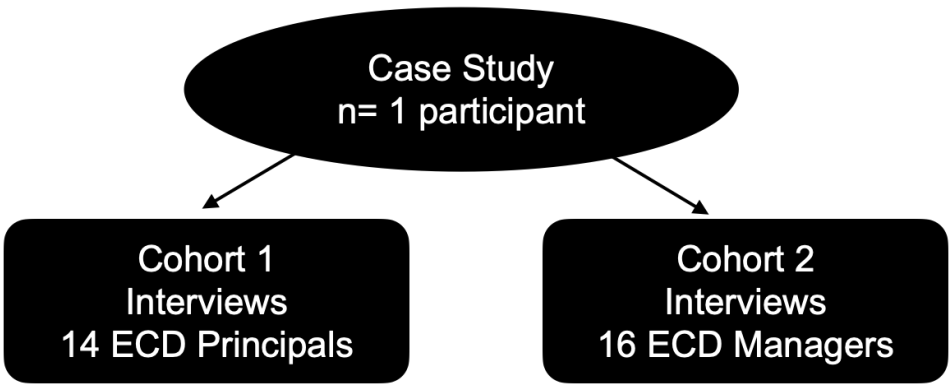

Figure 5.3 The case study design in context of the study

This case study design can be critiqued for the limited extent to which the findings can be generalised. Small samples are, however, possible in an exploratory descriptive case study design and in this study a total of 30 participants were included, which is deemed suitable for a qualitative study (Mason, 2010). The researcher found that having two cohorts, and in other words two different perspectives, added layers of experience, and interviewees tended to qualify each other's perspectives, which assisted with meeting saturation. Although ECD principals may have a different perspective on certain issues than ECD managers, there was a synergy in the findings (see Chapter 6) and both cohorts made a valuable contribution towards answering the research question. It was a fruitful endeavour to seek out managers for their reflections on management due to the hands-on experience they have.

5.5 LITERATURE STUDY

The literature study/review became a prominent feature of this study's framework and a strength of the interview schedule.

It was useful to take a systematic approach towards reading, organising, and storing the literature. The researcher found it beneficial to create order within the vast plethora of sources and materials by means of a numerical coding system for each article, based on a number assigned to the emerging concepts from literature. Instead of aimlessly reading, each article was read and grouped carefully into its numerical category for later use and cross referencing. The following words by Marryat (1898) aptly describes this literature coding and article filing system: "[…] a place for everything and everything in its place". The process used for finding literature included online searches, library book searches, and use of industry-specific materials, many of which were obtained through online searches. Relevant master's studies conducted within a South African context were identified with a keyword search on Google Scholar and several South African databases. The existing studies conducted within the field of ECD lack a management focus, but do look at school leadership, principal management, and educational management. Other searched

terms included “management skills”, “financial literacy”, “organisational learning”, and “ECD policy”.

Evaluating previous research was a valuable exercise for constructing the theoretical framework of this study and the interview guide (Annexure A and B), creating a suitable lens through which to analyse the data. The literature search process and filing system encouraged the researcher to actively read, while looking for patterns in the texts, establish gaps in literature, and determine the quality of research conducted previously in the field. The researcher tended to prefer articles written with a social development narrative or a learning organisation approach (LOA), however, contemporary South African studies within an ECD context were not commonly found.

Three literature review chapters were presented in accordance with the research objectives. In Chapter 2 the management of an ECD centre in South Africa was contextualised by a theoretical framework of the essential management competencies (namely, management skills, functions, and tasks), in Chapter 3, an learning organisation approach (LOA) was applied to an ECD management setting, and in Chapter 4 a contextual framework of the essential management competencies was provided.

5.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Sixteen SSO managers and 14 ECD principals from across South Africa were recruited to participate in this study. As a result of the virtual data collection method due to Covid-19, the researcher made a minor change to the criteria for inclusion to include participants from not only the Western Cape (as initially intended), but from other provinces in South Africa as well. This did not alter any other criteria from inclusion or exclusion and should be considered minor as the Western Cape is part of South Africa. This was a minor change from the original proposal, which intended to focus predominantly on Western Cape ECD principals as an area thought to be ahead of the other provinces in terms of their DSD registration support. This change was deemed an adjustment that strengthened the study, as it allowed for a variety of management experiences to be considered from different provinces. The criteria

ensured that information-rich participants were included in the study, but also allowed for a variety of demographic contexts and social backgrounds.

Scapens (2004) supports that a suitable case would be one where the research question is of value to the organisation sampled. Non-probability purposive sampling allows for carefully considered criteria for inclusion, based on participants' ability to participate in the research question and provide data-rich responses and engage meaningfully (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Wahyuni, 2012). The inclusion of both registered and unregistered centres was purposeful in this study for obtaining both successes and challenges managers are currently experiencing in their pursuit of sustainability and government-funded support.

5.7 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The research design was carefully planned and strategic, but the design and methodology also evolved throughout the study, allowing for creativity and necessitating flexibility. These were necessary in light of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, which will be discussed in this chapter in relation to the research methodology and process.

Primary data was to be collected from the sample population of ECD principals and managers through the use of individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Due to the pandemic, this, however, changed to telephonic interviews. These participants were identified and recruited through an NGO referral network in the ECD sector. The researcher chose key SSOs involved in the ECD centre registration process of the DSD as well as from training institutions. By approaching the gatekeepers of these SSOs, consent and participant involvement were established. Passing on knowledge and experiences is the outcome of semi-structured interviews (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of the interviews was to gain participants' experiences, stories, and perspectives, particularly regarding their active involvement in the ECD sector in South Africa.

As previously noted, there are a number of advantages to face-to-face interviews, however, the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and the rapid spread of the virus throughout South Africa and the world, changed the nature of this intended collection process. Stellenbosch University took a proactive decision to suspend all social contact, including for social research (Stellenbosch University Communication, 20 March 2020). In response to the position statement on responsible research conduct during the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher made minor administrative changes in order to ensure social distancing by using a hybrid interviewing method whereby participants were given the option, for their ease and safety during this time, to choose what platform they would find most convenient and accessible: either virtual face-to-face or telephonic interviews. This made provision for alternative interview methods even after the end of the country's lockdown period. All virtual interviews would uphold and maintain the same ethical considerations as physical face-to-face interviews, so no other ethical requirements needed to be changed. Confidentiality was ensured and protected, as described in Chapter 1. These minor administrative amendments did not affect the study design, study outcomes, or the risk level of the project. Focus groups were not appropriate for this study as individuals may not have been comfortable sharing their experiences in front of other people, and Covid-19 regulations prescribed that gathering groups of individuals was discouraged during the time of data collection. Unstructured interviewing is furthermore time consuming and could have led to unnecessary data collection.

Reflecting on the changes made during Covid-19, the researcher made several conclusions with regard to this study:

- Several changes were made to the research proposal, due to the 2020 global pandemic, which took time to be approved by the ethical clearance committee of Stellenbosch University. This delay meant that the dates and arrangement for data collection were changed a number of times.
- The data collection phase of the study occurred during an unprecedented time of a global pandemic (20 April 2020 – 10 July 2020). The uncertainty and changes to society meant that an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear was present, which were evident in some of the interview narratives.

- The national lockdown, which commenced 14 March 2020, impacted the ECD sector as well as tertiary academic activities. This was frustrating and created a tension between managing the crisis and planning ahead.
- Technology became crucial for the progression of this research project. Communication via email, telephone, and online video calls became the norm (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017; Jowett, 2020) and useful tools for communicating with participants.
- As a researcher, I was challenged to be adaptable and creative to harness this experience as a learning opportunity and not a barrier to progress.
- The Covid-19 crisis called for my own personal leadership to come to the fore and respond – as a researcher, a social worker, and citizen of civil society – to respond to the crisis proactively.

It was critical to reflect on this process and the impact it had on the research process as the experience should be preserved for future researchers to understand the unique crisis which altered everyday life and academic experiences from 2020, onward. Jowett (2020) provides an insightful perspective on the use of online platforms for research during the pandemic and encourages researchers to consider participants well-being and comfort when engaging in remote data collection. The adjusted, hybrid data collection process meant that it was possible to conduct interviews remotely, which was cost effective and saved time as no travel was necessary. The researcher did find that the telephonic interviews were often fairly transactional and more impersonal and thus lacked the relational component that is usually cultivated in a face-to-face interview. Carr and Worth (2001) also found challenges and limitations to the use of telephones in research. The transactional disadvantage of telephonic engagement was out of the researcher's control, however, it should be noted that several of the ECD principals were communicating in their second home language, which also contributed to a less engaging conversation.

The semi-structured format was effective for obtaining in-depth explanations. Several authors provide guidelines for developing research tools such as a semi-structured

interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) that allow for a conversational style interviews that are intentional, relaxed, open, and honest (King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2018).

By creating a core list of questions for participants, a systematic outline was created for each interview, yet flexibility existed to be able to ask follow-up questions and explore participants' responses. Responsive interviewing was selected for this study as a suitable method for exploring topics with open-ended questions, follow-up questions, and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Reflection upon workplace learning was encouraged by the researcher through the use of flexible interview questions which sought to collect in-depth data in order to achieve the aim of the study (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008; Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2018; Pease, 2006).

The process of collecting data from main questions and the use of follow-up questions on particular themes, endorsed by Wahyuni, 2012 and Morris (2015), was integrated into the development of this study's interview schedule. These themes incorporated into the interview schedule were submitted to the Research Ethic Committee of Stellenbosch University (REC) for approval. A generalised question was presented for each of the essential management competencies, followed by an anticipated probe and specific competency question formulated on the theoretical framework concepts. An example is provided below:

> **General question**: *"What are the essential functions of an ECD principal?"*
> **Specific probe question**: *"Could you elaborate further on the specific function of leadership?"*

This responsive approach is founded upon and in favour of the interpretive research dimension. Researchers recommend that conducting "good" interviews requires epistemological and practical flexibility, rather than the restrictive paradigm-driven compliance by the researcher (Wolgemuth, Erdil-Moody, Opsal, Cross, Kaanta, Dickmann & Colomer, 2014). The interview guide (See Annexure A and B) was constructed with the theoretical support from Engelbrecht's (2019:16) conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks. The researcher found this framework to be useful and easily adaptable to the ECD workforce in South Africa. Most noteworthy to mention, is that the conceptual framework accommodated the

interrelated nature of management skills, functions, and tasks. The combination of skills, tasks, and functions are not static but include individual competencies within the competency model, as described in Chapter 4.

A specific probe question was repeated in more than one interview for the purposes of saturation with both cohorts (ECD managers and principals), covering these specific competencies. Below (Table 5.5) is the allocation table which directed the unique probe questions during each interview. A systematic approach ensured that each of the essential management competencies were explored by at least two participants, thus from participant 13, the researcher considered saturation for each cohort due to the repeated thematic narratives established through the allocation. Only the ECD principal allocation table is included below, and the identical ECD manager allocation table can be found in Annexure E.

Table 5.5 Interview allocation of unique questions linked to skills, tasks and functions for ECD principals

ECD principal allocation of unique questions			
Participant #	**Skills (A-C)**	**Functions (D-G)**	**Task**
A	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills	(F1) Planning	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
B	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills	(F2) Organising	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of registration and compliance		(T4) Strategic action tasks
C	(S5) Technical Skills: M&E	(F3) Leading	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S6) Technical skills: Green environmental skills		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks

D	(S7) Technical skills: Using technology	(F4) Controlling	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S8) Human skills: Communication		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
F	(S11) Conceptual skills: Policy development skills	(F2) Organising	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S12) Conceptual skills: Decision making		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
G	(S13) Conceptual skills: Designing a learning culture and process	(F3) Leading	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
H	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills	(F4) Controlling	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks
I	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of registration and compliance	(F1) Planning	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S5) Technical skills: M&E		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
J	(S6) Technical skills: Green environmental skills	(F2) Organising	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S7) Technical skills: Using technology		(T2) Planning and financial management Tasks
K	(S8) Human skills: Communication	(F3) Leading	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S9) Human skills: Group facilitation and team-building skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks
L	(S10) Human skills: Mentoring and coaching	(F4) Controlling	(T5) Global awareness tasks

	(S11) Conceptual skills: Policy development skills		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
M	(S12) Conceptual skills: Decision making	(F1) Planning	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S13) Conceptual skills: Designing a learning culture and process		T2) Planning and financial management tasks
N	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills	(F2) Organising	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks

Prior to conducting the interview, the schedule should be given context and introduction, explaining the purpose of the research to the participant, as well as emphasising the ethical considerations of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (Wahyuni, 2012). Each interview was coded with a unique code (ECD Principals A–N; ECD Managers 1–16) and given a time stamp for ease of analysis and identification without the use of actual names. Participant E was removed from the data set due to network issues, which meant that the interview was not recorded properly. The manual coding of transcriptions which was adopted in this study, has been praised for preserving the voice of the participants, particularly in qualitative studies (Parameswaran, Ozawa-Kirk & Latendresse, 2020). During the interviews, a recorder and microphone were used for recording purposes. The telephonic interviews presented challenges when there were issues with connectivity, as this meant that the recording would also cut momentarily. Those questions had to be repeated, which was time consuming.

A pilot study is a trial run for a study to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of the methodology, instruments, and analysis (Kim, 2010; Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim & Yusof, 2017; Dikko, 2016). It gives the proposed study an opportunity to foresee the possible challenges that might be encountered in the actual study. In this study, one semi-structured one-on-one interview was conducted with one of the participants to test the effectiveness of the interview in data collection. The participant met the same criteria of the sample group demographics. No changes were made

after the pilot study interview, since the questions elicited in-depth responses to be able to answer the research question.

5.8 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

5.8.1 Method of data analysis

Interviews were transcribed for the purposes of representing the narrative of the interviews conducted with the 14 ECD principals and the 16 ECD managers. Each interview was typed out verbatim and the process of denaturalisation was used to remove interviewee noise, incorrect grammar, and unnecessary stutters for the purposes of obtaining purely informational narratives (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004; Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Data was stored online and in a secure folder with a password for access. Duplicate files of the recordings and transcripts were also stored.

In their article, Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) raise concerns about transcription, mentioning pronunciation, slang, accent, diction, verbal and non-verbal vocalisations, as well as concerns with grammar. However, while the process and experience of transcription tends to attract negative connotations by researchers, authors rightly argue that transcription is also central to harnessing the participant's message (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). While interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview, an interval of intentional reflection was inserted into the process to ensure that the denaturalisation process and decision making regarding the participants' intended meanings and the construction of their perceptions through cleaned narratives were contemplated in light of each participant and the goal of the research (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilised thematic content analysis by colour coding and providing unique numerical codes to common themes and categories in a code book. Yin (2009) suggests that one strategy for dealing with data is the use of a theoretical supportive framework for establishing codes. The researcher found the use of hard copies suitable for the analysis of each interview and that colours were helpful to make the analysis and interpretation easier.

The use of tables and visual representations of the sample demographics in quantitative terms assisted with interpretation and presented an understandable context for the study sample. It should be noted that the use of tables and visuals in the first section of Chapter 6 does not make the study quantitative. Once again, the research question and goal directed the analysis process and this was helpful, particularly when reducing the codes and data (Wahyuni, 2012).

5.8.2 Method of data verification

There are four key components of *trustworthiness* developed by Lincoln and Guba (1986) namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. As detailed in Chapter 1, *credibility* was achieved with all interview transcripts and with both cohorts by providing conclusions based on current literature (presented in the literature review) and data found in the empirical findings (Chapter 6). Furthermore, the researcher handled the data from the interviews in such a way that they adequately maintained the richness of the expressed information from the participants. The research process was logically tracked and documented, and an inquiry audit was created to authenticate the process of interviewing. The researcher's supervisor functioned as a reviewer and *dependability* checker to ensure that that process was transparent and relevant to the study. The narratives that emerged from the interviews, all of which were transcribed, were utilised to meet the criteria for *confirmability*. An independent transcriber verified the interviews to further determine confirmability of the data collected. In addition, a methodological audit trail assisted the researcher and supervisor, who acted as the research auditor, to establish confirmability through the research process. A collective research design involving multiple cases that linked data to the research findings ensured *transferability* (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017:50; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2021). This was further pursued by offering a detailed contextual description of the study that does not assume that the findings are applicable to all ECD principals residing in South Africa. Prolonged field exposure was also adopted, which ensured that data remained trustworthy. These activities allowed the researcher to validate the interpretations that

were presented and confidently draw conclusions extracted from the participants' reflections.

Upon reflection, it can be concluded that trustworthiness of the data and research process were established and maintained in the study. The researcher endorses the use of these strategies for qualitative studies in the social sciences as quality control mechanisms and accountability measures.

5.9 RESEARCH ETHICS

The ethical integrity of the study and that of the researcher were upheld throughout the study. As a social worker, The Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2011) is the guiding document that upholds the standards of professional practice, including research. Principle-oriented research was prioritised and upheld as a pillar of a quality study (Paradis & Varpio, 2018; Strydom, 2011). Research ethics approval was obtained through Stellenbosch University, approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE) on 11 February 2020 and amendments to the project proposal were accepted on 15 May 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Project number: 13061). See Annexure F for the Ethics Notice of Approval Amendment Form. Covid-19 was an unprecedently occurrence and presented the researcher with the need to evaluate and maintain ethical procedures to uphold guidelines under unique circumstances and regulations. The administrative amendments made to the study did not affect the design, outcomes, or the risk level of the project in any way.

5.9.1 Ethical guidelines in research

The study was in compliance with Stellenbosch University Policy on Research Ethics and research guidelines and policy (Stellenbosch University, 2013), which details the responsibly of the researcher if human participants are to participate in a study. In addition, ethical concerns and expected research practices are further detailed (Stellenbosch University, 2013). As an institution, Stellenbosch University requires their postgraduate researchers to maintain a high calibre of research practice, which

is based on the following principles for promoting research integrity: honesty in all aspects of research; accountability in the conduct of research; professional courtesy and fairness in working with others, and good stewardship (Stellenbosch University, 2013). In congruence with the institution's research ethos, the Policy on Plagiarism (Stellenbosch University Council, 2016) was consulted in support of the academic integrity of the study. All sources were cited and acknowledged in accordance with this policy. The researcher took great care to ensure that the ethical principles were upheld, and that the ethical integrity of the study was considered in each stage of the research process. Two useful documents that were used to further support the ethical rigor of the study was the UNISA Ethics Policy (UNISA, 2016), as it is a comprehensive policy that mentions a number of key ethical considerations, and the well-known, foundational, Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). A summary of the specific ethical considerations incorporated into the study with support from the above documents can be found below:

- **Informed consent** was obtained from each participant to ensure voluntary participation (Mouton, 2019; Strydom, 2011). Participants were sent individual copies of their signed consent forms (Annexures C and D). For the use of electronical data collection in the form of telephone calls, informed consent was obtained electronically, in a unique format to protect anonymity (UNISA, 2016).

- **Voluntary participation** and **right to withdraw** were made known to each participant. No participant was coerced into participating. Written consent was obtained from all support group participants and permission was obtained to record the interviews. Participants were also made aware of the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Strydom, 2011).

- Each participant had the right to **privacy and confidentiality** of personal data (Strydom, 2011). Wherever possible, the known linkage between the individual and the SSO was minimised (Stellenbosch University Council, 2016; UNISA, 2016). The hybrid data collection process required the research to be ethically

mindful of the potential ethical challenges involved with utilising virtual platforms. Confidentiality was raised as a potential, however, as described in Chapter 1, all virtual interviews upheld the ethical considerations. All data gathered was stored securely on a password-protected computer.

- **Prevention of harm was assured by the researcher for all participants.** Mitigation of risk is needed necessary for sound research practice. (Mouton, 2019; UNISA, 2016)**.** Due to the lack of emotional content and nature of the research aim, the study was demarcated as a **low-risk study** with the only foreseeable risk being that of discomfort or inconvenience. The study was furthermore considered to be a low ethical risk because it involved adult participants who were not part of a vulnerable group, nor was the topic of a sensitive nature. Participants were recruited to participate in the study in their personal capacity, which did not reflect their organisations' views or methodology. Care was taken and respect given to the individuals so that appointments for interviews would not interfere with the participants' work setting and obligations.

5.9.2 Reflexivity and research bias

There is value behind reflection on the impact that bias could play in the construction of a research project (Ruokonen-Engler & Siouti, 2016). There might have been a tendency to select certain individuals over others in the sample group due to the similarities between the researcher and the ECD manager cohort (Laxton, 2004). This was address by the criteria for inclusion, and participants were also given the opportunity to refer colleagues rather than the researcher preselecting these individuals.

Reflection upon workplace learning was encouraged by the researcher through the use of flexible interview questions and personal post-interview journaling for added reflexivity (Oliphant & Bennett, 2020). Reflective journaling is a purposeful tool which creates a platform for introspection and deconstruction of the research process (Finlay, 2002; Ryan, 2011). Reflection tools such as this have been used in other

studies to explore the reflexivity of the researcher within the research process. See Annexure G for the application of a reflective report, using the journal questions presented by Oliphant and Bennett (2020). This report offered the researcher an opportunity to freely explore her own bias and experience of the research process within a unique world crisis. While interviewing, at a distance over the telephone, there was a wonderful strength in the reflections of principals of ECD centres during the strange time of Covid-19, as seen in in this reflective journal entry excerpt:

> I was left inspired and humbled. As a professional and researcher, I was reminded again of how incredibly resilient and creative the ECD sector is and that it's largely being led by such strong and motivated women living in less-than-ideal circumstances. Even over the telephone, these women spoke with such strength of the hurdles they have overcome. May powerful stories such as theirs be the reason the powers at be will see the value of investing in this essential sector delivering education and protection. (Timestamp: Personal Journal, Covid-19 Lockdown Level 3, June 2020)

It is helpful for a researcher to develop skills of critical reflection and self-awareness to ensure that potential bias and shortcomings in the study are acknowledged. In light of this, it should be noted that a power dynamic exists between the researcher and the principals, specifically due to a number of socio-cultural elements, such as ethnicity, social class, age, and level of education. There is also a certain level of status that comes with being a social worker and the researcher was aware that this could elicit responses from the participants based on what they expected a "social worker" wanted to hear. This was addressed by offering ECD principals ample space and time to reflect and share the narratives they felt were most relevant, and the researcher ensured throughout that the questions were asked in a neutral tone and in easy-to-understand language and using familiar terminology. Kim (2010) suggests the use of a pilot study to gauge the cultural sensitivity and appropriate tone of the questions being asked in a qualitative study, which was successfully done, as described in Section 5.7.

Social workers in a research capacity are social scientists; this requires them to fulfil the role of active engagement with critical discourse around the way the ECD sector is researched and how such research impacts the ECD sector in return (UCT Summer School, 2018). One needs to acknowledge the movement for decolonising research,

particularly in South Africa where indigenous knowledge has not always been captured in an academic context. Even the word "research" can be historically problematic and one should be aware of the fact that the ECD movement has previously been established on Western-centric knowledge and theory. Developing practice theory and collective knowledge indigenous to South Africa has recently been brought to light in the social work context (Van Breda, 2019). Smith (2013) argues that issues of decolonisation and addressing of bias can be addressed through reflexivity and self-awareness, and by ensuring that findings are disseminated back into the communities where the research was conducted. The researcher is aware that her involvement in the ECD sector prompted her interest in the research topic and that, in South Africa, she is closely linked to the topic professionally. This is further explored in the self-reflexivity report in Annexure G.

The researcher also noted that as a result of Covid-19, the research ethics policies available in South Africa should be reviewed and updated to include the complexities of online data collection and handling remote research in South Africa in a crisis situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.9.3 Stakeholder management

Stakeholders' relationships become important for the success of a study. There is an interactive process of managing these relationships, involving clear communication and ongoing engagement. In Table 5.6 below, several key stakeholders that were included in this researchers process are given, along with a definition for each, and supporting literature. A researcher's ability to understand support systems and enable relationships are seen to promote and improve the final research output.

Table 5.6 Definition of research stakeholders

Stakeholder	Definition	Supporting Literature
Supervisor	A supervisor functions as a supportive and educational guide to advise a student throughout their research journey. The supervisor can function as a quality controller for the study and a mentor towards the researcher's professional and	Mouton, 2019 Brynard, 2005 Engelbrecht, 2010 Saleem & Mehmood, 2018

	personal growth. Social work theory has several relevant characteristics and skills that are considered effective supervision in a clinical setting and a research environment. The supervisor-researcher relationship is an important one, while the supervisor has the potential to assist students with challenges and dilemmas.	
Language editor	Language expert able to offer editing and formatting services. Allows for improving the quality of document submitted for examination. Also known as: translator, editor, and proofreader. They are endorsed as professionals and offer language, spelling, and grammar assistance.	Mouton, 2019 Professional Editors' Guild, 2021
Funder	An agency, trust, foundation, or commissioner that makes financial contributions towards research. Example in South Africa: The National Research Foundation (NRF).	Mouton, 2019 Professional Editors' Guild, 2021 Stacey, Talbot & Coxon, 2019
Librarians	Assist students and researchers to find and review relevant sources of information. They promote the organisation of literature and are experts at searching for appropriate literature. Enhance the student experience, more recently with the ability to use online digital databases to find literature.	UNISA, 2016 Dudden & Protzko, 2011 Blackwood, 2020
Gatekeeper	A person in authority with recognised access to a research site. Provides approval for researchers or practitioners to enter the research site and contact the individuals within the site. Often used to locate and recruit participants.	Creswell,2009

Human participant	Individual from whom a researcher is able to obtain data in order to better understand phenomena.	UNISA, 2016
Collaborator: Transcriber	An interpretive process of converting sound and dialogue into written text from which analysis may occur. Should understand the language and be able to capture the interviews with accuracy. According to the interpretivist view, transcriptions are based on a range of decisions.	Davidson, 2009
Collaborator: Writing consultant	Workshops, programmes, consultations, or editing input. Less formal than a professional editor.	Jeyaraj, 2020 Stellenbosch University Language Centre, 2021 Huang & Archer, 2017
Friends and family	Social support systems that provide emotional and financial support as well as encouragement to overcome challenges during one's research journey. Often deemed a necessary coping strategy for successful research. Researchers use online platforms as a form of peer support to connect with others during their postgraduate studies. Often thanked in the acknowledgements of a thesis.	McLaughlin & Sillence, 2018. Byers, Smith, Hwang, Angrove, Chandler, Christian, Dickerson, McAlister-Shields, Thompson, Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2014 Lamprianou, Symeou & Theodorou, 2019 Stacey, Talbot & Coxon, 2019

It has been a fulfilling process as a researcher to reflect on the role several of the above stakeholders played in the research process, which was explored in the researcher's reflective report (see Annexure G).

5.10 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

No study is without some form of limitation and acknowledging these is part of the research process (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The researcher identified the following as limitations of the study:

- The choice of a case study design can be critiqued for its subjective nature. The lack of rigor is often raised as a weakness of a case study. As a result, measures to improve trustworthiness were implemented to ensure data is presented and verified accurately. These measures, for example, included credibility assurance through the interview schedule, largely constructed based on current literature. A detailed description of the additional measures used in this study can be found in Section 5.8.2.

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the data collection was conducted online, which was discussed in Section 5.4, and this created a shortcoming in the rapport and conversational style of interviewing. The researcher noted that telephonic interviews were more transactional, and this could have limited the conversation. In order to address this, the researcher used communication skills to ensure that, to the best of her abilities, rapport was built during the interviews.

- It is important to note that generalisability is not possible with a case study due to the small sample size and the specific study context (Farquhar, 2012, Yin, 2012). The criteria for inclusion ensured that only data-rich participants were included in the study, however, saturation still occurred with both cohorts of participants, which is encouraged by Mason (2010).

5.11 CONCLUSION

Research methodology is largely concerned with creating a roadmap for one's study so that others too may follow the pathways towards similar findings. The process is both theoretical and practical, which requires critique and consideration. A statement which rings true to the researcher is one that was written in context of a postgraduate research programme: "Nevertheless, the end result (and no doubt the journey itself) is [hard work but also] very rewarding!' (Begum, 2019:71). This sentiment is relevant to the methodology as the research process hosts as much value as the end result.

Adequate planning of the research methodology is important to ensure rigorous research, which was evident from this study. The ability to adjust the research process, if needed, is just as necessary, as the situation with Covid-19 illustrated. Rather than merely defining the terms associated with research methodology, this chapter aimed to reflect and engage with the process in a retrospective manner that encouraged critical appraise of rigor and research practice.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion of literature in Chapters 2 to 4 created a theoretical framework for the empirical investigation in this study, which is presented in this chapter as a result of the data collection stage. During data collection, 30 semi-structured interviews were held telephonically with 14 ECD principals and 16 ECD managers from SSOs. The findings based on the views of these ECD principals and ECD managers aim to advance an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals. The qualitative approach of this study was founded upon meaning, driven by the participants. This is congruent with the chosen research design, as the empirical findings are presented in the form of participant narratives and dialogue to deepen understanding and achieve the aim of the study. A graphic depiction of the three empirical themes of essential management competencies, which are each comprehensively unpacked in this chapter, is found below in Figure 6.1:

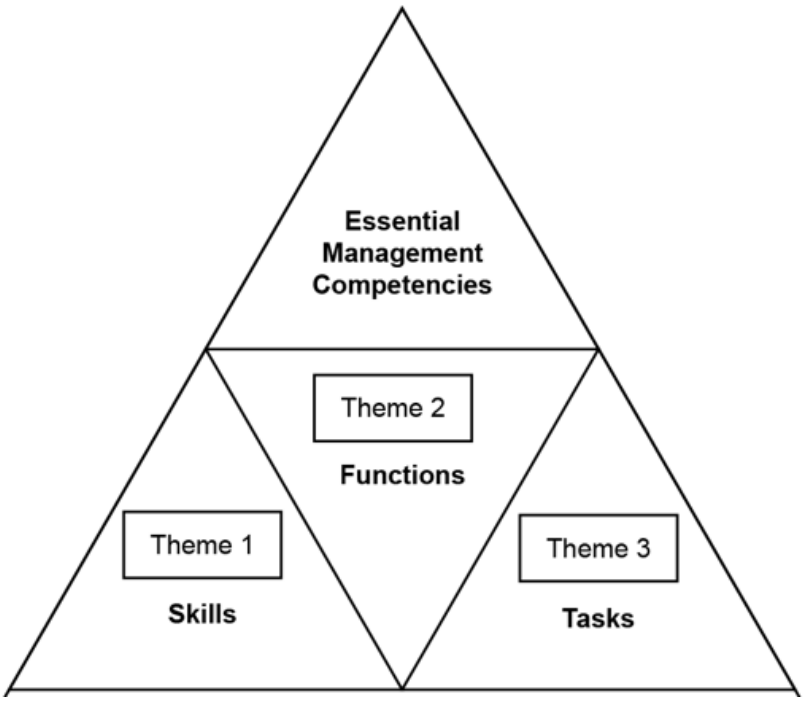

Figure 6.1 Empirical themes in the semi-structured interview schedule

During the semi-structured interviews, participants shared their reflections and thoughts on the competencies essential for ECD principals to manage ECD centres in a South African context. Participants were initially asked general questions regarding the competencies, followed by specific follow-up questions to ascertain views that either support or oppose those in the literature and either seen or experienced in practice, as well as their personal opinion. Sub-themes allowed for further exploration of each theme through repeated categories reflected in narratives taken directly from the interviews. In order to obtain a clear picture of the sampled population, biographic details are presented below to reflect the cases included in this study as a representation of a wider population. This will be followed by the empirical findings, presented with a literature control.

6.2 IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants were asked several questions regarding their age, gender, years of experience as an ECD principal or ECD manager, highest qualification, and position title. These biographic particulars, in addition to the criteria of inclusion, created the profile of the participants for both cohorts, which adds context for the interpretation of the narratives and findings. Each of these identifying particulars are discussed below.

6.2.1 Age of participants

The age of each participant was recorded in order to gain an understanding of *who* is managing ECD centres in South Africa and *who* is supervising these principals. From the 16 ECD managers interviewed, two (13%) were in the youngest age category of 25-30 years and five (31%) fell into the category of 51-60 years, as depicted in Figure 6.2. This shows that although the older participants tend to be managers or principals, there is an emerging younger group entering the ECD workforce in higher positions. The status of a manager is sometimes ascribed to those who have a certain number of years supporting their work experience. The general perception is that managers who are older are a reliable work force and possess

workplace and life experience to be able to manage complicated situations, while younger managers may be more open to try new approaches (English & Peters, 2010; Lipman, Manthorpe & Harris, 2018). A younger manager has also been perceived to be open to innovative ideas and able to take on many new tasks (Lipman, Manthorpe & Harris, 2018).

In the ECD sector, one would assume that ECD principals follow a similar trend to those of business managers, which was evident to the findings of this study. It should be noted that three (19%) of ECD managers were competent and qualified to oversee SSO programmes, such as principal management and ECD registration support. ECD principals were also distributed across a range of ages. From the 14 ECD principals interviewed, however, only one (7%) was in the age category of 25-30 years, three (14%) in the category of 31-35 years, three (21%) in 36-40 years, six (43%) 41-50 years, and two (31%) in the age category of 51-60 years, as depicted in Figure 6.2. ECD principal D made specific note of her management role and relationship towards her younger staff members at the ECD centre:

> *"…because we are a relatively very young staff, at the crèche. I am a few years older than them – if I say five or six years older than the staff that works under me – so they do see me as somebody that they can come and talk to."*

It seems that ECD principals and ECD managers tend to be older woman who have worked in the field for some time and gained valuable in-service experience.

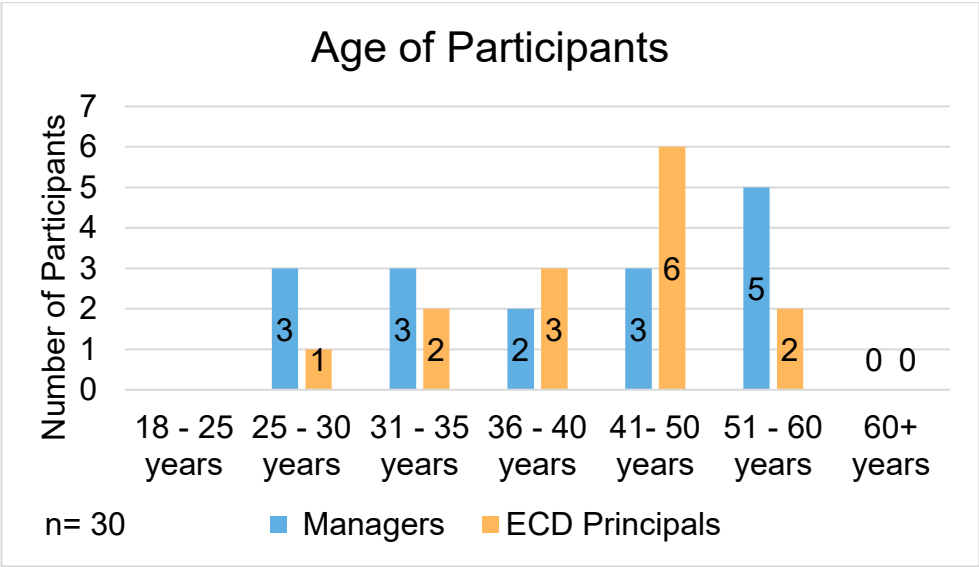

Figure 6.2 Age of participants

6.2.2 Gender

All (100%) of the participants (both ECD managers and ECD principals) identified themselves as female. This is not surprising, as Patel (2009:7) confirms that within the South African NPO sector the majority of professionals, paraprofessionals, informal community carers, and volunteers are women engaged in either paid or unpaid work. Gender is a social construct that involves roles and responsibilities, which in relation to woman tends to be associated with, amongst others, the nurture and care of families, children, elderly, and people with special needs and health issues (Patel, 2009). Society tends to make the claim that males tend to be more business oriented. In the case of ECD principals, this dissertation presents the picture of women in leadership being both nurturing and caring but also business minded and visionaries for their teams. The literature supports this conclusion and notes that the predominantly female workforce would like to progress in the sector, yet receive low wages and unclear career pathways, which often result in high turnover and indicates a need for professionalisation of the sector (Greyling, *et al.*, 2019; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011). Interestingly, despite much controversy over women in management positions, a hybrid model of leadership for NGO management is suggested for organisations, where feminist principles and organisational strengths are balanced. In a South African context, this means that an open conversation of equality and inclusion should continue when choosing candidates for management positions (English & Peters, 2011; Hyde 2001).

6.2.3 Years of experience as an ECD principal and ECD manager

During the interviews, participants were asked about the number of years of experience they had gained in a management position, whether as a social work manager, ECD manager, or ECD principal. Figure 6.3 details these findings, and what is noteworthy is that 10 (63%) of the ECD managers had 1 – 5 years of management experience and only 1 (6%) participant had more than 20 years of work experience as an ECD manager. All managers gained their experience through an SSO or government institution which delivered ECD services and mentorship programmes. In the ECD principal cohort, most principals had the minimum number (1 – 5 years) of experience (43%) and similarly, 6 – 10 years of experience (43%). No principal in the sample had over 15 years of management experience.

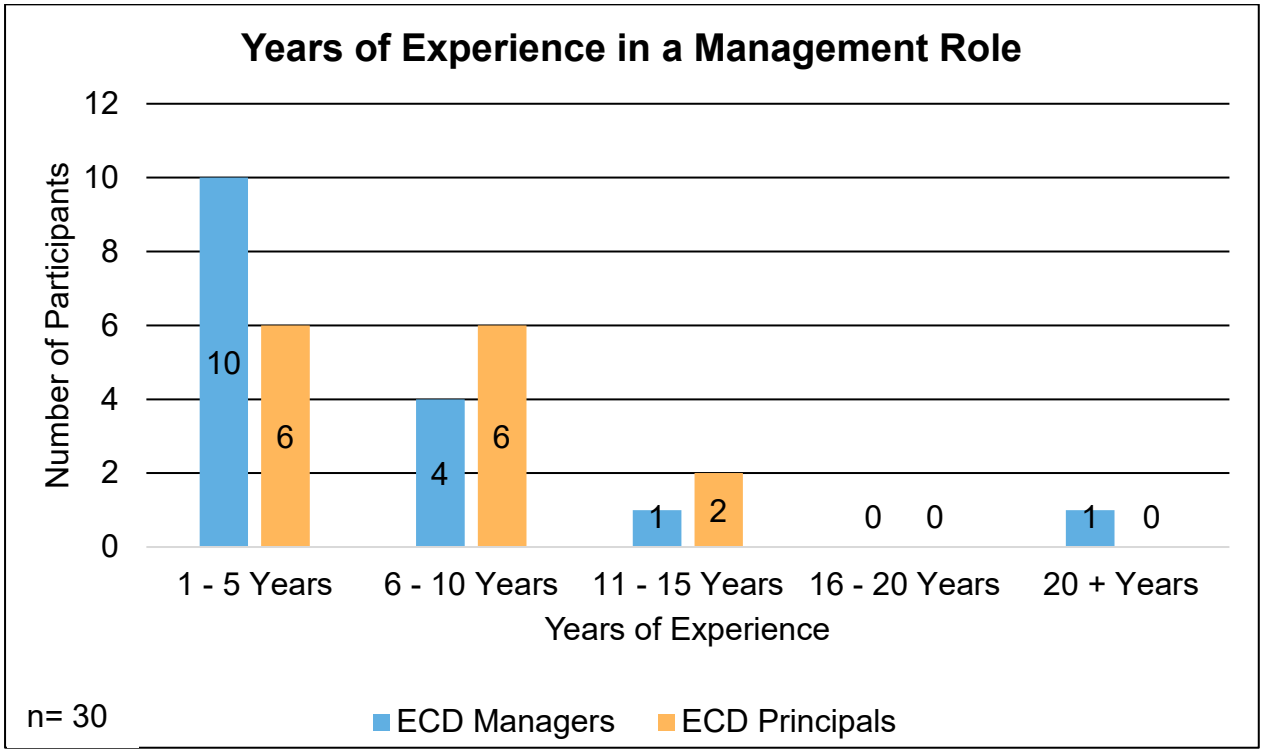

Figure 6.3 Years of experience as an ECD principal and ECD manager

A 2012 survey done with ECD NPOs in South Africa found that 25% of their sampled ECD managers had less than three years of experience, but also that staff tended to be older in years (Biersteker & Picken, 2013), which is not the case in this study. One should acknowledge that although ECD is not a new sector, focus and funding

priorities have become more accessible to both SSOs and ECD centres as NPOs in the last 10 – 15 years through the partial care facility grant and the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015). This prompted a number of new initiatives and funding models to be explored and implemented to encourage ECDs to operate and SSOs to function in a supportive capacity in South Africa. While age may not be a clear marker for management skills as previously discussed, years in a management position does expose an individual to valuable workplace experiences. One participant shared her opinion:

> *"…And they [the ECD principals] should also have experience, at least three years of being a teacher, in order to become a [p]rincipal. They should know what's meant to be happening in a centre to make it function effectively."* [ECD Principal J]

It should also be noted that the informal business nature of many ECD centres in the sector mean that many ECD principals are learning on the job. This may take a number of years of trial and error. The Work Skills Plan and Report study 2018-2019, (WSPR) conducted by the ETDP SETA (2019), surveyed NGOs and noted some hard-to-fill-vacancies, which included, amongst others, lack of principals in the ECD sector, lack of ECD practitioners due to poor relevance of qualifications, and lastly failure of government to direct funding to the early learning sector. These challenges were echoed by Harrison (2020), who also noted a number of core issues with ECD training accreditation and dysfunctionality with receiving certificates, which often deters young people from a career path in ECD. Despite these barriers, the ECD sector through training and development continues to be a viable career platform for young people to grow into management roles.

6.2.4 Highest qualification of ECD managers

Participants were asked to name their highest qualification, which, due to the multidisciplinary nature of ECD programme management, becomes broad in scope. Figure 6.4 depicts the following: Certificates were held by eight (50%) of the participants in specifically play therapy (1 or 6%), ECD (1 or 6%), financial literacy (2 or 13%), business management (2 or 13%), education, training, and development (1 or 6%), and life coaching (1 or 6%). Three (19%) of the participants held diplomas in play therapy, ECD, and social development respectively. Of the 16 ECD managers,

four (25%) had completed their four-year honours in social work and one (3%) had a master's degree in social development. While most ECD NPO staff tend to be woman and are qualified to train-ECD relevant accredited modules (Biersteker & Picken, 2013), postgraduate qualifications in ECD are not common, which is evident in the findings of this study and supported by Biersteker and Picken (2013), who state that this might be a consequence of no specialised ECD master's programmes being available in South Africa. There would only be a positive impact if managers and professionals in the ECD sector were to become more informed by research and training so that they could implement evidence-based practices.

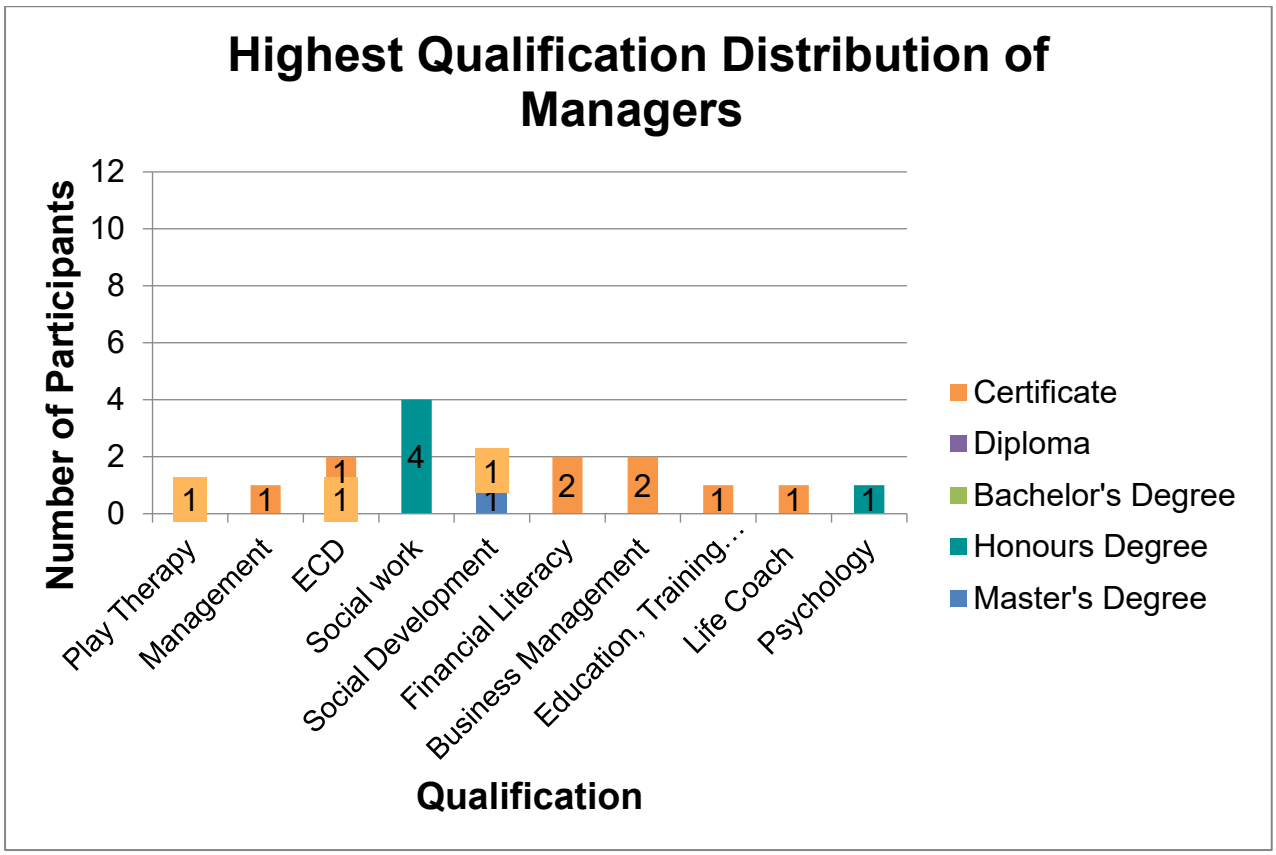

Figure 6.4 Highest qualification of ECD managers

6.2.5 Highest qualification of ECD principals

Much focus has been placed on ECD practitioners' qualifications, skill development, education, and training in the last 10 years. A call for training has been made a number of times over the years (Atmore, 2019) and several studies have shown the direct improvement in child development as a result of qualified teachers (Biersteker

& Dawes, 2008; Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Stretch, 2013). Figure 6.5 showcases the highest qualifications held by ECD principals who participated in the study: Nine (64%) participants had completed their NQF level 4 qualification in ECD, which is the equivalent of a Matric Certificate with education-specific content to assist with workplace and vocational training (Terblanche & Bitzer, 2018). Two (14%) were qualified with an NQF level 5 in ECD, one (7%) had a diploma in education, specifically in foundation phase teaching, and two (14%) had bachelor's degrees, one (7%) in education and the other in arts and social sciences.

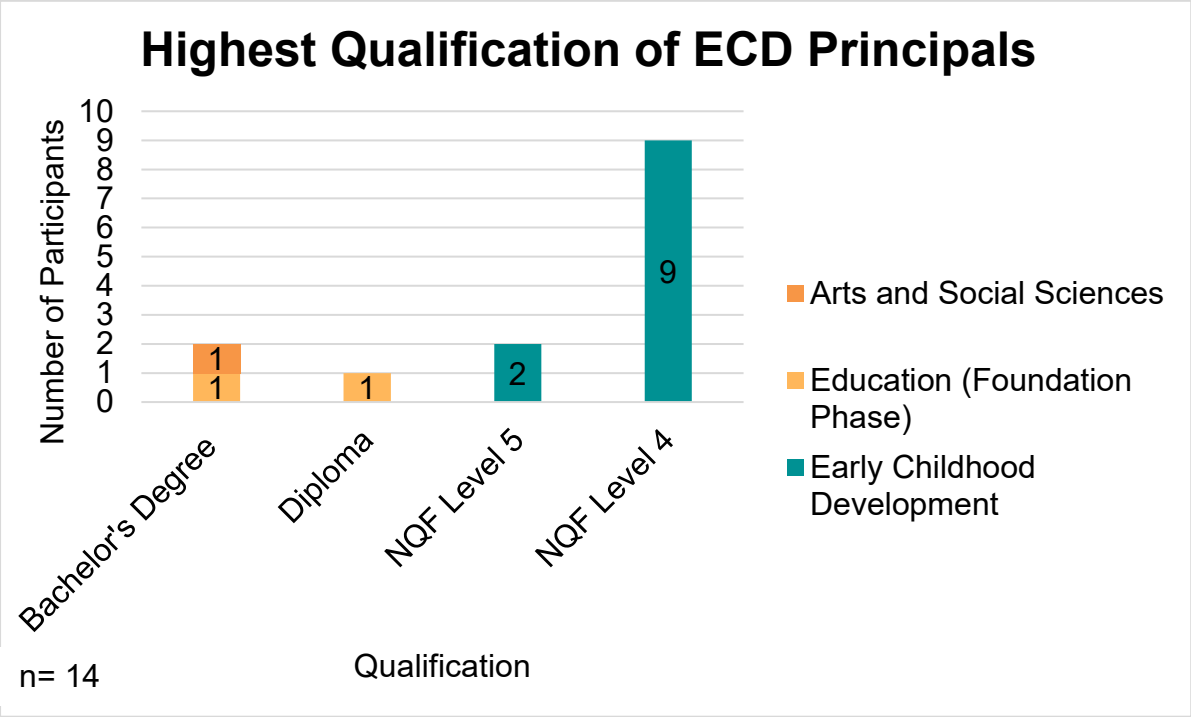

Figure 6.5 Highest qualification of ECD principals

While qualifications are helpful as a platform to equip individuals for the ECD workforce, as one participant noted,

> *"I know the qualification is also very important, but sometimes the person with a qualification doesn't have the experience, and I think the person* [ECD Principal] *needs to have a little bit of experience."* [ECD Principal K]

Caregivers whose qualifications are below Grade 12 are categorised as a "developmental risk" and has negative associated outcomes in child development (Du Toit, Van der Linde & Swanepoel, 2020; Erasmus, 2019). This places great

importance on the qualification of the carers (termed "practitioners") and the ECD principals who are running the centres that care for these children. One ECD manager noted,

> *"Principals also should have a qualification in ECD. Often they don't have a full qualification, it's more like [unaccredited] training that they've done. But they need to have some form of [accredited] qualification that's also essential, because how can you guide your teachers if you don't have that skill yourself…"* [ECD Manager 9]

Urban and Rubiano (2014) compared global cases of the privatisation of ECD services and found that this has an impact on child developmental outcomes and access to services. Desmond *et al*. (2019) warn against the potential for inequality in South Africa, specifically where private institutions offering qualifications are only accessible to those who can afford or access those services. Ultimately, coordination is required between the DSD, the DoBE, and the DoH to ensure that a structured and accessible path for ECD practitioners and principals is constructed in accordance with the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), which should include recognition of prior learning (Ashley-Cooper, Van Niekerk & Atmore, 2019; Desmond *et al*., 2019; RSA, 2015). This continues the argument for improved skills development in the ECD sector which is critical for ensuring quality service delivery of ECD programmes (Aubrey, 2011). A major critique regarding the current NQF system is that the outcome-based model tends to provide vague outcomes statements which are open to interpretation (Allais, 2007). This leads to low standards, which means that the education or training may not always translate into core competencies in reality (Allais, 2007). In a South African contextual study, Erasmus (2019) proved this to be true and found that, in reality, NQF Level 4 qualifications do not translate into learning-through-training but that skills are rather gained through in-service experiences in the field. It has been recommended that a clear career progression would include training in both leadership and business (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2012; Erasmus, 2019; Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012).

6.2.6 Social service organisation service delivery areas

A social service organisation (SSO) is a general term used both in theory and practice for an organisation, usually an NGO, which provides programmes or services to promote the well-being of people. This broad term requires some investigation for the purpose of this study as SSOs working in the ECD sector tend to offer a range of different supportive and supervisory services, as can be seen in Figure 6.6.

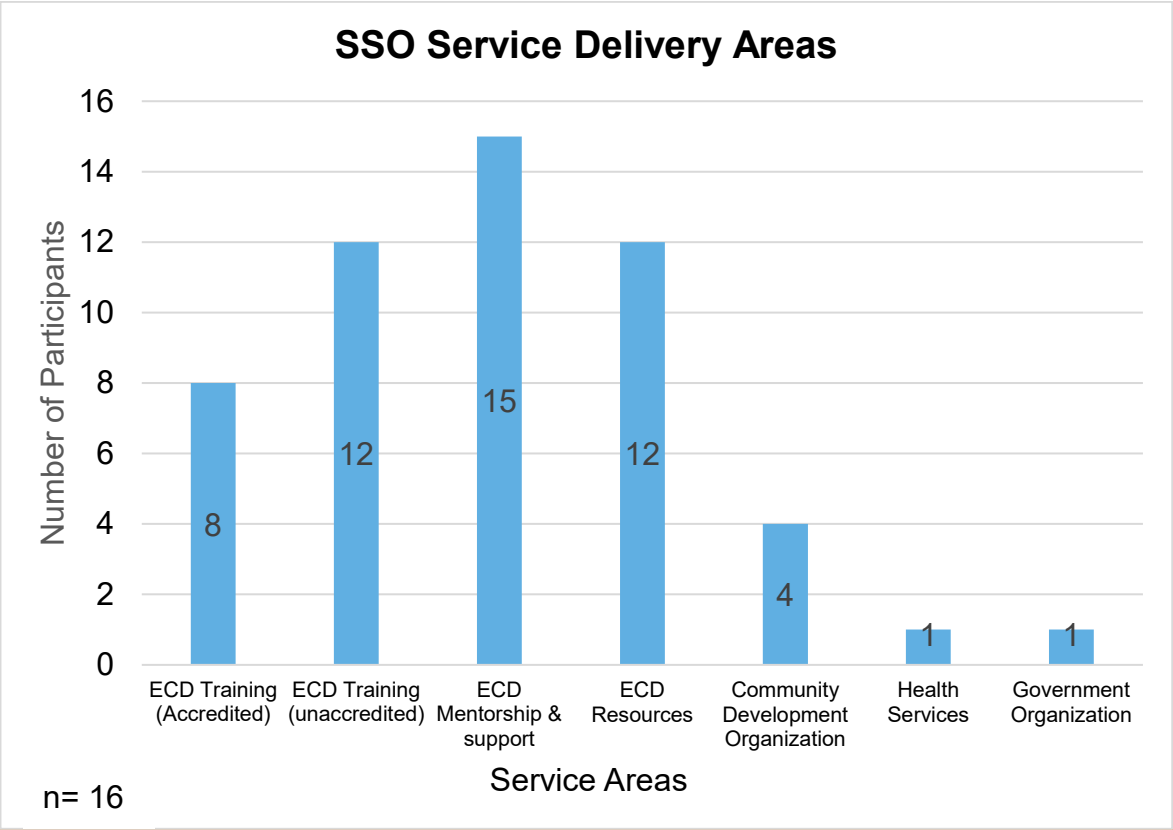

Figure 6.6 SSO's delivery areas

Of the 16 SSOs in the sample population, half (eight or 50%) offered accredited ECD training, 12 (75%) delivered unaccredited ECD training in the form of educational workshops or programmes, 15 (94%) offered ECD mentorship and support, and 12 (75%) offered ECD resourcing in a variety of capacities. Four (25%) of the SSOs identified community development services as a delivery area they provide to their beneficiaries, one (6%) offered health services, and one (6%) was a government organisation. It should be noted that one organisation may service multiple delivery areas and could have selected more than one service area.

Offering a variety of services is a natural landscape for organisations working in the social development sector. However, funding tends to dictate the types of activities or services offered, and this is evident in the findings (see Table 6.1), where most of the delivery areas are related to training and resourcing. Training programmes could include teacher training, classroom management, and foundational early education workshops offered through both accredited and non-accredited programmes (Erasmus, 2019; Harrison, 2020), and health services and support for both ECD centres and caregivers remain additional extras for SSOs offering ECD programmes, despite the importance of child health and nutrition in the first 1000 days and beyond (Bust & Pedro, 2020; Ronaasen *et al*., 2018).

Involvement of the government in ECD support should be a priority in South Africa and yet the concept of an ECD social worker remains ambiguous, both internally for SSOs and external stakeholders, and in research (Trueman, 2021; Viviers, Biersteker & Moruane, 2013). Without intentional activation of the ECD Policy (RSA, 2015), the concept of comprehensive quality services remains merely a “symbolic” intention as predicted by Ashley-Cooper, Van Niekerk, and Atmore (2019:101). This means that these findings reflect the continued need for financial investment into the comprehensive nature of the ECD sector to tackle the complex challenges facing this sector and the centres offering educational services to children in South Africa.

6.2.7 Title of position and core activities of ECD managers

The formal position and description of core job activities were given by each participant, of which some shared commonalities, and others showcased the different approaches and outputs of SSO ECD managers in the same sector (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Title of ECD manager position and core activities

	Position title	**Core activities**
ECD Manager 1	Project Leader	Oversee and coordinate ECD programme Staff management School visits

ECD Manager 2	Community Development Worker	ECD training support Mentorship SGB and governance engagement
ECD Manager 3	CEO of SSO	Ensure smooth running of programmes Fundraising and financial management Networking
ECD Manager 4	ECD Project Coordinator	Centre development Staff development Fundraising
ECD Manager 5	Training Facilitator	Training Management Mentorship of ECD programmes
ECD Manager 6	ECD Programme Manager	Programme design and implementation Ensuring registration and compliance Administration Induction of new parents Resource support for ECD centres
ECD Manager 7	ECD Facilitator	ECD training Content development Resourcing and capacitation
ECD Manager 8	Social Work Supervisor	Coordination of services M&E officer Parent education and training Supervision Case Work
ECD Manager 9	ECD Programme Manager	Management of programme Logistics Principal training Coordinating, reporting Financial management Donor engagement Research
ECD Manager 10	ECD Regional Implementation Manager	Mentorship Problem solving Training
ECD Manager 11	ECD Officer ECD Manager	Guidance and management skills ECD support ECD management

ECD Manager 12	ECD Compliance Manager	ECD site management Monitoring of norms and standards Financials
ECD Manager 13	ECD Regional Implementation Manager	Mentorship and training support Site management
ECD Manager 14	ECD Manager	ECD principal coaching and mentorship Upskill and capacitation Classroom support
ECD Manager 15	ECD Regional Implementation Manager	Mentorship Recruitment Managing relationship with principals
ECD Manager 16	Social Work Supervisor	Monitoring and development of ECD registration Supervision Curriculum support

All the managers' titles showcase a level of authority and management over ECD programmes. The wide variety of activities associated with ECD programmes is evident in the description and this is testimony to the vast scope of social services in the ECD sector.

In South Africa, it can be argued that social workers overseeing ECD centres are trained in the necessary skills and suitably positioned to meet the managerial functions and tasks of a sector which merges both social protection and education as mandated by the Children's Act No 38 of 2005. Aside from this significant policy, both legislation, regulatory documents, and literature regarding the actual job description of a social worker who operates within the ECD sector is not addressed. The grey area of an ECD manager or ECD social worker exists because, as professionals, they are not fulfilling a typical social work case manager role, nor that of a community development worker due to the dynamic multidisciplinary nature of ECD. A unique set of managerial functions of a social worker supervising an ECD centre emerged in this study's literature review (see Chapter 2) which are: advocacy for child protection, registration support, and supervision, M&E, training and capacitation, business management, linking to resources, mentoring and coaching, as well as research in the ECD sector and policy development. It is therefore necessary for social workers

or professionals working at SSOs to offer unique supervision and mentorship to ECD principals (Biersteker *et al.*, 2016; Desmond *et al.*, 2019).

Several of the above managerial functions correspond with the dynamic list of activities noted by participants in Table 6.1. One participant shared a narrative on the ECD manager role, which comprises of many job-specific activities:

> *"This is very much a coordinating role with many role players."* [ECD Manager 3]

From a social worker's perspective, a participant also shared the following about the variety of activities she must fulfil:

> *"…I've mentioned all these structural and developmental activities we must do. Part of the management role is also to look at the policies that each ECD keeps on record within their centre. We need to either reinforce just keeping in line with the Children's Act, or just ensuring general safety regulations are followed."* [ECD Manager 16]

6.2.8 Title of position and core activities of ECD principals

ECD principals may share a commonly accepted "title", however, like in a number of other countries, principals of early education centres in South Africa tend to utilise a number of terms to define their position (see Table 6.2). Without a formalised job description, each participant focused on different core activities involved with managing an ECD centre. Below, in Table 6.2, a summary is given of the responses of the ECD principals when asked about their position and the core activities they fulfil.

Table 6.2 Title of ECD principal position and core activities

	Position title	**Core activities**
ECD Principal A	ECD principal	Working with the ECD and children
ECD Principal B	Principal Owner	Managing staff Supervising staff Administration and record keeping Communication with parents

ECD Principal C	Principal	Overview of ECD programme Manage staff Plan the activities and curriculum UIF, SARS and bank administration
ECD Principal D	Principal	Managing the curriculum Managing preschool daily operations Staff management Organising food for kitchen
ECD Principal E	Principal	Running the centre Ensuring teachers are qualified Parent engagement Hiring of staff Managing payments
ECD Principal F	Principal Owner	Managing centre and planning activities
ECD Principal G	Principal	Smooth running of centre Management of centre Planning for year
ECD Principal H	Principal	Classroom engagement Ensuring child protection Care and protection of children Hands on with children
ECD Principal I	Principal Overseer	Oversee ECD centre Managing children and dealing with parents
ECD Principal J	Programme coordinator	Programme management Administration Funding for centre Staff management
ECD Principal K	Programme manager	Management of day-to-day operations Classroom management Overseeing staff Financial management
ECD Principal L	Principal	Managing centre Dealing with both staff and non-staff (volunteers)
ECD Principal M	Centre manager	Administration oversight Active in classroom Managing food / feeding of children

ECD Principal N	Centre supervisor	Run school Managing income and expenses Attending DSD meetings Attending local committee (forum) Mentoring of staff

In addition to the generally accepted title of "principal", some participants identified with more than one title. All the listed terms refer to a leadership role with certain responsibilities of care, protection, and supervision over their centre. The ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) also uses the term "supervisor/coordinator" to refer to an ECD principal.

Principals are tasked with multiple and complex roles involving a variety of functions both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as in the wider community, which is evident in the diversity of core activities the ECD principals noted. Clarke (2012) presented key characteristics of a principal as being both a manager and a leader, which could be argued to be a complex role to navigate and fulfil. School management has been defined in literature as multi-faceted in function, with a range of roles and responsibilities (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Cain, Brindley, Brown, Jones & Riga, 2019). One participant highlighted the dual role that many principals have to navigate, by fulfilling both the roles of teacher and principal at their centre:

> *"…they don't actually understand what is their responsibility[;] the [p]rincipal is the [p]rincipal and a Grade R teacher[,] which means she won't be able to [only] run the centre since she has two titles…you will see a lack of management, because now she has to focus on the teaching, instead of focusing on being a leader."* [ECD Manager 2]

That being said, complexity in roles, both from a managerial and a teaching perspective, require multiple skill sets to be integrated in order to perform optimally, and this could lead to a managerial challenge for unskilled or inexperienced managers or ECD principals (Ebrahim, Killian & Rule, 2011). It should also be noted that high job demands and lack of resources are potentially harmful factors for entrepreneurs and leaders of small businesses, which ECD principals could be defined as within a South African context (Neck, Houghton, Sardeshmukh, Goldsby

& Godwin, 2013). This study aimed to explore this complex role of an ECD principal using an LOA.

6.2.9 Legal entity of ECD centres

Principals of ECD centres are required to operate as a legal entity, although due to the informal nature of many ECD centres this may not occur in reality. Findings presented in Figure 6.7 provide insight into the legal entity of centres managed by the ECD principals sampled (n=14). Findings revealed that 79% (11) of centres are functioning as NPOs, none (0%) as non-profit companies, and 14% (two) as social franchises, which seems to be a new legal entity to enter the ECD marketplace with support from unique SSOs that endorse this model. 21% (three) of the participants said that their ECD centres were private and that they preferred to operate as independent businesses rather than aligning with the NPO model of income generation through donations.

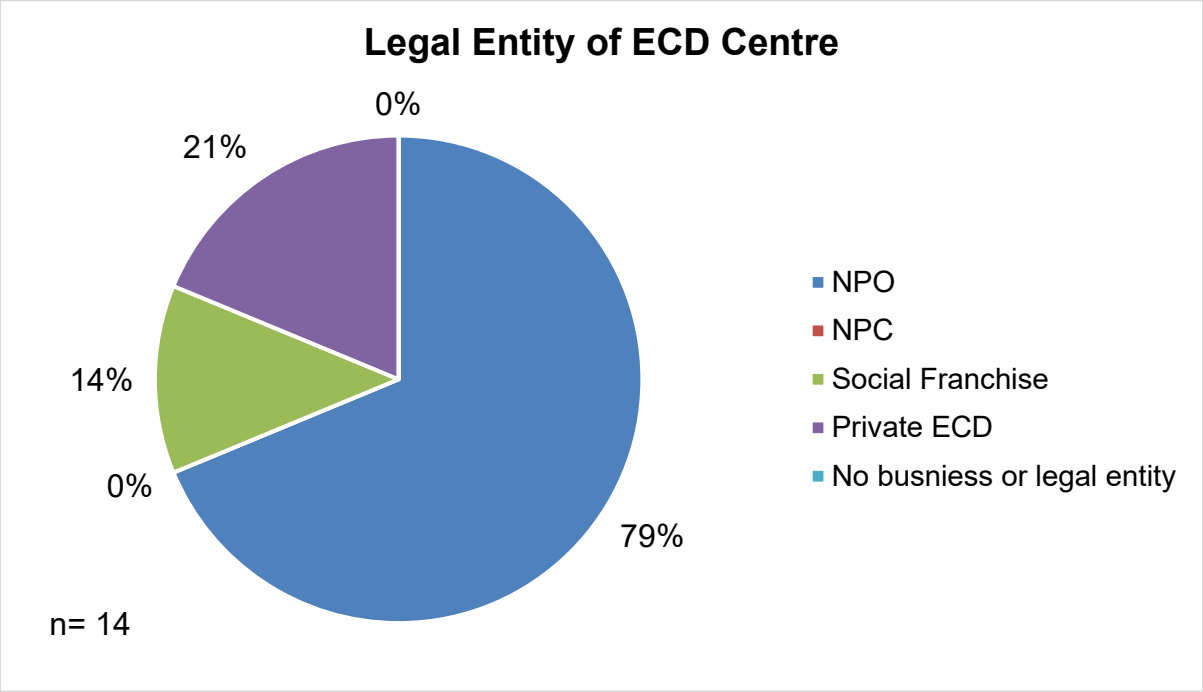

Figure 6.7 Legal entity of ECD centres

The benefit of ECD centres being registered as NPOs is that they become eligible for the DSD funding subsidy as well as other charitable donations. However, in reality,

being an NPO does not guarantee financial support and places the organisation in a position where they are by definition not a sustainable business (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012; Johnson, 2017). Although CSR funding initiatives are a possible avenue for income, governance issues, funder relations, and donor requirements often disqualify many ECD centres from receiving this kind of support (Mashale, 2017; Swilling, Russell & Habib, 2002). One participant, an ECD manager, shared her insight on this topic and mentioned that often ECD centres are registered as NPOs but the principal is not fully aware of the regulations, expectations, and responsibilities in practical terms:

> *"…They [the ECD principals] have no idea what non[-]profit means."* [ECD Manager 7]

Again, this tells us that ECD principals are setting up their business entities according to the DSD funding requirements without necessarily fully understanding that a unique set of managerial skills would be needed for the specific legal entity of choice. Rogers, Dovigo, and Doan (2020) clearly depict the impact that neoliberal policies have on the ECD sector, mentioning the focus on accreditation, regulations, and standards.

6.2.10 Registration status of ECD centres

Figure 6.8 (below) gives a graphical representation of the registration of each ECD centre of the sample population in the cohort of ECD principals of this study (n=14). Five (36%) were registered with the DSD and received subsidies and two (14%) were conditionally registered, which means they can receive some funding support, with requirements for improvement in order to be fully registered and compliant. A noteworthy half of ECD centres (seven or 50%) were unregistered for a variety of reasons and were unable to receive any DSD funding support.

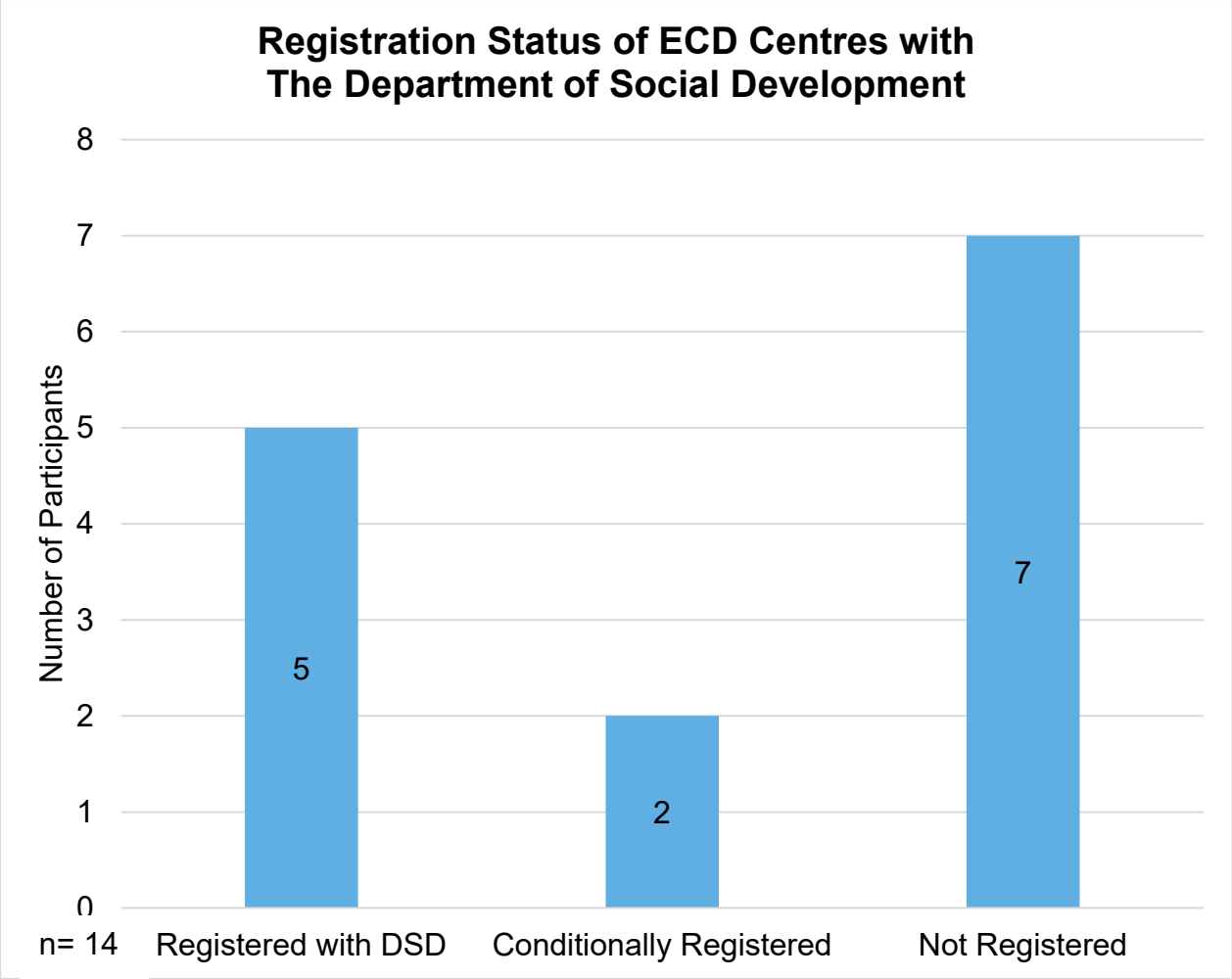

Figure 6.8 Registration status of ECD centres with the DSD

The contentious debate regarding being registered and non-registered is relevant to this study, as the registration status is not attainable for many centres in South Africa, which limits their access to support and ultimately funding by the government, which, as an NPO, is a critical part of the intended business model. Registration should not be merely a checklist of criteria but an enabling opportunity for centres to improve their facilities, train and hire qualified staff, and support services (Ronaasen, Steenkamp, Wilson, Venter & Elkonin, 2017).

During the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, it was estimated that there were more unregistered that registered centres, which meant that during 2020, the majority of the South African NPO sector was among the industries that struggled to stay financially stable during and after the lockdown (Mohamed, 2020). These unregistered centres in South Africa felt the difficulty of government restrictions in

particular, and globally, the early education providers suffered with no financial backup to survive the long closure. For many programmes, this meant that educators were without jobs and parents without childcare (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020; Jennings, Jeon and Roberts, 2020).

The ECD workforce were not eligible for any government support pre or post lockdown, which meant that registration became a punitive symbol (BRIDGE *et al*., 2020). The lockdown impact of Covid-19 saw increased attention being given to this issue that has been an elephant in the room for quite some time. Both the registered and unregistered centres came together in a united critique of the ECD sector and its inequalities, lobbying in solidarity for support throughout the lockdown (Giese, 2020; Newzroom Afrika, 2020; Nkgweng, 2020). As a result of a number of public and legal processes, the court ruled for the implementation of backpay of 2020 subsidies and the Covid-19 relief subsidy (a once-off amount for ECD centres and staff), which was unprecedented and set a president for future relief packages, should the need arise, regardless of registration status (SA Childcare Association, 2020). Understanding the registration process is a skill set an ECD principal should possess and will be discussed in Section 7.2.1. The registration challenges experienced by principals are detailed in Section 4.10.

6.3 EMERGING THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND TASKS

Utilising the identifying particulars of the participants and their organisations as part of understanding the findings of the study, the empirical findings are explored, analysed, and discussed under themes, subthemes, and categories below. As detailed in the methodology chapter, the themes were largely determined by the literature review and provided a suitable framework for analysing and understanding the reflective narratives gained from the semi-structured interviews. The following themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Essential management skills;
- Theme 2: Essential management functions; and

- Theme 3: Essential management tasks.

Reflections from ECD principals and ECD managers who oversee and support ECD principals provided insight into these themes, sub-themes, and several categories. This provided a deeper understanding of the management competencies required by ECD principals to effectively manage an ECD centre in South Africa. The themes were determined through thematic analysis as described in detail in Chapter 5 and will firstly be summarised, followed by a discussion incorporating narrative dialogue from the interviews to support the themes. It should be noted that the sub-themes have been bolded throughout the chapter and given a unique number code, and similarly, the categories are underlined and given a unique numbered code throughout the discussion. One can hereby easily cross reference the coded themes and categories in the discussion to the summarising table.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Essential management skills of an ECD principal

The conversation regarding management and governance of ECD centres cannot be had without exploring the essential management skills required by an ECD principal. As previously defined in Section 4.9, skills are acquired as a result of the intentional aptitude built upon through education, training, and work experience in a certain task or action (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017; Unger *et al.*, 2011). ECD principals require specific skills to address specific school-related challenges and role expectations (Fourie, 2018, Niemann & Kotzé, 2006; Van Deventer, 2016a; Rajaram, 2008). Managers can possess technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills (Katz, 1974), Below (Table 6.3) is a summary of the related sub-themes and categories which emerged from the interviews.

Table 6.3 Summary of Theme 1: Essential management skills of an ECD principal

Theme	Sub-Themes	Category
Theme 1: Essential management skills of an ECD principal	(S0) Technical skills: ECD experience and qualification	(S0.1) ECD knowledge and qualifications
		(S0.2) Experience in the ECD sector
	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills	(S1.1) Vision setting for centre
		(S1.2) Sustainable business model
		(S1.3) Acknowledging the ECD as a business
	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills	(S2.1) Marketing
		(S2.2) Administration
		(S2.3) Creating a business plan
		(S2.4) Human resources and labour issues
	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills	(S3.1) Managing income and expenditure through budgeting
		(S3.2) Inadequate financial literacy skills
		(S3.3) Creation of fundraising Initiatives
		(S3.4) Ability to handle salaries and manage wage issues
	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of DSD registration and centre compliance	(S4.1) Documentation needed for registration
		(S4.2) Challenges with the registration process and documentation
		(S4.3) Feelings of confusion and despondence
	(S5) Technical skills: M&E	(S5.1) Progress, outcomes, and impact measurements
		(S5.2) Quality assurance mechanism used for government, donor and stakeholder funding requirements
		(S5.3) Lack of practice and implementation in ECD centres
	(S6) Technical skills: Green environmental skills	(S6.1) Environmental knowledge and awareness
		(S6.2) ECD waste management practices
		(S6.3) Health and safety awareness
	(S7) Technical skills: Using technology	(S7.1) Cell phones being used for communication
		(S7.2) Computer literacy among principals
		(S7.3) Using computers for online data and documentation
		(S7.4) Online financial management
		(S7.5) Inadequate access to technology
		(S7.6) Research

	(S8) Technical skills: Crisis management	(S8.1) Personal response to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions
		(S8.2) Financial and organisational planning and provision for a crisis
		(S8.3) Communication adaptions during a crisis
	(S9) Human skills: Communication	(S9.1) Relationship building and networking
		(S9.2) Interaction with parents
		(S9.3) Interaction with staff
		(S9.4) Interaction with board of the NPO or SGB committee
		(S9.5) Interpersonal Skills: Character and nature of the principal
		(S9.6) Conflict management
	(S10) Human skills: Group facilitation and team building skills	(S10.1) Consistent involvement by principal
		(S10.2) Team leader
		(S10.3) Stakeholder engagement
		(S10.4) Trusting staff with delegated tasks
	(S11) Human skills: Mentoring and coaching	(S11.1) Prioritising staff development and mentoring needs
		(S11.2) Enabling learning opportunities
		(S11.3) Transferring knowledge and skills
		(S11.4) Fearing competition or others' success
		(S11.5) Leader is closed off to a learning culture
		(S11.6) The façade of support
	(S12) Conceptual skills: Policy development	(S12.1) policy is responsible for ECD quality assurance
		(S12.2) Creating business accountability and staff protection
		(S12.3) Policy is responsible for child protection
		(S12.4) Gaps and discrepancies with the policies
	(S13) Conceptual skills: Decision making	(S13.1) Problem-solving role
		(S13.2) Shared decision making

6.3.1.1 Technical skills (Sub-themes S0 – S8)

Technical skills (S0) offer a manager the capability to perform their job (Reyneke, 2020) but also to execute context-specific actions, processes, or methods (Van

Scheers & Radipere, 2005; Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003). For an ECD principal, this means managing and operating as the head of the school or organisation. During the intereiews, participants noted the need for ECD experience and relevant qualifications (S0.1). The researcher chose to begin coding this theme with (S.0) to incoperate the unique technical skill of ECD experience and qualification which was not originally in the interview schedule. Several comments from the interviews showcased the need for this skill. One principal highlighted the importance of having both ECD-relevant knowledge and experience to support the role of principal:

> *"…the minimum qualifications that they need is a[n] NQF Level 5, to be in the position of a [p]rincipal. But we must also look at the practical…A principal would need experience… not just a qualification, but also the know-how, what do I do as principal?"* [ECD Principal D]

There was a strong agreement from participants regarding the qualification requirements from the DSD, and even though the term "suitably qualified" appears in the ECD Policy, the exact NQF level is not stipulated (RSA, 2015). As noted by ECD Manager 2:

> "*The [p]rincipal must be a person who has experience, but if you don't have something on paper, that is different; because that is what social development wants...one of the regulations is that you [the principal] must have something on paper…a qualification. I must have a Level 4 or Level 5, in order to run the centre."*

It was also mentioned that training and qualifications can improve the quality of ECD programmes and service outcomes:

> *"Obviously, they [the principals] have their own qualifications in early childhood development. Many of them look at it still as running daycare, up until the point that they are qualified. Only then do they understand the importance of employing qualified teachers, sending their teachers on training, upskilling their teachers… So obviously their own qualifications in the sector would definitely improve the quality and standard in the sector."* [ECD Manager 10]

A participant also emphasised the need for business knowledge and administration skills, as well as an understanding of early education:

> *"I think they must know something about ECD. You must have a background of a practitioner, even if it's just a Level 4 background. You can't run a[n] ECD centre if you don't have any background in a school; because I know people who do run ECDs, and they do not have an education background."* [ECD Principal K]

Literature supports the need for a qualified ECD workforce to possess ECD knowledge (S0.1) in order to ensure quality ECD services (Biersteker *et al.*, 2016; Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Mathwasa, Ntshuntshe & Duku, 2019), as well as accreditation and training (Harrison, 2020). It may be essential to have theoretical knowledge, however, the in-service training and practical implementation of evidence-based practice are also important to offer learning opportunities for practitioners to gain experience in the ECD sector (SO.2) (Bertram & Pascal, 2016; Harrison, 2020).

Participants emphasised the need for **entrepreneurial skills (S1) and business management skills (S2).** Drawing a link between the ability to see a gap in the market and the skills required to translate that opportunity into a viable business, one participant shared:

> *"…I think principals struggle not having the skills, like the business skills and the financial management skills. They live day-to-day, it's literally just that for them… and I think that's stressful because they have no idea where the money or the food or the resources are going to come from for the day after tomorrow. Principals are literally trying to survive through a day, to provide to the children what they can at that moment. I think they have the passion, which an ECD centre needs, but then I think in order for them to really sustain themselves[,] they need business skills and an understanding [of] ECD from a business perspective, also a sustainability perspective."* [ECD Manager 7]

The courage to expand one's services is an entrepreneurial quality (Chand & Misra, 2009; Urban & Gaffurini, 2018; Senkane, 2014) and has been suggested to be connected to neoliberal values and the ideals of employability and business sustainability (Ehrlin, Insulander & Sandberg, 2016; Hunkin, 2017; Moss, 2017;

Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020). The following narrative demonstrates a principal's entrepreneurial approach toward her ECD centre as she shares her idea for expanding her services in the future to generate revenue:

> *"I can tell you... about this corona-virus, we are all in lock-down… now that children are at home, I think when they come back, I would like to do the extra business like selling popcorn... So selling popcorn within my ECD centre, is the first business change I will implement when they come back; and in the community, I will also sell popcorn to the community."* [ECD Principal A]

A participant also shared how often principals neglect the enterprise expansion opportunity that their role offers:

> *"I'm doing this because I'm passionate about it, and they actually struggle to bring those two together, to say, yes, I love working with children, but I'm also an entrepreneur. And so I think that that falls short, that they're not seeing that side of the importance of running a small business, like an entrepreneur, seeing the vision, having the skills to do your budget, having the skills to lead your staff well. Ja, so it's essential."* [ECD Manager 2]

As entrepreneurs and leaders, ECD principals set a <u>vision for their centre (S1.1)</u> by offering direction and sound decision making in line with the centre's mission and purpose. A vision should encourage energy for all in the organisation to align (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2019; Stoner, Blanchard & Zigarmi, 2007):

> *"So they need to really be a visionary, to know what it is that they want, and be able to map their way towards getting there, and getting the relevant and necessary support, along the way."* [ECD Manager 15]

<u>By maintaining a vision</u> (S1.1) a principal is able to ensure that the ECD centre is grown strategically:

> *"…you're actually not going to get the ebb and flow of what needs to happen in a school, and it just calms everything down so nicely; and instead of the principal*

> *rushing from one thing to the next, she actually now starts planning, and has purpose; and that is key."* [ECD Manager 13]

A principal is also responsible for selecting, managing, and maintaining a sustainable business model (S1.2), such as an NPO or NPC. Managers felt particularly strongly about this, and ECD Manager 7 indicated her frustration realising that many principals do not actually understand what an NPO entails:

> *"They [the ECD principals] don't know why they have a non-profit, they don't even know what it means, they were told to do this, that's the process that they were told to follow...I think that for many [p]rincipals their primary goal when they started, is to care for the children, they have the passion for the children, but with that, they don't realise the responsibility that they also have, in terms of sustaining this ECD centre."* [ECD Manager 7]

Echoing this, a manager shared that even ECD centres that choose to be part of a franchise model require technical knowledge and skills to maintain their compliance:

> *"I'm going to give you an example of a private school, for instance, right; I'd made mention of it as well, [redacted] schools, and they are... I mean, it's a listed company, a franchise of ECD centres around the country, they have a lot of money, but their technical skill, when it comes to working with the state, for instance, and navigating that space, has been really difficult for them… They're a school that has the resources that they need to get everything that they need, but because there's this tug of war that happens between state and private well-resourced institutions, there is a bit of difficulty…. so for instance, their model is a well-run school, well-resourced, has access, even they sometimes struggle with the technicalities of registering with the state; and although they do get registered, I think there's an attitudinal dissonance that kind of interferes with the technical aspect of registration."* [ECD Manager 16]

This narrative is particularly interesting, because it showcases that even well-resourced schools may lack the technical skill set required for completing the registration and the understanding of the registration process.

In addition, a principal should acknowledge the ECD centre as a business (S1.3). This perspective would promote financial sustainability and would initiate the process to acquire the correct managerial competencies:

> *"Well, basically, you're running a business, so it's like you are a manager of a business, so you actually have to have those skills in any kind of business, to be a manager…"* [ECD Principal B]

supported by another participant who agreed*:*

> *"One thing that I've picked up when working with [p]rincipals, first of all, is the fact that they start their ECD journey, wanting to see to a need in the community, and not necessarily understanding it from a business perspective. I think they're trying to meet needs, which is amazing, and I think they understand the importance of the ECD, but they don't necessarily know how to manage it as a business, because it is ultimately a business."* [ECD Manager 7]

Lack of technical skills has been found to hinder South Africans from growing their small businesses, particularly if they are based in informal settings (Van Scheers & Radipere, 2007). In turn, a developmental approach to business means that **business management skills (S2)** become an essential competency for any ECD principal. This competency should include the ability to market their centre (S2.1); to handle administration (S2.2); to be comfortable creating a business plan (S2.3), and to handle human resources as well as labour issues (S2.4). One participant integrated these skills in her reflection:

> *"…business skills require a principal to operate from a business perspective. ECDs are businesses, and also community[-]based organisations, giving community input. So[,] one would need to have good business skills and work ethic, handle her paperwork and should know how to lead a team."* [ECD Manager 16]

This narrative describes the variety of skill sets to be actively demonstrated at any given time by an ECD principal. Marketing (S2.1) is a management skill, a process, and at times a product which allows a business to showcase their services to public, but also assist with creating public opinion and building the organisation's reputation:

> *"…I want to be a different ECD in my community. I have to market my ECD in a professional way. My community must know that we are not babysitters anymore."* [ECD Principal A]

With regards to administration (S2.2), both the principals and the managers shared the importance of being able to manage the administration of the ECT accountably:

> *"So if the teacher doesn't understand the importance of keeping the records, and making sure that they've got proof, especially if a child has got a special need, there needs to be a document trail in place, and that's where a lot of centres are actually getting into trouble, they're just signing a referral, but they have no idea what they're signing for, and then it comes back and the people want to do an investigation and the centre's got no proof."* [ECD Manager 12]

Principals are required by the DSD to submit business plans for funding purposes, but the ability to formulate these plans requires mentoring and support**.** Creating a business plan (S2.3) should be viewed as a business management tool and skill set. One principal explains how she seeks social worker support to ensure her administration is compliant:

> *"...Yes, I phoned them [DSD], I go there sometimes, I make an appointment to see the social worker. We speak about the business plan, the registration plan, and what the requirements are for us to be registered as a partial-care ECD centre."* [ECD Principal N]

A manager also proudly reflected on an ECD principal who had a business plan in action:

> "*She's [the ECD principal] now managing too… she knows exactly what's happening with her finances, she's paying UIF for her staff, she has a great business plan; and you see that the staff stay, there's not this constant turnover of staff. So you see it, and you can see the effects of it…"* [ECD Manager 1]

Business plans are an integral part of applying for DSD funding and improve the chances of an effectively managed centre (DSD, Western Cape, 2011). High turnover is not uncommon in ECD settings, however, it was noted that a principal needs to manage the human resources and labour issues (S2.4)**:**

> *"…I'm working with staff, I need to have some sort of skills. I need to apply for UIF for them. If you think about what is happening due to lockdown, pressures are... Principals are in a tizz, financially they're in a tizz, and their staff cannot access UIF because I didn't think it was important to pay…before this [Covid-19] I did not know that I must register for UIF..."* [ECD Manager 3]

The specifics of human resource management as a skill have not been widely explored by scholars in relation to education leadership in Africa (Hallinger, 2018), although several noteworthy reports from South Africa do mention the need for workforce management in the sector (Bridge, 2020; DSD & ERPI, 2014). The ability to equip an organisation with human capital is vital to the learning processes of any team and is acknowledged behaviour associated with a transformational leader (Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez & De la Rosa-Navarro, 2019).

Financial management skills (S3) were also noted by many participants as an essential skill, which is appropriate considering that basic financial understanding was nominated to be a core competency for a successful small business in South Africa, along with other financial skills such as bookkeeping, cash flow management, budgeting, and investment for the future (Nieuwenhuizen & Kroon, 2003). Regarding financial management, ECD Principal H commented:

> *"Financial management, wow, I think we need that, it's something that all of us need. Because, for me, I had no business skill, I am still learning, I'm learning on the job…. But the financial training which we're getting before, and even now with this lockdown we learn. I'm not funded yet, my income, it's generated from fees, I need to know that I should have a portion of money set aside for an emergency."*

Financial understanding is the basis upon which financial literacy is created (Kirsten, 2018; Refera, Dhaliwal & Kaur, 2016; Usama & Yusoff, 2018). When the categories

were explored within this sub-theme, managing income and expenditure through budgeting (S3.1) was often raised by participants, and one participant shared the reality of managing funds, particularly if there is a lack of income, which is a direct result of poverty and unemployment in many communities in South Africa:

> *"I have all my excel spreadsheets; and of course, finances, as well, you need to know how to manage the finances of the school, when they're there, of course, even when they're not there."* [ECD Principal B]

Regardless of the income generated by the centre, principals need to still have knowledge about managing and budgeting for centre operations and expenses. The inadequate financial literacy skills (S3.2) present in the ECD sector is concerning to many managers**:**

> *"And one of the big things, also, that is another skill that we picked up that they really need to have, is some type of numeracy skills, because they don't understand that they need to actually invoice for the service that they're providing."* [ECD Manager 12]

The reality of business failure is noted with regards to lack of financial literacy:

> *"I think that finance management is most important for a [p]rincipal. If you do not understand your finances or you are misusing your finances, your business will collapse."* [ECD Principal J]

Kirsten (2018) and Corrinna, (2018) both comment on the importance of financial literacy in small businesses, financial self-efficacy for the owners, and the ability to acquire these through education and training.

It becomes important for ECD principals to be able to initiate the creation of fundraising initiatives (S3.3) for additional NPO support**:**

> *"And then we also have...they must be visionary leaders, so they need to be able to ensure that their centre is sustainable, so they need to be able to fundraise."* [ECD Manager 9]

Echoed in this commentary, is the need to seek business skills in order to secure funds:

> *"Can I say, on a micro level, principals are busy doing business, because they are working with fundraising, they're supposed to work out a business plan for fundraising…And we see there's often more successes in fundraising efforts because of the business skills that are there. And less so when where there's a lack of business skills of course."* [ECD Manager 8]

A principal should have the ability to handle salaries and manage wage issues (S3.4), as shared by ECD Principal B, who has 15 years of management experience, which is substantial experience in managing a centre, as noted in Section 6.2.3:

> *"… it's also because the staff are not paid well. And to be honest, I actually don't really know what other people pay their staff, but I think, I feel, I actually pay my staff… they get paid above minimum wage. So look, I'm not running a huge money making business, it's really purely for the love of it – not that we don't need the money, we desperately do."*

ECD Principal B continued to share her view on financial management and wages as a centre which is not registered with the DSD and considers itself a privately-owned enterprise:

> *"I mean, finances, in any business, it's important to be able to manage the finances, because you've got expenses that have to be paid, and there's salaries that have to be paid, so you actually have to be able to manage it, and to make it into a good business, there's got to be something left over for you, otherwise what's the point….And we say, it's not just about money, but it is our business…"*

Not being registered means that the centre does not qualify for government funding, making the principal responsible for ensuring that sustainable income is generated. Regardless of the source of income, economic sustainability is essential for ECD centres' survival. This was endorsed by ECD Principal J, who said,

> *"Financial skills are essential, because without the finances, or without money, nothing will go…you need to have the money to buy food for the children, you need to buy the administration things for the school, everything is needing money, that's why I said, if you can't control you finances well, so your business will collapse…"*

Managing a small to medium enterprise such as an ECD centre requires financial management knowledge and skills (Kirsten, 2018). Literature highlights that many small business owners and individuals in managerial positions, such as ECD principals, lack managerial skills which hinder business success (Asah, Fatoki & Rungani, 2015; Van Scheers & Radipere, 2005). As a solution, training has been found to be a useful enabler of financial literacy for entrepreneurs in South Africa (Kirsten, 2013).

Continuing the discussion on technical skills, it became evident that an ECD principal should have a clear and technically-oriented **understanding of DSD registration and centre compliance (S4).** Specific documentation is needed for registration (S4.1)**,** which can be the first hurdle for many ECD principals to overcome. ECD Principal B, who described herself as an ECD owner, shared her frustration with the process:

> *"The registration has been an issue for us right from the beginning, we've tried…I don't even know what more to do to be honest, at this stage, I don't even know what forms to fill in. We have been trying to get hold of Social Development here for so long. I think they've been here once or twice, and I've asked them for forms. Please email the forms to me, bring them to me…We don't hear from them again."* [ECD Principal B]

An ECD manager confirmed that this technical skill is not one that principals gain easily:

> *"I think having administration skills saves you time, and it saves you the stress of a back-and-forth process that can leave you as a principal feeling a great deal of despair. There are so many forms that one has to complete – just speaking about the other technicalities that principals may have to face – I think there's a lot of duplication of information. If you're not asking the right questions, you won't necessarily get the*

answers that you're looking for, and that defeats the whole purpose of information being accessible and having an open and transparent relationship with the government departments. The department you effectively want to do right by, but you just can't, because there are people involved in the process, that aren't necessarily as forthcoming as what they should be with information about what documents are needed and when." [ECD Manager 16]

Challenges with the registration process and documentation (S4.2) was a predominant subtheme in many of the interviews. There is often difficulty in accessing accurate information:

"I came across a centre recently who wasn't receiving the subsidy, but they were registered, and they didn't realise that they could access the subsidy because they were told wrong information…" [ECD Manager 9]

Several participants shared that, generally, principals were insufficiently informed of the registration process. ECD Manager 16 noted,

"The technicality of understanding registration means for most [p]rincipals, and even myself, as a practising social worker a hit or miss. It's a trial and error. Registration is about asking the right people, who may be in the right mood, on that day, where to access something. Like I've mentioned, there's a technical aspect of finding, first of all, your Town Planning Department, your Environmental Health Department, followed by Disaster Management, Department of Education, Department of Social Development, the Criminal Record Centre or your local police station for the screening process; and then you also have your local clinics that you also have to navigate. So it's all these different departments that you kind of have to just figure out who needs what from you, in order to register."

Participants also noted the challenges with compliance and regulations:

"My biggest challenge – is linked to management – has been the red tape from government municipality for registration and zoning, like the bureaucracy of it. My case might be unique; how many apply and are still waiting after four years? So that's been quite frustrating. When I went to the meeting with the department, and they outlined all the things you need for the application, I felt like it's a lot of red tape, I

> *found that daunting – I don't know how people with less resources, less of a network, less of an education, how they would cope…It's very confusing to meet all the regulations, it's not a very clear what they want, all the time."* [ECD Principal F]

Compliance tended to dominate the conversation among ECD principals, who experience many hurdles despite their attempts to adhere to government protocols. Some authors have suggested that ECD leaders should being encouraged to focus more on compliance than sound governance, which may be the case for many South African principals, who are in dire need of the financial support that comes with compliance (Sims, Waniganayake & Hadley, 2017).

There was a resounding emergence of confusion and despondence (S4.3) regarding registration from participants:

> *"It's a very tumultuous experience..."* [ECD Manager 16]

and similarly,

> *"So then I thought, well, you know what? Whatever! If we're going to go over to Basic Education, then I'm not going to worry about the registration now, until that's sorted out, and then rather register with Basic Education rather than DSD."* [ECD Principal B]

Several other narratives reflected feelings of confusion and uncertainty regarding the system and their inability to meet requirements. An insightful ECD manager noted that this particular skill is one that can be acquired:

> *"They're learning about registration. You need to register your centre, registration doesn't only mean you register the physical structure, you also need to register the programme, which is your learning programme that you're implementing at the centre…"* [ECD Manager 16]

Supporting this, another manager noted that one does not learn this skill immediately and that access to support does impact this process:

> *"I've been practising for seven-and-a-half years already and I am still learning about registration. I think it's affected by where you are situated geographically. First of all, the access to services and information. In a well-resourced area, it's so much easier to navigate this terrain. But in areas where it's not, unfortunately, it makes it all the more difficult."* [ECD Manager 16]

Another ECD manager mentioned an exceptional principal whose attitude made all the difference in getting registered:

> *"…her attitude toward the registration process seemed to be very proactive, and she was very willing to understand the social dynamic of registration. So always willing to learn and willing to meet the state institution where they were at… Her administrative system is great, and she does it herself, but I think it's just because she's just so involved. This makes sure that her ECD grows. So she's a success story." [ECD Manager 16]*

As mentioned previously, literature and current debate regarding the registered and unregistered centres continues to indicate a need for intervention and collective action in the sector (Johnson, 2017). SSO-driven initiatives have sought to address the confusion among centres and the demand for registration guidance. In response to the need for easily accessible information, innovative platforms and online forums have been created to assist with registration. While it may differ somewhat from province to province, this is a great initiative to assist with empowering principals with the process in an easy-to-understand, systematic way (Bridge, 2020; Centre for Early Childhood Development, 2020).

It was interesting to note the comments from both ECD principals and managers regarding the skill of **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) (S5)**. Most authors agree that monitoring is the ongoing process of measuring progress activities, policies, programmes or plans (Morra Imas & Rist, 2009). This is complemented by evaluation, which is the analysis and reflection of monitoring outcome (Kusek & Rist, 2004). These two operations both require a research-oriented skill set.

M&E has been referred to as a tool and a feature of good governance (Abrahams, 2015) and the M&E skill is intended to generate records on progress, outcomes, and impact measurements (S5.1). ECD Principal C shared her desire to track children's progress, indicating that it was important for her to monitor the progress of the children entering and leaving her centre. This sentiment was supported by ECD Manager 9's comment, who relayed that it is important to

> *"…keep track of everything that is actually happening at your centre… and what can you change for the future."* [ECD Manager 9]

Lack of a reliable database of ECD centres and their outputs is a challenge for South African government departments and those working in the sector (Matshali, 2015). In addition, M&E is a relatively new trend in the NPO sector used as a quality assurance mechanism for government, donors, and stakeholder funding requirements (S5.2). Abrahams (2015) reviewed the M&E role in South Africa's history and the thrust for donor requirements, particularly in the civil society sectors such as ECD services. ECD Manager 3 mentioned the following about this topic:

> *"I think you're going to have challenges if you're going to apply for funding, be it from government, be it from local or foreign donors, because that's a requirement in any application form, that ask you what are you going to do for monitoring and evaluation; and this is where many fall short. And not just for the business side, but also for your staff, and for monitoring the programme."*

There is an astounding call for quality assurance in the ECD sector and yet, even the ECD managers in this study shared their frustration about their inability to offer the ECD principals quality services:

> *"We get so inundated with administration tasks that we don't offer quality…we are counting heads, checking boxes…but are we really adding value?"* [ECD Manager 16]

An excellent example of what is possible, is GROW ECD, who has a sound methodology for their programme impact report, containing ECD-significant data

(GROW ECD & Relative Impact, 2020). The Impact report showcased baseline data, intervention indicators and progress made to date with regards to their ECD micro-franchise model.

A strong emphasis on quality is noted as a robust theme from most of the interviews. The following narrative reflects the call for quality assurance and service delivery that meets a high standard:

> *"It's not just a one-sided thing, it's democratic, it is meant to be a learning curve. I find that government impose their rules, but they forget that it is meant to be a continuous thing…at the end of the day you're working towards quality."* [ECD Manager 4]

The intention is for collective learning to occur as a result of the data collected. This was evident in the following reflection:

> *"…because when you do monitor and evaluate, you're constantly changing, it's like you're going through this metamorphosis all the time, changing… you need to monitor what's happening at the school all the time, and evaluate. Not just you yourself, but have everybody involved. And again, it's not just you, and that's sadly what many principals think that it's just about them[,] but that's not true." [ECD Manager 7]*

M&E can take the form of reports, registers, assessments, checklists, and observation sheets, to mention a few. The emphasis is usually on recording and ensuring that there is evidence for the work completed to a certain standard. ECD Principal F mentioned,

> *"I think quality control is a big one, we have our plans and we do them, but did they work?... [T]he teacher won't necessarily check this[,] but it is a specific role of a principal."*

Sadly, despite the call for quality M&E tools and outputs, there seems to be a <u>lack of practice and implementation in ECD centres</u> (S5.3), which could be attributed to a lack of understanding, capacity, and competence. In the context of the participants' qualifications (discussed Section 6.2), this is not surprising and requires attention

from a strengths-based perspective. One manager shared her observation of practical application in the field:

> *"I'm not sure if many of them are actually really doing it, and that's the challenge."* [ECD Manager 12]

This observation was shared by ECD Manager 6, who also noted the potential for improvement amongst the principals she supervises:

> *"M&E is a nightmare…I sit and collect all the data and it's not something the principals are getting right. It's something I want to move towards."*

Another technical skill which emerged from the interviews, was that of **green environmental skills (S6)**, which tended to mean something slightly different to different participants, depending on their experience, background, and context. Some participants saw these skills as encouraging environmental knowledge and awareness (S6.1), for example:

> *"If I want to do something with plants, I am supposed to know what is safe for the children to touch and which plants are dangerous."* [ECD Principal C]

However, some felt that green skills referred more to ECD waste management practices (S6.2), such as recycling or limiting waste in the centre:

> *"Going green in the classroom is possible for me as the principal because I can use less paper by using technology[,] but going green in the classroom isn't always a good idea because children need to have things in their hands like crayons and paper."* [ECD Principal D]

The Natural Learning Initiative (2019) made some noteworthy findings on the impact of naturalised early learning environments, which support the adoption of environmental awareness and awareness of nature into preschool contexts.

One other category that was noted, was the principal's ability to showcase health and safety awareness (S6.3) in their centre, and some of these narratives refer to compliance and safety regulations too, indicating an overlap in these skill sets.

> *"The principal needs to ensure she has got enough space for a particular number of children for safety."* [ECD Manager 4]

> *"In terms of principal compliance issues with various departments, the main one is Health, Fire and Safety. Ensuring that their fire equipment is checked and approved, train staff on fire safety and the first aid kit, once a month."* [ECD Manager 10].

ECD Manager 10 also noted the importance of hygiene as a green skill in ECD centres:

> *"…cleanliness, general cleanliness; and making sure that teachers are washing those resources, like Lego blocks; kids spit on them, pee on them. Maybe now after [C]ovid, centres will clean."*

While water sanitation and hygiene practices have been explored in South African ECD contexts (Melariri *et al*., 2019; Steenkamp *et al*., 2020), much input is needed to improve resource provision, water accessibility, and knowledge on hygiene practices. Creating a workplace culture that improves the environment and ensures health and safety should be a priority in all businesses (Cwele, 2019).

The vast differences in definition of environmental skills and application thereof in the ECD context present an opportunity for further investigation into environmental health issues in ECD centres.

The **use of technology (S7)** is a modern practice for managers in ECD centres and is relevant in the current climate of technological advances, making education resources, online learning, and information more accessible than ever before (Daniels, 2020). This statement is not said without acknowledging the complexity in the education system of South Africa whereby technology has been deemed a stumbling block to equal access to data, hardware, and technological competence,

particularly in low-income and underprivileged communities (Ahn & McEachin 2017; Jansen, 2020; Protopsaltis & Baumi, 2019). One younger principal, ECD principal D, who has administrative and funding support at her centre, boldly acknowledged the efficiency that technology brings to her centre:

> *"In today's life you cannot function without a PC. Information reaches the relevant partners quicker, and I can get a quicker response by making use of technology."*

During a number of the interviews, cell phones being used for communication (S7.1) was raised as the tool of choice for online exchanges and sharing of information. Principal D, for example, mentioned:

> *"Everybody has a cell phone with WhatsApp[,] but not everyone has a computer. I use this to send messages to the staff and parents."*

Using messaging services such as *WhatsApp* proved to be useful for networking with other principals too:

> "*We've got WhatsApp groups as principals. There are so many WhatsApp groups! Whenever there is training, we create a group and I make sure I get myself involved*." [ECD Principal A]

In addition to *WhatsApp* groups, principals also mentioned using phone calls, SMS messages, and voice messages via their cell phones to communicate with parents (Rudi, Dworkin, Walker & Doty, 2015; Lim & Cho, 2019; Gauvreau & Sandall, 2019).

Leaders who are relational have been known to inspire and create high-performing organisations (Gittell 2016). Networks, particularly with other leaders, such as communities of practice or ECD forums, have also been known to promote principal leadership (Douglass, 2017). Networking will be discussed further in Section 6.3.1.2.

Computer literacy among principals (S7.2) is necessary, starting with the basic knowledge of and confidence to use a computer. This is a developmental opportunity

for small businesses to enhance their efficiency and professionalism of services offered:

> *"…computer skills are good[,] because if the principal is not computer literate, then the personnel files, forms and reports are not easy to find. Leave forms and the planning can go missing. It can be a disaster."* [ECD Principal D]

One principal proudly mentioned that their teachers were ready to expose some of their Grade R children to computers in the afternoons as an extra service offered by the ECD centre:

> *"We've started a computer class, because children are into computers."* [ECD Principal K]

Despite this, computer programmes aimed at Grade R largely have not successfully seen implementation due to limited staff capacity, lack of funds, and, in some cases, vandalism of centres (Mohangi, Krog, Stephens & Nel, 2016).

Principals also use computers for online data and documentation storage (S7.3). SSOs have incrementally been adopting online and web-based systems for data management, particularly for M&E functions:

> "*Aside from research, there is data you must back up on the computer. I back up my budget on [E]xcel."* [ECD Principal K]

A flood of online applications and platforms for capturing, reporting, and storing data have been developed to help administrators and ECD practitioners. Uptake of these has mostly been seen in developed countries but there has also been a surge of technology in South African schools and ECD service providers (CNBC, 2018; Hannaway, 2016).

Technology-driven, online financial management (S7.4) is also noted as a valuable tool for an efficient and organised centre. Examples given by participants included:

> *"I have all my Excel spreadsheets."* [ECD Principal B]

and similarly:

> *"I do a backup of important information, like my budget… I do it on Excel. If you don't have computer skills or know how to use Excel, you won't do a budget."* [ECD Principal K]

Inadequate access to technology (S7.5) was a prominent category that emerged during the interviews and is also widely documented in the literature**.** Daniels (2020) mentions that in most South African households, technology may not be present, other than a cell phone. In addition, the high cost of data, lack of access to computers and printers, and the limitations of internet coverage in South Africa often prevent small business from using laptops or computers or accessing information which is online (Chisango & Lesame, 2014; Lesame, 2013). ECD Manager 12, who mentors ECD principals specifically on management and governance requirements, shared one scenario:

> *"So what the principals did is, they hand wrote their policies out first, and then some of them asked if they could come and sit at our offices and type up their policies, and others went to internet cafés and did it. Sadly… some couldn't afford to do that, while others literally found a way to type it out and pay for it to be printed."*

Another barrier to access is the commercialisation of software and operating systems, which require subscriptions or fees to run computer systems. ECD Manager 12, whose SSO offers mentorship to principals as well as ECD resourcing, amongst other programmes, had the following insight:

> "*…a big issue is that the principal needs to get policies and procedures in place[,] but they don't have access to paper, they don't have access to a printer or a laptop. They don't have the access to the resources that run laptops, and they don't have the money to go out and buy programmes like Windows."*

A potential solution here, is the use of free software, such as Google Docs, and open-source software, such as the Linux Operating System (OS), Chrome OS, or the

South African-created Ubuntu OS (McClune, 2018; Quan-Baffour & Romm, 2014). Some Office alternatives include Libre Office, Open Office, and the Google Docs Editors suite. Open-source software is freely available software which seeks to offer a cost-saving alternative to proprietary software, to reduce the digital divide between those organisations who can afford software and those who cannot. As a result, this kind of software has the potential to encourage local economic growth and creatively address challenges in market inequality (Rossi, Russo & Succi, 2012).

Dedrick and West (2003) mention managerial skills as a contributing factor to successful adoption of this technology into any organisation. It could be argued that the environmental and socio-economic context in South Africa is not yet "ready" for embracing technological developments in general, however, in an ongoing developmental approach towards economic growth globally, one has to be aware of the role technology can play in the promotion of small business efficiency (McClune, 2018; Quan-Baffour & Romm, 2014; Sassi, 2005). Research is needed into the use of open source community software, even in social service sectors such as ECD and community work (Quan-Baffour & Romm, 2014).

Lack of support and infrastructure in informal settlements and rural areas mean that the use and ease of accessing and owning devices such as smart phones or printers, as well as the technical skills needed to use these devices, are limited. There is a dire need for people in South Africa (Bornman, 2016) to improve their technological literacy.

Lastly regarding technology is the value of using computers and the internet specifically for <u>research</u> (S7.6):

> *"If we plan a lesson and we don't know much about the lesson theme[,] then we must do some research. If you don't have these skills, how can you research things outside your own community or environment?"* [ECD Principal K]

In addition to website creation, marketing opportunities via social media and email, online directory services, and other online platforms for ECD resourcing are an

ever-growing opportunity for small businesses to enhance their services and attract new customers, such as potential parents and funders.

In the current context of this study, a relevant skill that emerged in most of the interviews due to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, was **crisis management** (S8). This is defined as the ability to prevent a crisis or adequately deal with contingencies (Potter, Pavlakis & Roberts, 2020). During 2020, the COVID-19 virus caused a global pandemic which sent industries and society into a state of disarray. The South African nationwide coronavirus lockdown commenced on March 27, 2020 for an initial duration of five weeks. Across the country, only essential services were in operation and no ECD centre was permitted to open. Participants were interviewed during the lockdown and thus several of the narratives on Covid-19 are in the present tense.

Crisis management is a skill that was not probed by the interview schedule but emerged as a vital, albeit unacknowledged, skill for ECD principals. Participants mentioned their personal response to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions (S8.1):

> *"Yoh, this Covid, we are just staying home… it['']s so frustrating…"* [ECD Principal M]

The frustration continued as the DSD did not allow ECD centres to open after this period, until legal action was taken against the state. One principal mentioned her fear of the future for the ECD sector:

> *"The ECD [sector] is lacking…I'm talking about all ECDs, for that matter. We are sitting in a crisis now. We are all stressing because why? Everyone is asking… Do I have a job after this?"* [ECD Principal J]

A lack of communication lead to principals feeling uncertain regarding opening regulations and their businesses' livelihoods:

> *"…nothing has been said about the pre[-]schools in this pandemic."* [ECD Principal J]

Coombs (2012) suggests that there are three stages to a crisis that managers should be aware of, namely (1) pre-crisis, (2) mid-crisis, and (3) post-crisis. In a time of crisis

such as 2020's Covid-19 pandemic, the following question has to be asked: How could an entire sector and workforce be no one state department's responsibility? A workforce survey was conducted which reflects the resounding voice of the sector, stating the need for immediate government intervention to uplift and invest financially into the sector's human resources (Bridge, 2020). Other countries such as Italy, who were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, reflected on the need for public institutions such as social services to not be silent during a crisis but to upscale support and focus on preserving intellectual capital as well as prioritising the human, structural, and relational capital of the country (Lacuzzi, Fedele & Garlatti, 2020; Bornemann & Wiedenhofer, 2014; Massaro, Dumay & Garlatti, 2015).

In terms of the crisis management skill, financial and organisational planning, and provision for a crisis (S8.2) were highlighted. Patterson and Radtke (2009) mention two types of crises that a non-profit may encounter, namely an unpredictable crisis, either internally or externally, and secondly, a crisis of controversy, which may involve the reputation or legal standing of an organisation. Both these forms of crises may impact a non-profit's ability to retain donor investment, offer customer services, and feasibly pay their staff**.** The ideal for a principal would be to learn to understand and manage risk. In South Africa, we must understand how the historical and socio-economic context has a particular and unique set of risks and challenges associated with it. This can mean anything from poverty and unemployment, to single-headed households, to HIV and malnutrition, diseases of lifestyle, abuse and neglect, and also an ever-changing environment of needs and demands impacted by global and local winds of change. Planning becomes necessary, however, without adaptable crisis management skills, plans could hinder or stunt an organisation's ability to adjust to a crisis. ECD Principal M remarks:

"Yoh, this year, I did plan, but the year didn't go according to any of our plans."

A crisis could also have consequences for the financial stability of an ECD centre. Several participants indicated that there was financial strain during the pandemic, as centres were not financially supported and had to adapt accordingly:

> *"Every school has practically collapsed, with receiving no income, or very little. Covid-19 has been the best teacher ever, by getting people to understand what it means to limit your expenditure to your particular month's income, and not spend ahead."* [ECD Manager 10]

Not being registered also hindered ECD centres' ability to survive the lockdown without the extra financial support they would otherwise have been eligible for:

> *"I'm not funded [by DSD], my income, it's generated from fees. I should have a portion of it set aside for an emergency. Should I get funding, wow this place would be remarkable …even now with this lockdown."* [ECD Principal I].

Lack of registration with SARS caught most of the sector by surprise and this unfortunately resulted in little crisis support from the state:

> *"We are facing the Corona virus, most ECD centres are not registered with SARS. They're not registered for UIF and do not qualify for support even though they are a small company, because they don't meet the requirements. If only principals knew this."* [ECD Manager 2]

<u>Communication adaptions during a crisis</u> (S8.3) became a necessity during the pandemic. Principals' communication platform shifted from face-to-face or written, to the use of technology, mostly using cell phones and social media platforms. Covid-19 impacted the way principals encouraged parental involvement and engagement, and how they offered parents support (Daniels, 2020). ECD Principal B mentioned her leadership role in communicating during the virus:

> *"…I said that as well, communicate with staff, communicate with parents, put parents['] minds at ease when they are concerned about certain things, like the coronavirus."*

Technology, as previously discussed, was an essential tool for communication during a crisis:

> *"I use technology now in the lockdown too, obviously, communicate with my staff and ask if they are okay and my parents. Not all of them have a PC but they have WhatsApp."* [ECD Principal D]

Ensuring parents were engaged during lockdown, seemed to be a priority for ECD principals. They clearly acknowledged the impact of a crisis on young children, and many principals came up with innovative ideas for encouraging stimulation and learning at home:

> *"When the lockdown happened, there's a [p]rincipal who made sure that she sent out messages to her parents containing certain activities that must be done with the children, or ideas of activities that can be done."* [ECD Manager 12]

Jansen (2020) highlights three layers of technology for communication and learning during the Covid-19 lockdown. These included: (1) high-tech digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams, (2) medium-tech, digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, and (3) low-tech/analogue platforms, namely radio and television. All of these layers required the use of data, which is expensive, and the ability to access a smartphone or laptop, as well as uninterrupted electricity to power the device (Jansen, 2020). Access to electricity is a big problem in South Africa, as the country experiences regular power interruptions known as "load shedding", when power is turned off for a predetermined amount of time to reduce power consumption. That, combined with additional issues with electricity in informal settlements, such as stolen cables and illegal powerlines, create a number of large-scale issues, especially for those living in underprivileged communities, to access electricity to power electronic devices.

Merely moving to online teaching was therefore not enough, nor did it allow for inclusion, especially in a South African context, as mentioned above. It further lacks value in comparison to face-to-face interaction, as in all spheres of society (Lacuzzi, Fedele & Garlatti, 2020; Potter, Pavlakis & Roberts, 2020). In the ECD context, online learning is especially problematic as especially small children require hands-on interaction and because most children do not focus well in an online classroom setting. Another problem that emerged, was that parents had to become facilitators

of learning, which many parents struggled to achieve. Government has been called to invest in digital access and infrastructure to ensure that the poor and working class can too have access to and develop the ability to communicate effectively via technology during a crisis such as Covid-19. Communities of parents and principals should not have to choose between survival and learning during crisis situations.

6.3.1.2 Human skills (Sub-themes S9 – 11)

The ability to work well with people is a managerial skill that all leaders in the ECD sector should possess and continually seek to improve (Hujala, 2013; Fourie, 2018). Harmonious relationships in schools are accompanied by good communication skills, especially by a principal who is ultimately the connector between parents, children, staff, and other stakeholders (Rahmadani, 2020). ECD Manager 16 raised this point:

> *"I think it's important to not forget to be human. To remember to have real relationships with everyone who we find at an ECD centre; from staff, to children, to their parents, and to the community at large. I think it's really essential to show your interest in the continued growth of the children, and I think that that has a ripple effect on everything."* [ECD Manager 16]

Several sub-themes raised by participants spoke to the interpersonal managerial skills required by an ECD principal, the first being **communication (S9)**:

> *"Communicating with other people, it helps me, as a [p]rincipal to not get stuck in my own ways. When you are communicating with other people you learn more, you gain information, you learn more ideas; how to improve, where to improve, when to improve yourself and your centre."* [ECD Principal N]

Good communication has benefits for all involved at the centre, particularly staff members who benefit from the safety created in opening up dialogue together (Aceron & Guerrero, 2018; Greyling, *et al.*, 2019):

> *"Putting time aside to speak is helpful, I bring my staff together. It's an open space where we talk about what we need to do at the centre; what is right, what is wrong*

> *and what is working well. Everyone feels free to say whatever, correcting one another…we always feel free, all of us."* [ECD Principal H]

Participants focused on verbal and written communication, however, some managers mentioned the struggles principals have with this skill:

> *"Some principals have learnt a way of communication in their upbringing that is not useful, such as I speak once, and you must listen; or if it's a hard conversation, I avoid it. This happens a lot, my practitioners will tell me that they keep trying to phone their principal who doesn't pick up her phone and doesn't arrive for work. You see that natural avoidance of 'this is hard', I don't have the answer, so I will just avoid it…So what we see is that poor communication leads to avoiding the hard conversations and that causes the biggest breakdown of relationship, particularly with the staff."* [ECD Manager 1]

Active listening and seeking to understand others' perspectives can offer principals learning opportunities for innovative actions to improve their centre services (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2017). Relationship building and networking (S9.1) form part of the human skills mentioned by participants. ECD Principal C even mentioned the benefit of building relationships with parents who may enrol their future children at the centre. Another principal shared her view on the value of interactions with parents (S9.2) and the opportunity to create relationships:

> *"So often community level trust is broken with parents…it takes time for them to begin actually realising the value of getting to know their centre['']s staff, and then attending the parent workshops. Parents begin to see that their principals aren't like the other schools['] principals. They see true engagement like getting artwork sent home, messages from parent communication books, Whats[A]pps and then the parents really start to value the school and we see the numbers increase in that school."* [ECD Manager 13]

ECD Manager 16 suggested that interpersonal skills with parents can help with impacting the community:

> *"I think it benefits everyone that's involved[;] it makes people feel like they are a part of something."*

Parent meetings were mentioned by many participants, in addition to written letters or the use of a notice board or message book. These opportunities for interaction ensure that the parent

> *"does not have to worry about their child[;] they know that the child is safe and* secure…*"* [ECD Principal K]

Another participant also suggested that principals should

> *"listen to and report back to parents about their child."* [ECD Principal D]

This showcases the feedback loop necessary for school-to-home communication. Principals also have to communicate to parents the expectations of fees to be paid as well as additional financial costs, for example for additional activities:

> *"Every year I write out the year plan, like outings and fundraisers for the parents, so they have it in their hands."* [ECD Principal A]

The <u>interaction with staff</u> (S9.3) has been mentioned previously, but also features prominently under "communication" in terms of recruitment of staff, specifically when addressing the sector-wide issue of high staff turnover:

> *"It's a lifelong relationship that you are creating with people. Yes, with parents but also practitioners because if you don't, one month your staff are with you and the next month they have quit and you have to find new staff. I have two practitioners on staff and they are still with me."* [ECD Principal C]

Staff turnover can be avoided through adequate remuneration, sufficient supervision, peer support, and a positive school environment (Schaack, Le & Stedron, 2020; Totenhagen, Hawkins, Casper, Bosch, Hawkey & Borden, 2016). Interactions with staff could span a number of functions, from leading and planning, to organising and

controlling of the employee and volunteer activities at the ECD centre. The principal is also often responsible for interaction with the board of the NPO or SGB committee (S9.4):

> *"As principals, most of the time, we are working with groups…with staff, the parents and with the board members. Someone has to be the leader. You have to lead these meetings and conversations."* [ECD Principal L]

This was echoed by ECD Principal A, who actively aims to involve her board in the centre's strategic decisions:

> *"You have to know how to handle a meeting, how to supervise the staff and the management committee of the ECD."*

A principal's interpersonal skills are often referred to by others as their character and nature (S9.5). Parents value the expertise of a principal, as well as their empathy and kindness shown towards their families, and the knowledge shared, particularly during times of need or family stress (Rogers-Baber 2017; Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020). ECD Principal C mentioned,

> *"It is important to be caring towards the parents, even if they come with stories, it will help with the development of the child, it will help getting school fees, no matter what is happening in the child's family."*

One principal mentioned the safe space she creates through her relationships with those at her centre:

> *"Staff and children at my centre, I'm always there for them. I love them."* [ECD principal L]

Staff also respond well to communication which is delivered in an empowering way:

> *"Sometimes you have to give your staff more work. So that's where communication comes in, you have to explain everything you want in a polite way."* [ECD Principal N]

Principals are expected to model good character and interpersonal skills for teachers to emulate and, ultimately, for children, so that they can learn and grow from these interactions.

It was also raised that conflict management (S9.6) should naturally form part of the managerial skills expected from principals and that it is closely influenced by one's interpersonal skills:

> *"What is key and forms part of HR is being able to handle conflict resolution... because where there are people, conflict is bound to happen. The principal is key and central to these school relationships."* [ECD Manager 15]

ECD Manager 2 expanded on the leadership role principals need to play when it comes to conflict management within their centre:

> *"A lot of the time the practitioners get away with a lot of things because the [P]rincipal doesn't want to step in and actually be a [P]rincipal. They're too scared of the conflict that it might have, which is where conflict management is so important…you're going to have to have conflict in order to resolve certain things. It doesn't have to be bad conflict, but staff must know where the lines are."*

Block (2004) suggests that learning organisations maintain an open-minded approach to conflict, ensuring that managers function as *agents of* and not *barriers to* change. NGOs, which can be learning organisations, embrace decision making and open dialogue when it comes to conflict management (Block, 2004). What was once considered a soft skill, the ability to manage a group and create a functioning team, has become a valuable contribution to any business. Therefore, **group facilitation and team building skills (S10)** were also discussed by both managers and principals:

> *"Principals are working with groups of people[;] you are the leader of a group of people. They need to have group facilitation skills, because people have different personalities and different ways of working. The principal needs to have those skills to be able to make everyone run in the same direction…also a very good way to bridge different personalities, is by having team building sessions, so everyone can*

> *understand one another and it will be easier for them to all work towards achieving the same goal."* [ECD Manager 11]

Also supporting this, is the following remark:

> *"I need teamwork so that my centre will succeed in whatever we do, be a successful ECD…I do put time aside, so that we can talk about our ECD.*" [ECD Principal H]

One principal shared a lovely analogy which showcases the engaged role of a principal in building a team, while also functioning alongside the members:

> *"You become part of the team. It's not sitting back and only telling people what to do when actually, you don't know how to do it yourself. If you are part of a team. It's like we are all playing soccer, but one person must check if we all have our gear to start the game. That's the principal. I'm also going to be part of the game, I will be playing as well. Everyone is playing their part.*" [ECD Principal C]

Team building is seen as an essential management task (Theme 3, further discussed in Section 6.3.1.2) and has been noted as a highly effective component of empowering organisations with positive outcomes such as staff self-efficacy, improved motivation, self-direction, increased productivity, and commitment to a vision (Hardina, 2005). Working with teams encourages interaction between staff, thereby cultivating commitment and promoting a positive attitude towards the tasks at hand (Barnard,1999). In the Eastern Cape of South Africa, group facilitation skills have been taught to ECD principals for a number of community-based functions, such as parent support groups in an urban setting (Ronaasen *et al.*, 2020). It should not be dismissed that group-work skills and facilitation values, acquired in the context of ECD services in an urban setting (Nelson Mandela Bay), offered the platform for these skills to be transferred into a business management scenario for staff and stakeholders. To counter a largely individualistic approach in most workplaces (Miller-Stevens, Taylor & Morris, 2014) one also needs to acknowledge that an ECD centre could learn to value and promote a team-oriented culture.

Consistent involvement by a principal (S10.1) is a contributing factor towards building a strong team. Involvement by supporting other functions and tasks actively came across strongly in many of the interviews, for example:

> *"You must be a person that is hands-on, not just be the type of principal that doesn't know what is happening on the ground… many centres are struggling, the principal is not hands-on and does not actually understand what their responsibility is."* [ECD Manager 2].

ECD Manager 5 concurred:

> *"I think it's really important to be present… Not to be overbearing, but to make sure that everything is happening like it should."*

There was a clear distinction made by managers regarding the importance of a principal's active role in more than only staff matters:

> "*Being a [p]rincipal is not just about managing the ECD practitioners, but they play a big role in managing the centre itself. They need to manage the committee and also all financial issues and other centre matters."* [ECD Manager 4]

A principal is also expected to be a team leader (S10.2):

> *"I should be able to do the policies, together with my committee… we are creating the centre policies together. As the principal, I invite the community to join, we sit down and draw up everything together with some community members as well." [ECD Principal J]*

And:

> *"The [p]rincipal will make the final decision in certain situations; but we cannot forget that they are also part of that team of teachers; so the communication to the team is extremely important."* [ECD Principal D]

Creating teams also requires removing the power hierarchy and instilling a team ethos among the staff:

> *"I think everybody needs to know that they're in it together. There's no one role player who is more important than another, everybody has a very large and essential role to play."* [ECD Manager 6]

Principals must acknowledge employee satisfaction and their intention to retain employees at the centre as a long-term return on investment, which will promote positive interpersonal relationships between principals, managers, and practitioners (Lee, 2020). Leading a team also includes being able to manage and promote stakeholder engagement (S10.3) around the activities and operations of the ECD centre. This also requires interpersonal skills:

> *"You must be someone who is flexible and warm, willing to adjust when you work with a team. You encourage the teamwork at your centre and you must be someone who is loving and caring. It is important to have a conversations with teachers, parents and the community at large."* [ECD Principal M]

And:

> *"Principals need to have good communication skills because they are the leader. The principal needs to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately with the stakeholders[,] both within the centre and outside of the centre."* [ECD Manager 15]

A stakeholder approach is recommended for increased accountability in non-profit organisations (Barett, 2001; Murray, 2018). ECD Principal J shared how she implements both shared decision making and collective engagement at her centre:

> *"I raise most issues with the board. I also open up these conversations to the practitioners. Sometimes I even need to be open to the community, they too are stakeholders who can help."*

Teamwork necessitates managers to prioritise setting clear goals, measure work outputs, and have an intentional focus on improving services and processes through

meetings, planning, and conflict management strategies (Hardina, 2005). An organisation is only as strong as its (human) interaction with people, both internally and externally. Ideally, teams can be most effective when the members are empowered and trusted, committed, and given space to be innovative. (Krog & Govender, 2015).

Principals "must take everyone onboard" to foster team spirit within their schools (Ozen, 2018:92). Teamwork can therefore be enhanced by a principal who is able to trust staff with delegated tasks (S10.4). ECD Principal A mentioned that shared tasks promote the ownership felt by her team:

> *"You help everyone to be a part of what are you doing, to own the ECD too. The teacher can say, proudly, this is my ECD. Even if I'm not here at the centre, they can do it without me."*

Employees thrive when there is a level of shared trust and acknowledgment from management that their contribution towards the organisation is valued and appreciated**:**

> *"I think an important thing is valuing your staff. Showing value to what they do and the extra things they do for the centre…Thanking them when they do it."* [ECD Principal N]

Educators who are involved in a network or part of a team benefit from collaboration, shared learning, and mutual support (Serrano, Gonzalez Alfaya & Garcia, 2017) and unsupported educators acknowledge that participation in a shared mission would encourage increased team spirit in the workplace (Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020). Human skills are intended to build relationships to create an ECD centre that is beneficial to all.

Part of the supervisory role that ECD principals fulfil, requires them to have the ability to **mentor and coach (S11).** This would be true for any director, supervisor, or small business owner who intends to adopt an LOA in their operations and enterprises. Mentoring is the supervision, support, and guidance provided by one individual, who

is often a supervisor or senior in their role, to another (Amos, 2018). Often closely associated with leadership, mentoring involves an interpersonal process of communication (both verbal and non-verbal) that includes coaching, motivating, inspiring, directing, and supporting (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). In an ECD context, mentoring is experienced in a personal, professional, and team capacity, depending on the centre's needs (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors & Edwards-Groves, 2014; Ståhle & Stålbrandt, 2020). Prioritising staff development and mentoring needs (S11.1) is necessary for creating a culture of learning**.** ECD Manager 2 tells the story of many principals who attend training but then do not implement what they have learned at their centres because of little mentorship and support. This would also be true for staff who require coaching and support, particularly if they are new employees or newly qualified:

> *"Yes, my staff need to have support, even I need mentoring after I attend training…If I don't have to practice what I've learnt and there's no one following up on me to implement it[,] then I may just leave it there…. Follow-up and mentorship is important because not everybody will ask for advice."* [ECD Manager 2]

The principal should become an enabler of learning opportunities (S11.2) for herself and her staff. Transformative learning opportunities should be given, particularly to informal businesses, such as the ECD centres where women are predominantly in management positions and have to learn their way through challenges and successes as part of adult learning principals (English & Peters, 2010):

> *"If a teacher in the class is not equipped, you as the [P]rincipal needs [sic] […] to have knowledge to support her and to guide her. That will help her so that she can then grow in that aspect."* [ECD Principal D]

Responding to the learning needs of the organisation requires principals to be aware of the capacity and abilities of their team. Although ECD qualifications, as previously discussed, may be one mechanism used to encourage learning, there are additional technical, human, and conceptual skills which fall outside the standard ECD training modules. Mentoring and coaching could improve the quality of services offered but may also encourage staff:

> *"You should mentor your staff, because you want to make sure that they are professional in order for your centre to run effectively."* [ECD Principal 14]

ECD Principal D elaborated on this concept as she shared how she pursues opportunities for her staff to develop their skills:

> *"It is also my job to seek out workshops or any training that I can send the staff to do so that they can perform their tasks to the best of their ability…"*

Educators have also reported feeling valued and gaining mutual support through a peer-mentoring community of practice (Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020). The ability to relate to each other as adults was shared as an important tool for mentoring:

> *"Although principals are good at organising when they do plan, it's not a hundred percent and that's where the mentorship and support will come in."* [ECD Manager 2]

ECD Manager 8 shared the following perceptions based on her interactions with her staff, which shows a need for improved mentoring:

> "*I spoke to the teachers individually and the one thing that came out, the main thing that came out, was that the teachers don't actually know how to address or speak to their principals…they feel that the [p]rincipal is treating them as children. Supervision is a much needed skill for principals[;] they should know how to guide teachers"*.

One of the experiences shared by participants regarding the skill of mentoring was the <u>transference of knowledge and skills</u> (S11.3). Reciprocal benefits that result from intentional shared learning was noted by ECD Manager 9:

> "*I look at principals and I learn from them every day*".

Shared learning is fundamental to building organisational culture (Austin, 2000; Milway & Saxton, 2011; Winkler & Fyffe, 2016), yet there are certain barriers which prevent principals from facilitating the development of these skills.

Managers particularly felt that there was often a fear of competition or resentment of others' success (S11.4), which hindered learning and growth in centres:

> *"…Principals are often threatened if a practitioner is more qualified than them, thinking that they are a threat and not realising that that person can actually implement that skill."* [ECD Manager 7]

Commentary in the literature on the modern work culture mentions the lack of trust and competitiveness in many ECD settings, where personal gain and individualism fuel a negative work environment (Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020). It has been found that in ECD settings, principals may be aware of the need for professional development but sometimes fear the changes that come with collaborative learning and training (Hughes, 2019). This was evident in the following narrative:

> *"Principals are employing staff who are not necessarily good enough to ensure the quality of education in the centres, because they are always worried that someone's going to take away what they have at the centre. There is the fear of someone being better or coming with new ideas."* [ECD Manager 7]

This fear can mean that the principal as the leader is closed off to a learning culture (S11.5), which translates negatively into the ECD programme:

> *"…there's also an element of resistance from the principals to send their practitioners on training[,] because many of the practitioners end up leaving after training and then starting their own ECDs, once they have a qualification. Principals create a dependent system, where there's not a lot of managing. This way practitioners don't leave and they lack development. I see them, they just look after the kids and there's not enough teaching…whether it's play or implementation of the actual curriculum."* [ECD Manager 16]

Mayer and Nolan (2008) paint a picture of successful mentoring models in ECD centres which are fairly theoretical, however, practically, mentoring requires skill and intentional motivation. It involves supervision, support, and shared development (Ståhle & Stålbrandt, 2020). Sometimes leaders or managers can intend to offer

oversight and support to their team, but in practice, this can be erratic, critical, or even harmful if not delivered with a clear understanding of supervision (Wynee, 2020). Participants noted the façade of support (S11.6):

> *"Principals often come to training with the expectation of gaining new knowledge and skills[,] but often it goes against what they are already doing and the motivation to try it out isn't there… There is a lack of support in centres for learning, the lack of actual healthy support, fly-by-night support."* [ECD Manager 7]

The above skills are all linked to human skills, which are a critical management competency for an ECD principal.

6.3.1.3 Conceptual skills (Sub-themes S12 – 13)

Conceptual skills allow managers to address abstract and complex tasks (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2003). Conceptual skills mentioned by participants included policy development skills and decision making, which are detailed below.

Policy development skills (S12) were strongly linked to the administrative ability of an ECD principal. Participants mentioned a number of specific policies, namely emergency plans, admissions policies, staff administration, recruitment criteria, and health-related procedures. Other examples of policies listed in the literature include medication management, a disciplinary policy, a special needs education policy, and a transport policy (DSD & EPRI, 2014). One of the main purposes mentioned for this skill was that policy is responsible for ECD quality assurance (S12.1):

> *"Policy development gives you direction[;] you can't just do as you like. There are norms and standards."* [ECD Principal M]

Being able to create and formulate written evidence of processes within the centre is seen as part of policy development:

> *"There has to be a system in place[,] because I need to adhere to a standard. Not just for other people's sake, but for my own too. Writing the policies helps with making decisions and ensures that my centre is full of integrity."* [ECD Principal F]

Policy writing also creates business accountability and staff protection (S12.2):

> *"When I go through the policy step-by-step, I will ask the principals…if this is what they are signing up for? And they often respond saying 'we didn't realise our responsibility was so huge'."* [ECD Manager 12]

The weight of carrying out this task is often not fully understood by principals, and is discussed further in Section 6.3.2.4.

Staff also require protection in terms of leave and labour rights (S12.2) and principals are furthermore not only required to protect staff but also the children.

Writing up policies also contributes towards child protection (S12.3) at the centre, which is a priority area for the DSD and social work managers who conduct inspections at ECD centres to ensure progress and compliance:

> *"Things can go wrong if centres don't have policies and procedures in place to protect them. It's really bad…there had previously been a child safety complaint raised with the social worker but there wasn't any policy about handling these issues."* [ECD Manager 1]

Managers found that there were gaps and discrepancies with the policies (S12.4) implemented at ECD centres. Principals' policy creation skills were found to be lacking:

> *"The policies and procedures that were in place were literally a copy and paste exercise by principals. They had found a policy online and literally copy and pasted it with their letterhead on top."* [ECD Manager 12]

Policy development was mentioned as a challenging task for principals:

> *"…when I got a list of how many polices I needed, I went into a flat spin…I have drawn a lot from examples I found online… it was quite painful. I see the value of policies but I do find them tedious to set up."* [ECD Principal F]

The mere replication of policies by ECD principals without adequate understanding of what they entail, has dire consequences for a centre, as this creates a disconnect between the words written on paper and what is occurring in reality at these centres. An example of this would be if a centre has an admission policy in place that requires parents to submit a copy of the child's Road to Health Book, but in practice, parents register their children without completing any paperwork, nor submitting any health information. These challenges with policy writing continued to be shared by managers, who saw that although the centres had policies, the principals did not have the skills to create them:

> *"Principals don't understand how to develop a policy…They all know what a policy is and that they need to have a policy in place, but they don't know what needs to be in the policy. It's not even worth the paper that it's written on."* [ECD Manager 4]

This presents a need for further training, support and mentoring to ensure that policy development skills are enhanced in the ECD sector. ECD principals, like all managers, are seen as the authority in the organisation and often have to improve their **decision making (S13)** capacity. This ability is required of principals on a daily basis:

> *"Thinking on your toes is quite important[,] because in an ECD centre no two days are the same…Sometimes decisions need to be made that aren't easy decisions[,] but you have to keep in mind the best interest of the child always."* [ECD Manager 6]

The ability to <u>problem solve</u> (S13.1) is closely linked to decision making, as mentioned by ECD Principal A:

> *"I also take time to think about something before action…*"

ECD Manager 2 felt strongly about the principal's leadership role when it comes to making decisions:

> *"When solving problems, a principal must not take sides…"*

Decision making can be dominated by the principal or NPO committee, however, shared decision making (S13.2) is recommended as best practice for organisations (Hardina, 2005; Mowrey & King, 2019). This is a skill that can be initiated by the manager or ECD principal. Being able to make quick decisions is also helpful in a crisis (Potter, Pavlakis & Roberts, 2020).

Human skills were a predominate theme from the narratives that emerged in most interviews as part of the discussion on essential management skills required for ECD principals in order to effectively manage their centres.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Essential management functions of an ECD principal

The second theme to be explored is the essential management functions of an ECD principal, which are based on the well-documented work of Fayol (1916). Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum (2002) outline the fundamental management functions as planning, organising, leading, and controlling, which were all discussed with the participants. Most participants had to be prompted to discuss each function, instead of raising these topics themselves. However, they were more than knowledgeable and aware of the functions once they were mentioned by name and able to elaborate on them in great detail. This need for prompting speaks to the lack of business-oriented theoretical input for both the ECD managers from SSOs and ECD principals. Below in Table 6.4 is a summary of the theme, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the interviews during the empirical investigation.

Table 6.4 Summary of Theme 2: Essential management functions of an ECD principal

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 2: Essential management functions of an ECD principal (F)	(F1) Planning	(F1.1) Weekly and yearly planning
		(F1.2) Fundraising initiatives and events
		(F1.3) Financial planning and resource allocation
		(F1.4) Lack of planning occurring in centres

	(F2) Organising	(F2.1) Organised systems at an ECD centre
		(F2.2) Administrative organisation
		(F2.3) Human resource and staff delegation
	(F3) Leading	(F3.1) Maintaining a vision for the centre
		(F3.2) Active role in their centre
		(F3.3) Role model
		(F3.4) Hierarchy within the centre
		(F3.5) Team leader who builds a learning culture
		(F3.6) Difficulty being the boss
		(F3.7) Public face of centre
	(F4) Controlling	(F4.1) Negative connotation
		(F4.2) Ensuring policy and DSD regulations
		(F4.3) Visitor and staff control
		(F4.4) Schedule and curriculum control
		(F4.5) Budget control

6.3.2.1 Sub-theme (F1): Planning

Planning involves setting goals and then designing appropriate activities to ensure that an individual or team achieves these goals. Decision-making skills promote the efficiency of planning and followers' perceptions of a leader have been found to be influenced positively by proper planning (Brumm & Drury, 2013). Foresight and proactivity are key elements of successful planning. It was mentioned by an ECD manager that

> *"[f]or an ECD centre[,] planning and routine is important…If a centre knows what will happen and when it will happen, it gives the staff a sense of security. Nobody wants to get to a job and they don't know what's going to happen or what needs to be done for that day…Obviously planning doesn't always go the way it should. We need to be flexible; but then it[']s important that you at least have an ECD background that can allow you to be flexible."* [ECD Manager 15]

Weekly and yearly planning (F1.1) was mentioned by many participants. This is relevant due to the nature of ECD learning and the National Curriculum Framework, which lends itself to ECD curriculum outcomes. This kind of planning ideally needs to consider themes and intentional learning opportunities. ECD Manager 11 mentions in this regard,

> *"I think failing to plan is planning to fail. ECD centres should do their planning a week ahead…the Principal needs to teach the educators, as well."*

One of the principals said that,

> *"At the end of the year, I look at my calendar for all the themes for the following year…"* [ECD Principal A].

While South Africa does not have a prescribed ECD curriculum, any activity or theme presented at an ECD centre should be age-appropriate, researched, and evidence based. As one manager mentioned,

> *"Planning for the academic year involves all of the paperwork, the induction process for new teachers and planned assessments throughout the year."* [ECD Manager 13]

One of the principals noted,

> *"…when I am doing my year-plan…I include activities like Valentine[']s Day, Mother's Day and Heritage Day."* [ECD Principal F]

This is positive to note, particularly in the context of ensuring that children are learning through play, life events, and special occasions. Other planned events included outings, school concerts and fundraisers, as mentioned by ECD Principal D.

Research endorses children attending quality ECD learning programmes frequently, as this is associated with improved cognitive development outcomes in children (Hong, Sabol, Burchinal, Tarullo, Zaslow & Peisner-Feinberg, 2019).

Participants elaborated on the need to plan fundraising initiatives and events (F1.2). In South Africa's current economic climate, now more than ever, fundraising is a skill set which needs to be taught, understood, and practiced by managers in order to learn and ultimately sustain their businesses, which are inherently non-profit and reliant on donations and support.

Sustainability is at the heart of this discussion:

> *"I've got the fundraising activities within there for the whole year. So[,] for [that] fundraising, this is when the ECD will make a bit profit, except [for] the school fees."* [ECD Principal A]

When elaborating about the benefits of being able to fundraise, ECD Principal 1 mentioned,

> *"If there is profit, that can go into petty cash or it can buy some school resources…"*

ECD Manager 6 supported this concept by noting that,

> *"The planning of income opportunities is important".*

This means that aside from school fees, principals should strategically plan other streams of revenue, which could include after-school services, outings, and fundraisers.

When it comes to events:

> *"I think one area that all principals are extremely good at is arranging and organising their year-end graduation."* [ECD Manager 10]

and:

> *"I can do the planning for the event before the time. I check what equipment I need and what information I need. What do I need to buy…"* [ECD Principal D]

Financial planning and resource allocation (F1.3) became a relevant theme for a principal's execution of the planning function and participants mentioned the consequences for inadequate planning of the centre's finances or resources:

> *"As a principal, you also need to plan to draw a salary…Once they've worked the financial plans out the principals realise, okay, this is what I'm getting and there's this much extra to work with."* [ECD Manager 1]

If a principal is able to plan sufficiently for the centre both in the short term and the long term, it strengthens the vision of the centre. ECD Principal M shared that even when she's not there anymore, there needs to be a plan for the legacy of the centre.

ECD Manager 15 said,

> *"Principals also need to be quite resourceful. In the sense that they need to be a people that are able to be innovative and to reach out and go out there to look for the resources they need[,] because unfortunately the sector does not come with a lot of luxuries."*

Being creative with finding resources is mentioned by participants as a forward-thinking approach favourable in a sector that does not always provide sufficiently for the needs of the centres:

> *"…the reality in the sector is that principals have to go the extra mile to make things work because financially it's not just there. A principal needs to be someone who is ready to take ownership and take initiative ahead of time."* [ECD Manager 15]

Learning organisations require intentional planning to facilitate change and opportunities for reflection. Participants mentioned a lack of planning occurring in centres (F1.4):

> *"Planning is key[,] but few of them have weekly meetings with their staff for planning…So without those in place, you find that the ladies start quibbling and fighting amongst each other…then you get a high staff turnover."* [ECD Manager 13]

Record keeping is essential for the planning of human resource management and is a useful tool to improve accountability and budget planning:

> *"In terms of businesses[,] many when they start coming to us for their finance meetings, we ask them, so how much money did you get in this month? And they answer 'I don't know['']; because cash in the pocket goes out here, and they keep no record of anything, and that just affects every aspect of their business and their life*" [ECD Manager 13]

That being said, there is a need for principals to be well rounded and not solely focussed on one element of the ECD programme, such as raising funds, for a centre in order to see business success:

> *"Principals are so focused on their role of chasing funding and getting donations…sometimes they neglect the ECD programme"* [ECD Manager 12]

While planning is a theme that came up throughout the interviews, the function of organising also emerged.

6.3.2.2 Sub-theme (F2): Organising

The arrangement of a workplace structure and hierarchy at the ECD centre as well as resources are primarily the responsibility of the principal (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Nel, 2019). It may sound like a simple task to accomplish, but this function requires clear administrative strength, strategic planning, and an ability to manage the resources at one's disposal. Participants highlighted the value of having an organised system at an ECD centre (F2.1):

> *"Principals are good when it comes to organising and planning for their centres but often their plans do not materialise. Principals control most of the ins and outs… but without a structure[,] things can get totally out of hand."* [ECD Manager 2]

As ECD Principal 6 mentioned,

> "*Organisation is a huge task that rests on the [p]rincipal, they're driving the standard for the whole school. Teachers should report to the Head. I know some schools have even bigger systems, but my system is teachers report to me".*

Administrative organisation (F2.2) is part of this function, and Saarukka (2014) found that approximately two-thirds of a school principal's time is spent on management and administration, whereas only one-third is spent on leading people. This sentiment is supported by the following narrative, which illustrates the administrative demand on principals:

> *"For example, the assessments; do the teachers know what they're assessing? Are there assessment sheets? Once they've completed it, I must put all of that data together and bring it all together in a written report."* [ECD Manager 6]

There also needs to be organisation with regards to the staffing, compliance documentation, and other administrative duties:

> *"Principals must keep track of employment contracts and job descriptions; they'll need to have a business plan for their centre and that should be updated regularly. They'll need to have a constitution for the registered NPO. Principals need to keep their approved building plans… Many supporting documents that one needs to find and organise and keep filed."* [ECD Manager 9]

Managing human resources and staff delegation (F2.3) is a skill which entails more than merely delegating tasks and allocating specific tasks to certain staff members. Tasks should also be appropriate and should include both "pleasant" and "mundane" activities, and thus involves strategically assigning roles and workload (Rodd, 2013:86). ECD Manager 7 mentioned,

> *"Organising is a broad category, I think [p]rincipals need to make sure that they can delegate tasks to the people that actually have the skills to fulfil them…"*

Organising involves understanding and harnessing the capacity of staff and aligning it with the vision of the centre. This links closely with teamwork:

> "*…being able to manage a team and being able to relate to your staff as individuals and not just manage them…to make sure that everyone knows their roles and their responsibilities…"* [ECD Manager 6]

This not only fosters joint investment in the mission of the centre, but also ensures that even without the manager present, the school still operates, as advocated by ECD Principal M. Distributed leadership acknowledges the role that all professionals within an educational setting play in implementing change, and that it is through collaboration that expertise is developed. (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011). That being said, the extreme outcome of delegation would be micromanagement of the staff and a lack of trust in the ECD centre's leadership, which would negatively impact any ECD setting and team (Rogers *et al.*, 2020).

6.3.2.3 Sub-theme (F3): Leading

Leadership (F3) is a concept that has been defined and critiqued in various different ways over the years but remains closely associated with power and personality (Amos, 2018; Rothman & Coetzer, 2002). Without adequate leadership, even the best of business ideas fall victim to traditional models of management, which do not necessarily foster innovation or learning. Contemporary leadership theory has evolved over time to expand on the concept of an "ethical leader", which encompasses transformational, servant, and authentic leadership styles (Krog & Govender, 2015; Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan & Prussia, 2013). Emerging leadership theories suggest that the authentic power of a leader is no longer linked to the leader's *position*, but rather to their *transforming impact* within the organisation and on its workers (Burns, 1978 in Stone & Patterson, 2005). A good leader and principal is willing to see, hear, and value the staff within their organisation and enhance their team members' personal growth for the benefit of the organisation as a whole. Leadership and governance are contemporary issues in the NGO world, and SSOs are not immune to the complex nature of leadership and power relationships that are intrinsic to organisational development and system formation over time.

In a South African context, a neoliberal trend is evident in the way NGOS are required to plan, fund, and execute their interventions, which demands managers and directors

to possess more than just clinical skills but also business-oriented expertise and managerial exposure (Ornellas, 2019). A competent manager is able to maintain a vision for the centre (F3.1) that involves communicating, goal setting, designing, and organising. Practical examples of leadership include adopting values into one's organisation and managing the mission, while also fulfilling operational tasks as part of a high-quality ECD service (Hujala *et al.*, 2016). However, Block and Rosenberg (2002) suggest that founders or owners tend to play a prominent role in small enterprises and in leading smaller teams. As shared by ECD Manager 6:

> *"The way one leads is very important. You need everybody onboard, moving towards the same goal. Principals make sure that everyone is on the same page… all their staff should work together towards the end goal, which is the development and growth of the children."*

And ECD Principal C:

> *"A principal is meant to guide everything that is happening at the centre, because even if someone comes to clean the yard, you have certain things that need to be done in a certain way."*

Good principals should play an active role in their centre (F3.2). Authors tend to use the word "leader" in early education settings sometimes in a school leadership capacity but other times in a managerial business capacity (Rönnerman, Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2017; Sergiovanni, 2015). ECD Principal M linked the functions of planning and organising to being able to "lead by example" as part of being a present and involved manager. This means that principals,

> *"…are filling a leadership role, that require certain approaches to dealing with situations that wouldn't necessarily come naturally to them. Training can empower principals with the skills and the knowledge that they need to set up and fill that complex role."* [ECD Manager 4]

The title of principal comes with a number of responsibilities, functions and expectations. This creates multiple hats that they must wear at once, which was confirmed by the following comment:

> *"ECD principals assume a number of different complex roles all at once in one person. For example[,] in a big company there would be a different person for HR and PR and marketing but now in an ECD setting, you find that all that's compacted into one person."* [ECD manager 15]

Similarly, ECD Manager 5 supported this notion by stating that being a principal can become "really overwhelming very quickly".

As a leader, an ECD principal is a role model (F3.3) to the children at their centre, the staff, the parents, and the community:

> *"Principals are role-models with different facets. They need to make sure that they're modelling the appropriate behaviour at all times"* [ECD manager 15]

While passion can further a business endeavour, leadership, control, planning, and organising are necessary for sustained business practices, even in small social enterprises like ECD centres. Forming part of a sector-wide mission, principals are leading in their individual communities:

> *"I always look at it as ECD principals are advocates within communities because [they] are the first people to advocate for quality early learning with their teachers and parents."* [ECD Manager 15]

The leadership style of principals can facilitate the successful implementation of business strategies to achieve organisational goals. Principals and practitioners who are able to integrate cultural knowledge and values into their business structure and strategy have been praised by their peers for leading with respect in the education sector (Phatudi, 2017).

The power of leadership emerged not only as a key competency but also a pivotal element of organisational growth on all levels; this pertains to the owner, the staff, the children, the parents, and community stakeholders**. Hierarchy within the centre (F3.4)** is a traditionally held view within a top-down hierarchical model, where centre directors follow a "command-and-lead approach", based on job title and position within the organisation (Nicholson & Maniates, 2016). This traditional approach positions leaders as managers, however, it can result in confusion and internal power struggles between leadership and management responsibilities in a small business. The principal, who is often the owner, is generally in charge; however, sometimes the principal will also be a teacher, which can result in added pressure on the team:

> *"Sometimes a [p]rincipal is qualified as a primary school teacher…this is where friction often starts. She acts above all the others."* [ECD Manager 3]

This tension can be addressed through open dialogue and a clear distinction of responsibilities between different staff members.

It has been suggested by some authors (Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2016; Ord, Mane, Smorti, Carroll-Lind, Robinson, Armstrong-Read, Brown-Cooper, Meredith, Rickard & Jalal, 2013) that a model of distributed leadership is highly suited to educational settings such as ECD centres, given the collaborative and collective nature of this sector. Principals are required to delegate and give opportunities to their staff to lead. A confident manger can understand their role and their teams' strengths to ensure optimal organisation outcomes. ECD Manager 7 notes,

> *"Principals need to clarify their roles for themselves so that they can focus on their level and the specific roles below them. I think often that it comes down to the organising of staff, the resources, capacitation and manpower. Not to do everything yourself."*

Block and Rosenberg's (2002) study added to the earlier work of Carver (1992) on a broad range of non-profit organisations that brought attention to the notion of "one person [who] inherently holds privileges and power that only a few individuals will ever experience: the founder of a non-profit organisation" (Block & Rosenberg,

2002:353). Sometimes owners exhibit behaviour related to what is described as "founders' syndrome". This is when the leader or founder tends to exercise increased influence, power, and privilege due to their position in the organisational workforce. Young ECD practitioners may feel frustrated by such hierarchies, if not given adequate space for shared dialogue (English & Peters, 2011). An ECD principal needs to be aware of this and the implications of exercising too much power or authority over their teams.

In addition to this, developing and maintaining successful organisations requires leaders to understand the culture of the organisation, to adapt to the challenges of the environment, and to respect the elements that make up the organisation. Leadership is less about a title and more about relationships. A leader of an organisation encompasses its vision and mission and should therefore lead by example. While principals may hold the title of director or overseer, ultimately *leadership* is the managerial function required of their role. This function should endorse the title, which means that principals function as team leaders who build a learning culture (F3.5):

> *"I know an excellent principal, she's clear in terms of her role and she gives roles to the practitioners based on their strengths. She is someone who encourages and praises strengths. She leads and guides staff[,] considering weaknesses."* [ECD Manager 7]

Working closely within a community often presents a challenge to managers on how to balance one's personal and professional life, and how to set boundaries between these two roles (Laurenzi, Skeen, Rabie, Coetzee, Notholi, Bishop, Chademana & Tomlinson, 2020). When principals live in the same community as their centre, the lines of leadership and friendship can be blurred:

> *"…it's sometimes very difficult to differentiate between my [p]rincipal, Monday to Friday[,] and my neighbour, Saturday and Sunday."* [ECD Manager 6]

The tension between being a leader, but not acting autocratically, will be discussed further in Section 6.3.2.4.

Navigating the dynamic of being a community leader is part of the principal's role. Participants mentioned that principals as leaders find great difficulty being the boss (F3.6) of a business:

> *"Many [p]rincipals struggle with being strict with their practitioners[,] because they want to be liked by the practitioners[,] but a lot of the time, that stops them from building the name of the centre, and building the team of the centre in a positive way."* [ECD Manager 2]

A principal becomes the public face of the centre (F3.7) and needs to grow their own professional network for support:

> *"Principals need to work with their community forums[,] because often resources are filtered through the forums."* [ECD Manager 10]

This shows the value behind communities of practice for connecting managers to one another:

> "*… forums have developed as a community response to the problem of being isolated and not having access to resources[,] so that's a way that principals get support from each other."* [ECD Manager 9].

It is not surprising given the developmental nature of the ECD sector that leadership in ECD emerged as an essential function.

6.3.2.4 Sub-theme (F4): Controlling

Control is a unique function that was discussed in the interviews, but questions were met with hesitancy from ECD principals and despondence by ECD managers. Worth noting, was the negative connotation associated with the concept of control (F4.1). Participants, both ECD managers and principals shared some of the struggles and realities they wrestled with when implementing the management function of control. Some resisted the notion of the term "boss" due to the resistance to power that could result from their staff or the community. This is a tough position for any manager to

navigate, because, in essence, you are the owner, but there is still a level of monitoring that needs to take place over your operation. This creates varied interpretations of the value of control:

> *"Yes, control is good but not when used negatively. You become very firm but you don't become rude." [ECD Principal C]*

Several participants asserted that control had both positive and negative attributes, yet some principals viewed control purely in a negative light. When asked about control, ECD Principal M indicated that,

> *"…controlling is not good…it's not the right way. You must not be controlling, you must be someone who can work with other people peacefully and respectfully."*

An ECD manager shed further light on the struggle that principals have with control:

> *"I find that [p]rincipals are really actually very good at control[,] but they do it in the wrong way. They can be quite autocratic in the way that they manage their centres…"* [ECD Manager 10]

Due to the intensified nature of policy development, societal pressures to perform, and business competitiveness on the rise the likeliness of principals imposing "top-down measures is likely to continue" (Holmes, Clement & Albright, 2013).

One element of control which has effective outcomes is that principals are tasked with ensuring that **policy and the DSD regulations are upheld** (F4.2). Principals are both at the helm, controlling the centre, and supervised and monitored by the DSD:

> *"… because centres have to register with the Department of Social Development and that department is sending them up and down to meet regulations which are sometimes not clear. For example[,] the instructions will be, you need to go to Land Use to apply for zoning, or rezoning, yet the person that you speak to doesn't give you clarity on what exactly one must do to comply* [ECD Manager 2]

Centre registration, while being a mandated requirement for principals to pursue, is also a gateway to sustainable income flow for the business to be able to pay teacher salaries, cover administrative costs, supply nutrition, and purchase educational materials:

> *"When centres receive resource support or food support, the principal is able to see, that actually without this support, they might not actually be able to run the centre and then we see the importance of registration, compliance and the DSD subsidy."* [ECD Manager 1]

The intended purpose of regulations is to ensure minimum norms and standards in a trajectory towards quality ECD services. Control assists with establishing, monitoring, and improving the services being offered, as ECD Principal F detailed in her interview:

> *"Without control in a centre it becomes like a free-for-all. You can plan as much as you like with big elaborate ideas, but ultimately if you're not controlling and assessing how it's going or if it's even working[,] how will you be able to adjust it or improve? It seldom happens and then the kids aren't getting what they need from the ECD centre."*

As important as it is to control the norms and standards at the centre, <u>visitor and staff control was also raised by participants</u> (F4.3):

> *"One needs to monitor the people entering and working in the ECD; my practitioners should feel free to come and go to their classrooms but to strangers coming in, I need to put my foot down. I need to be in control."* [ECD Principal G]

ECD Manager 13 cautioned that some principals tended to be overly controlling of the staff and volunteers at their centre, which can result in "micromanaging and principals quickly burn[ing] themselves out".

It is important that there should be adequate <u>schedule and curriculum control</u> (F4.4) in the classroom and in the overall centre curriculum throughout the year, or else, as one ECD principal mentioned,

> *"…the day just becomes chaotic and the teachers also aren't happy. The classroom plan can't be too hectic or too demanding of their time because that is when I find they can't manage to actually do it with their children."* [ECD Principal F]

ECD Manager 13, who has the title of ECD Regional Implementation Manager and offers mentorship, training support, and site management to ECD principals, provided more insight. She cautioned against authoritative leadership with regards to curriculum implementation:

> *"Some principals don't allow the creativity of their staff in the classroom and in their school. They see themselves as a dictatorial person who insists certain things must happen instead of understanding why things are happening."* [ECD Manager N]

The National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four specifically names the following developmental domains to be included in any ECD programme in preparation for Grade R: physical motor, socio-emotional, cognitive, language, creativity, and cultural-identity development (DoBE, 2015). This document is not without its criticism; however, it does provide a level of direction for principals in South Africa to formulate their schedules and programmes in a realistic manner (Murris, 2019).

Lastly**, control over the centre's budget** (F4.5) was emphasised**.** Without organisation, NPOs have limited control:

> *"Managing the finances makes sure that the centre doesn't operate at a loss. I think that's one of the hardest things for the principals; making sure that the money comes in, and that it is used for the purposes that it is intended to be used."* [ECD Manager 7]

Ensuring that the budget is carefully monitored becomes vital, particularly when centres are positioned in low-income areas impacted by poverty and unemployment:

> *"Without knowledge of what's going on in your centre[,] like the income and expenditure, a [p]rincipal won't be able to manage the centre. I have to make sure that I don't over-spend. My budget mustn't be more than my income. Sadly, it is*

> *happening [a] lot of the time when parents don't pay school fees[,] but I still need to feed those kids."* [ECD Principal N]

Engelbrecht (2008), introduced the idea of financial literacy education as a possible social work intervention tool to address poverty in South Africa. This would include the understanding and use of budgeting to manage income and expenditure. One ECD manager highlighted that she includes practical ways to control and manage a budget during her training and mentorship sessions with ECD principals:

> *"I show them exactly what to do. They must put all the cell phone slips together, all food slips together and then come sit and we can add them up…and the principals start to see the amount of money they get in and what is going out. Many are amazed that their business makes a turnover[,] but sadly they have got nothing to show for it. Without proper budget planning, organising, they have no control."* [ECD Manager 13]

Training and development of ECD principals and managers through innovative solutions is a potential opportunity for this largely informal sector to find its voice and establish itself in response to the following: influences of the economic market (Caloghirou, Kastelli & Tsakanikas, 2004), cultural values underpinning business (Mordi, Simpson, Singh & Okafor, 2010; Preisendörfer, Bitz & Bezuidenhout, 2012), approaches to social welfare (Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018; Gray & Allegritti, 2002; Phatudi, 2017), the philosophy of education (Cherrington, Botha & Keet, 2018; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018), and the organisation location (rural or urban), to be able to access innovative entrepreneurial opportunities (Elliott, 2019; Plotnikova, Romero & Martínez-Román, 2016).

Control (F4) was the last managerial function reflected on by participants as an essential management competency of a principal of an ECD centre in South Africa.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Essential management tasks

The final theme that emerged, which complements both skills and functions, is that of essential management tasks. As discussed throughout this study, the nature of the essential management competencies is interrelated and includes a collection of tasks

(Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). Participants were asked about the tasks specific to the Managerial Competency Model (Adapted from Hellriegel *et al*., 2018) and provided reflections on and practical explanations of these tasks and the application of them in an ECD context. Below, in Table 6.5, is a summary of the sub-themes and categories that emerged from the interviews during the empirical investigation of Theme 3:

Table 6.5 Summary of Theme 3: Essential management tasks of an ECD principal

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 3: Essential management functions of an ECD principal (T)	(T1) Communication tasks	(T1.1) Written and verbal communication
		(T1.2) Parent communication opportunities
		(T1.3) Communication values
		(T1.4) Marketing and advertising
	(T2) Planning and financial management tasks	(T2.1) Handling fees and income
		(T2.2) Use of a budget
		(T2.3) Accessing finances and funding
		(T2.4) Recording financials
	(T3) Teamwork tasks	(T3.1) Valuing staff
		(T3.2) Meetings with parents, staff, funders, and the SGB committee
		(T3.3) Recruitment
		(T3.4) Staff supervision
		(T3.5) Staff training and learning opportunities
	(T4) Strategic action tasks	(T4.1) Creativity with resources
		(T4.2) Strategic year planning
		(T4.3) Pursuit of registration documentation
		(T4.4) Quality control through reporting
	(T5) Global awareness tasks	(T5.1) Exposure to the ECD sector
		(T5.2) Attendance of ECD training and workshops
	(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks	(T6.1) Personal development
		(T6.2) Time management
	(T7) Operational tasks	(T7.1) Facility management and classroom resources
		(T7.2) Nutrition and food purchases
		(T7.3) Enrolment and administration
		(T7.4) Teaching and child assessments

6.3.3.1 Sub-theme T1: Communication tasks

Communication and interpersonal skills (T1) are the pinnacle of ECD management and often present the greatest challenges (Rodd, 2013). One ECD manager noted the lack of communication implemented in ECD settings:

> *"Very seldom do I find a [p]rincipal meeting with their staff. I mostly find that there's no communication or very little[,] even though it is an important factor for having a good support structure in your ECD centre. I think it's a task that's pushed down the priority list."* [ECD Manager 7]

Written and verbal communication (T1.1) were noted as communication tasks for principals to execute. Language in written, verbal, and non-verbal forms is used to express one's feelings, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs from a young age (De Witt, 2009). An ability to "read and write" (as mentioned by ECD Manager 3) is vital for administrative tasks, and to complete funding applications and reports, but also for general communication. Included in the narratives, the following applications were mentioned:

- Letters and notices;
- Message books or boards;
- SMS and WhatsApp messages;
- Phone calls;
- Face-to-face conversations; and
- Email.

According to Davin and Orr (2018), parents and ECD principals should maintain clear lines of communication in order to maintain an effective partnership and, according to the participants, creating parent communication opportunities (T1.2) is the task of the ECD principal. Particularly in times of organisational change or crisis, such as the COVID-19 lockdown, or a strike action, or natural disaster (Potter, Pavlakis & Roberts, 2020), ECD Manager 6 mentioned that

> *"…[a] principal should make sure that she knows when anything is going to take place, when will that be completed and who needs to be aware of these actions. Those details can then be communicated to the parents."* [ECD Manager 6]

Again, technology was raised as an enabler of effective communication with parents:

> *"Keep parents updated…that's where technology comes in. You can form a [W]hats[A]pp group and it['']s easy to send out a quick message so that everyone can read it…some personally message me on my phone to ask is my child okay?"* [ECD Principal C]

This task does not have to be overly complicated, however, it is important to encourage parent engagement and involvement in the educational progress of their child:

> *"…We find that in these communities the parent engagement is severely lacking. It is important for any principal to help the parents feel part of their child's educational process. Small jobs like[…] writing in the parent communication books can help. Now we have all the parents in [W[hats[A]pp groups to update them on what we are doing at the centre."* [ECD Manager 13]

One of the participants mentioned,

> *"Parents are the people that are essentially buying into your service and really they are the people you want to form a relationship with as a principal… Parents must do their part at home and having that relationship with them is essential."* [ECD Manager 5]

This is where communication becomes important for holding all those involved accountable and fostering the relationship between the home environment and the ECD centre.

Participants mentioned that there are also certain <u>communication values</u> (T1.3) that are considered as part of the tasks modelled and led by the principal. Transparency and confidentiality were two specific values mentioned by participants:

> *"To be transparent with your staff is very important but also it is important to know if certain issues are necessary to be discussed with the parents. These issues do not have to go around or to be known by everybody. Some matters should be kept a secret."* [ECD principal H]

The responsibility is on the principal to determine what information should be made publicly known and what should be protected, depending on the context and sensitivity of the issue at hand. Managers should use their discretion when determining what and how to communicate.

Prioritising communication values is a skill set adopted by group work facilitators who understand the value of building trust and fostering meaningful connections with others through mutual aid, which is found to yield positive process outcomes in community parent support groups and ECD settings (Ronaasen *et al*., 2020). One principal who is a fairly new to her managerial role mentioned that

> *"[w]ithout communication there can be a misalignment of expectations. Parents might be expecting something and then they are disappointed or unhappy. This reaction could mean less enrolments in the future, or can lead to poor word of mouth. With my staff, if there's no communication, there's no accountability[,] because I can't hold them accountable to anything if I haven't told them what my expectations are." [ECD Principal F]*

Views on <u>marketing and advertising</u> (T1.4) informs the idea that ECD centres are businesses that need to attract potential clients and build a positive reputation in their communities, similarly to any business:

> *"Principals need to know how to market their ECD centre… some centres have the facilities but they're not marketing themselves correctly to get the kids in the door."* [ECD Manager M]

ECD Principal F also proposed that marketing is a form of communication:

> *"It's quite important for your centre to be visible…"*

ECD Principal B shared her trial-and-error experience with different types of advertising, once again showcasing the need to be seen by the right target market at the right time to attract parents:

> *"I need to have enrolments each year so the advertising is important… parents must see that there is leadership at the school…I basically advertise on Facebook….I've handed out pamphlets before[,] but I have never got anything from pamphlets. My challenge with Facebook is that I put paid adverts up[,] but I don't know if it always targets the right people."* [ECD Principal B]

Ensuring that adequate communication channels are established, maintained, and strengthened is important, particularly for vulnerable parents who may not fully understand the role of ECD in their child's academic career. This has been found to be the case in some African communities, according to Matengu, Korkeamäki, and Cleghorn (2019), and Ng'asike (2014). Understanding a South African context and the local communication styles of parents in a particular community can assist principals to promote, market, and advertise their centre in a meaningful way.

6.3.3.2 Sub-theme T2: Planning and financial management tasks

Inadequate funding and poorly sustained **financial planning** (T2) can negatively impact the quality of services delivered by ECD centres (Meier, 2014; Richter & Samuels, 2017). There is a history to the funding of NGOs in South Africa, whereby apartheid tainted the experience of NGOs and community-based projects that were previously excluded from funding or support. With the election of a new government, the ANC was given the potential from 1997 to see and provide support to the thousands of NGOs offering social services across the country (Hamber, Mofokeng & Simpson, 1997). Over a 20-year period of democracy, the ECD sector is but one example of how access to funding for NGOs is still not guaranteed. That means that NGOs have to think and plan like businesses in order to financially sustain themselves.

Managing finances became a central issue for many participants as they discussed the theme of planning of finances. This includes the ability to handle fees and income (T2.1). ECD Manager 3 highlighted that there were key questions a principal would need to ask when handling income, which included:

> *"What is my ultimate goal at this centre? Do I want to make a profit or am I just going to be a service to the community? How much profit do I want to make each month?"*

She continued to elaborate on the short-term perspective that many individuals have when it comes to running a small business, particularly in low-income communities. ECD Manager 10 suggested that having certain management competencies can improve financial security:

> *"Often I see that the school[']s income is going from hand-to-mouth. She's [the principal is] going from month-to-month hoping for the best because there is no plan and no organisation. She could market her ECD better and get additional children to move it from a hand-to-mouth business to a sustainable and profitable business[;] she's going to need managerial qualities to achieve this."* [ECD Manager 10]

This is confirmed by the literature, which advocates for the use of sustainable financial planning in business (Van Nieuwenhuyzen, 2009). In addition, the use of a budget is a managerial task of a business owner, a director, and, in the case of this study, an ECD principal. A budget (T2.2) is a useful tool mentioned by participants that allows for the control and intentional allocation of income towards expenses and potential savings:

> *"As the owner, you have [to] make sure that the centre doesn't operate at a loss. You have to make sure that money comes in and that it is used for the purposes that it is intended to be used, that is a type of budget control."* [ECD Manager 10]

It is important to see funds allocated correctly and with accountability, regardless of the source of funding. Quality governance measures improve the credibility of the organisation and ECD Manager 12 concurs that an ECD principal should be

> *"…ensuring that school fees are coming in and if they are a funded centre, making sure that the funding is used appropriately. I would say, financial management is a big part of centre management."*

Principals are the decision makers who ensure that salaries and quality service delivery are a priority on the budget, as ECD Manager 10 pointed out:

> *"If a principal doesn't look after her finances, she is never going to be able to employ quality teachers. She should plan to hire qualified teachers so that she can offer a quality school programme. How else will she be able to increase her fees?"*

Managers concurred with the observation that ECD principals struggle with basic financial literacy competencies, as illustrated in this narrative:

> *"I think finances are last on their [the principals'] list because they think about it as a passion for children[,] but they don't look at it as a business. Nowadays[,] they struggle to allocate funds. The monthly expenses arise, there is no food, they need to pay rent, they need to do this, they need to do that for the centre but because of the lack of financial knowledge they fail." [ECD Manager 7]*

Similarly, as mentioned by ECD Manager 13:

> *"It starts with basic concepts that we often take for granted[,] such as doing our own budgets at home on a monthly basis. Principals don't even do that…"*

That being said, <u>accessing finances and funding</u> (T2.3) is critical from a business perspective, despite the philanthropic nature of ECD. The business model of an ECD centre is a key component of the avenues to access income. These avenues should be contextually relevant to the community and offer an opportunity for using resources for income-generating activities. It is important not to not rely on only one funding stream, but to constantly be motivating and arranging opportunities for revenue creation:

> *"Fundraising is part of the tasks that principals must do[,] because they cannot only rely on the fees or the subsidy alone. They need to make sure that the center['']s financial planning is in place." [ECD Manager 2]*

Written financials become an indication of sound governance and accountability, even in centres impacted by low-income communities and other social issues:

> *"At the moment[,] a big issue for me is really money. Sometimes the challenge is how to get new resources and they cost money…My biggest challenge is around fundraising[,] because our crèche is in a poor community."* [ECD Principal K]

Effective principals have been found to spend a considerable amount of time and energy considering how to collect fees and raise money from sponsors (Lumby, 2003; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). Regardless of the funding source, ECD principals should always maintain a high level of management procedures when dealing with the centre's finances.

<u>Recording financials</u> (T2.4) was a practical application mentioned by participants as a sound business practice for ECD centres:

> *"[I]f you are not up to date with the finances[,] you could be robbed blindly of a lot of money without even knowing. It's very important, it's your business and you need to keep a fine eye on everything."* [ECD manager 12].

The ability to have accessible financial information that monitors and tracks expenditure was mentioned:

> *"Recording every single cent you spend is the biggest task for principals. It is hard for them to separate their personal finances from the business. I always try and encourage these women to open up a separate account and pay themselves a salary so that they avoid dipping into the business bank account."* [ECD Manager 10]

Skilled facilitators are needed to support ECD principals in administration and financial management to comply with registration requirements (Biesterker & Picken, 2013). This skill can be developed over time with support and encouragement:

> *"It's painful recording all those expenses, I know it for myself… sometimes I don't even want to look at my bank statement and see what I've spent where. For many principals it takes a long time and much practice…"* [ECD Manager 10]

Planning and maintaining financial integrity is a managerial task requiring an array of skills to achieve and execute effective business-oriented strategies.

6.3.3.3 Sub-theme T3: Teamwork tasks

While the ability to lead is required when facilitating groups, managing a team of staff and stakeholders also calls for intentionality and certain tasks to be fulfilled. Creating an environment where **teamwork** (T3) is a priority should be the role of a leader:

> *"…I think [p]rincipals need to clarify their role as principal for themselves… there is a lot of confusion in terms of what they are actually supposed to do and what others should do…as the leader they must find the resources and encourage capacitation and the manpower to help them reach their goals."* [ECD Manager 7]

This concept is supported by valuing one's staff (T3.1) and the principal can achieve this by creating a proper team. The ECD sector, like social service settings, is fuelled by collective energy. Creating teams and collectively achieving tasks is a worthwhile endeavour for a principal:

> *"What is essential… is that you engage everyone, everyone at the centre should feel that she or he is accepted at the centre and is important."* [ECD Principal M]

The ability to value those working at an ECD centre is vital to enhancing it as a learning organisation and to enhancing the relational strength and trust between staff members:

> *"I need to form a trusting relationship with my staff if I don't have that vital communication skill then my team is not going to work, and ultimately the school won't function the way it should. One has to value the human factor of a centre."* [ECD Principal D].

A relational notion of leadership moves away from a focus on the individual leader to a more participatory focus, which leads to a collective strength (Nuttall & Thomas, 2014).

The leader is ultimately an enabler of this team-based culture. A principal, much like a facilitator, should understand group values, roles, and tasks (Prinsloo, 2016b; Smit *et al*., 2011):

> *"…The tone that the [p]rincipal sets is really important. I think if a [p]rincipal or a team manager is consistent with their motivation and rules and the way that they handle situations and […] the staff in general, if there's consistency in that, I think it really helps to build a solid foundation for the team effort and team spirit…This will also enhance the quality of the education in the ECD centre because if the teachers and the practitioners are happy and feel like they are part of a team[,] it also helps them to do their work better."* [ECD Manager 5]

Importantly, team tasks can take various forms and those mentioned during interviews included meetings, recruitment, supervision, staff training, and learning opportunities. Organising meetings for shared learning is a priority task for learning organisations specifically (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

According to the participants, <u>meetings with parents, staff, funders and the SGB committee</u> (T3.2) were useful platforms for encouraging teamwork.

> *"…meetings with teachers, regular meetings to make sure everyone is on track. These meetings mean that if there any issues, concerns or challenges, they can be addressed.*" [ECD Manager 9]

Parent meetings, whether for education, support, or organisational planning purposes, encourage a sense of community.

Parents desire active involvement from the principal as the centre leader, as is illustrated in this quote:

> *"Parents feel that the [p]rincipal must be at all meetings because you are meant to be planning and are running the show. If you as the principal are[n't] there, parents will question; why are you as the principal not at the show?"* [ECD Principal K]

Meetings offer an opportunity for group decision with staff, parents, or the governance committee (Marsh & Farrell, 2015; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). Funding opportunities are also noted as a reason for attending meetings:

> *"… I attend the important meetings making sure I'll attend fundraising meetings, for example with Community Chest, these meetings help to learn how to access funding from them."* [ECD Principal A]

Any business requires recruitment (T3.3) processes as well as induction and orientation opportunities to ensure that a suitable team is formed. There is an initial requirement for protection of the children at the centre:

> *"It is essential to know about your colleagues... Every time you take a new practitioner they should be screened."* [ECD Principal J]

Without ensuring that one is hiring quality staff, there is a risk of creating an inadequate team:

> *"Many [p]rincipals just employ anyone or find a volunteer that will be able to help because they need someone. This means that if they need someone today, they might take the first person that they can find what needs to be done. This is where quality control becomes extremely important."* [ECD Manager 7]

ECD Manager 1 furthered this argument:

> *"When you're hiring people, interviewing the staff is one of the roles. A principal should have a plan of how they will interview. You need to establish, what are the staff[']s values and do they match the preschool's values?"*

Often challenges arise due to inadequate execution of administrative tasks that impact the human resources of the centre, which can severely impact staff satisfaction and overall morale:

> *"…At some centres, the [p]rincipal doesn't give the employees employment contracts, job description…* [ECD Manager 2],

These processes also include disciplinary steps and firing, according to ECD Manager 15.

Principals tend to take on a supervisory role but may not fully understand the purpose of supervision (T3.4). With many definitions of supervision, an appropriate lens to view the type of supervision generally offered by principals through, would be that of Staude (2018), who sees supervision as a task of a manager, regardless of the size of the sector or business. Sometimes supervision can be formal and other times less formal, depending on the situation and staff members' needs:

> *"Checking in with the staff before the day starts is typically what I do. I try be there to connect and align all the activities we are offering."* [ECD Principal F]

Ensuring that staff are meeting goals and have the necessary support is part of the supervisory process. This is also an opportunity for evaluation and reflection:

> *"Staff management ensures that teachers are doing their planning and does not assume that it is being done. If there are issues, I call them in. Even doing performance appraisals every six months helps teachers grow."* [ECD Manager 13]

The idea behind supervision is to encourage staff to be independent, perform, and meet goals, while maintaining and learning from a professional culture:

> *"If you have people in a centre that are able to function without you being there, then you know that you've got something right as a principal. It becomes important to have that relationship with your staff."* [ECD Manager 12]

Inadequate management training is a common stumbling block for principals to overcome in their role, particularly with regards to new principals (Onguko, Abdalla & Webber, 2012). Staff training and learning opportunities (T3.5) were mentioned by many participants during their interviews as principals are the designers of learning and training for their staff. With a unique socio-political history, South Africa is a scaffolding of inequalities and the early education sector is no different. Without training and accredited qualifications to support the quality of education and care services provided at ECD centres, professionalisation will remain an issue in South Africa (Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Atmore, 2013). Promoting organisational learning in ECD centres and within the sector encourages strengths-based practices on various levels through a shared exchange between SSOs, social workers, and ECD principals:

> *"A principal should have a finger on the pulse of their school. To understand the needs [of] each of her educators is important… she must be able to see when an educator is missing a skill… and that makes it easier to recommend a training session or to offer some assistance." [ECD Manager 1]*

Both the tasks of teamwork and participation are enhanced by the use of human skills, particularly when a principal engages in the facilitation of groups. Training opportunities have the potential to be used as enabling tools for growth for an organisation or team. The following inspiring quote by J.F Kennedy (1963) aligns this theme with the function of leadership and professional development: "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

6.3.3.4 Sub-theme T4: Strategic action tasks

A widely used term in business is "strategy", which refers to acknowledging and responding to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the business at any given time. Non-profits are not exempt from this business principle and have had to be responsive to the pressure of for-profit businesses' influence on the market and the needs of the communities they service. It was suggested by participants that **strategic action tasks** (T4) were valuable for an ECD principal. The creation of a sustainable business is part and parcel of the big picture for any organisation, of

which ECD centres are no exception. ECD Manager 11 mentioned the responsive action suitable for ECD centres:

> *"I think that one must anticipate needs before they arrive. The principal should have a strategic planning session maybe once a term to discuss needs and allocation of budget."* [ECD Manager 11]

Although strategic tasks are not only associated with financial decision making, ECD Manager 7 added that

> *"…they [the principals] are not thinking about finances… they don't see it as a business",*

which would hinder their ability to implement strategic actions, due to financial restraints.

Principals could utilise creativity with resources (T4.1) to assist with the resource scarcity or allocation. Creativity is useful for encouraging learning but can also be appropriately incorporated into decision-making processes in ECD settings (Marais, 2018). Preventing this kind of learning process, is the fear of innovation and change. ECD Manager 7 expands:

> *"Fear is hindering the centre from growth. There are so many ideas that can be tried out and [p]rincipals are not necessarily open to it… they are afraid of new ideas."* [ECD Manager 7]

The ability to have a strategic year plan (T4.2) in place, was mentioned by several participants, who tended to be predominantly ECD managers. This suggests that the long-term strategic vision for the centre may not be naturally on the agendas of ECD principals when they conceptualise their role. Strategic planning can purposefully involve the board members to distribute the leadership and share the decision-making responsibility:

> *"[I]t is the principal['']s task to contact the board if strategic decisions must be made in the school." [ECD Manager 14]*

This is, however, not always an easy experience, as can be noted by what another participant had to say:

> *"In order to be a non-profit, you need a governing body. This is often a challenge, especially in the communities that we work with. It's not a paid position, so people are volunteering for this role. Principals must work with the governing body."* [ECD Manager 9]

SSOs and ECD managers play a supportive and mentoring role in the execution of strategic action tasks:

> *"Once a year, every facility must have a strategic session with the board members and the ECD practitioners. We [SSO] help organise it." [ECD Manager 14]*

It seems that even strategic regulatory processes were planned by the ECD managers on the principals' behalf:

> *"We support the principals with these matters annually. They need to have your fire certificates done and health and safety checks. All the regulations that surround an ECD centre and how it should be run, is planned by our team."* [ECD Manager 5]

The literature supports the mentoring and supervisory role of SSOs and social workers to support ECD principals in their journey towards compliance (Biersteker *et al*., 2016; Desmond *et al*., 2019).

One of the strategic tasks of any ECD principal would be the <u>pursuit of registration documentation</u> (T4.3) with the DSD:

> *"If you are able to access the government then your centre can be sustainable. We've seen that the only preschools that are financially sustainable are those that are getting government subsidy."* [ECD Manager 1]

This highlights the dependency upon the DSD for financial support, despite the fact that only half of the centres participating in this study were eligible for this support.

In an attempt to meet requirements, principals are following instructions and not always seeking quality innovative solutions to their situations. Similarly, non-empowering approaches to centre management can

> *"disempower principals[,] because they are fed stuff and follow the recipe…but do not always fully understand why they are doing what they are doing"* [ECD Manager 10]

Another ECD manager echoed this need for clear strategic action that is active and empowering:

> *"…, you have to support but don't spoon-feed because then you take away their responsibility. As a manager I need to encourage principals to develop their skills without taking over the control…you want them to become independent and strong leaders."* [ECD manager 11]

This insight provides evidence to support the idea that mentoring and coaching are helpful, but that they need to come from a learning perspective and empower principals to become confident and independent managers of their centres.

<u>Quality control through reporting</u> (T4.4) can be seen as a strategic task of principals to capture the progress and impact of the work being completed. This may attract donors and funders but also enhance the validity of M&E processes such as year-end reports and assessments. ECD Manager 9 mentioned that everything that occurs in the centre, would be reported. The ability to collect and present data is a way of accounting for quality:

> *"There is a mandate to get numbers of beneficiaries and what is missing, it is the quality aspect…if we are only reaching numbers, we're not getting to the point where quality is also being achieved[,] and that is essential for what ECD is supposed to be achieving in the long term."* [ECD Manager 16]

To be able to buy into the strategic tasks of growing a business and ensure that the vision for the centre is achieved, is considered a necessary competency of an ECD principal.

6.3.3.5 Sub-theme T5: Global awareness tasks

Of the managerial tasks discussed with participants, the conceptualisation and application of global awareness was one of varying responses. The global, national, and local economies and environments impact the functioning and nature of local ECD centres. This is a positive progression for the ECD movement with a number of global initiatives and promoting investment and accessibility for ECD interventions. Globally, networks and platforms have emerged for information sharing and advocacy. Nationally, there has been increased investment into African contextual content and programme development while locally, training, forums, and communities of practice have offered those in the ECD sector an opportunity to become aware and involved in the large scale wide movements and opportunities:

> *"There are some great platforms at the moment, including local ECD forums where issues are discussed…sadly these platforms are not always reaching the grassroot level."* [ECD Manager 16]

Developmental social work theory also acknowledges the interdependence and influence between globalisation and local economies (Dominelli, 2010; Lombard, 2019). As mentioned in Chapter 4, a developmental approach is suitable in a South African context where the ECD sector strives towards individual capacity building in order to enhance the sector as a whole (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, 2014). The system influences emerged withing the category of **global awareness tasks** (T5) during the interviews are detailed below.

The importance of <u>exposure to the ECD sector</u> (T5.1) by joining a community platform such as ECD forums or technological communication platforms served as valuable communities of practice. As a sector, ECD has needed to have a collective voice that is heard, even at the cost of calling out inaction when necessary. Hamber, Mofokeng, and Simpson (1997) have been calling for this since South Africa became a

democracy, aptly stating that "this means, not merely consulting with civil society and NGOs but involving them in processes in a substantial way as equal partners" (1997:43). One participant noted,

> *"By joining forums principals learn to seek out opportunities and resources. They learn about the context of ECD beyond their own communities."* [ECD Manager 10]

There are a number of online platforms which also offer resources and information. Gatherings of the workforce and stakeholders in the sector provide an opportunity to engage one another:

> *"…local issues are discussed and often times a lot of traction gets made. Independent NGOs have also created knowledge hubs like Bridge which is a great tool that has spread a lot of knowledge about the ECD sector, its limitation is it's not reaching the absolute grassroot level."* [ECD Manager 16]

In addition to forums, attendance of ECD training and workshops (T5.2) was mentioned often as a useful method for connecting with the sector, upskilling of staff, and improving quality of services delivered. This has been discussed previously as part of developing and encouraging a learning culture. Training has been discussed and mentioned several times throughout the empirical findings, which emphasises the developmental value of empowerment through education and training opportunities [ECD Principal O].

> *"Every job is a learning curve and every day there is going to be a new challenge. Whether I've been a principal for ten years or one year. It's a very special job.*" [ECD Principal D]

It is significant to note the process of learning in the professional role development of a principal or manager.

6.3.3.6 Sub-theme T6: Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks

A fairly recent movement in literature began to present the value of emotional intelligence for a manager and sustainable business operations (Carmeli, 2003; Martin, 2014; Martins & Coetzee, 2007). While this soft skill becomes a task of a manager without the ability to reflect and manage one's emotions, it can become challenging for any manager.

> *"There are those principals who able to be in a mental space where they're able to perform yet others still need a lot of support and assistance in order to realise that that they need to improve their this emotional intelligence."*

She proceeded to explain that this involved

> *"…being able to understand themselves, to know when they are also falling short, and when they need to refill themselves emotionally."* [ECD Manager 15]

Emotional intelligence (T6) and the ability to manage oneself are important for the growth but also allow a manager to fulfil the leadership functions continually being asked of them.

These tasks involve actively pursuing one's own personal development (T6.1) as an individual and ECD Principal K described her journey to establish her own identity and the strength it gave her as a manager. Followed by Principal I who mentioned, "I try to find myself," which helps her manage the expectations placed on her as a principal. The power dynamic of being the boss is often misunderstood or interpreted poorly by staff, which means that an ECD principal needs to maturely take ownership of their role while also encouraging and empowering those within their team to develop themselves. ECD Manager 15 pointed out the multi-facet role of a principal, which can be complicated to navigate and often leads to fatigue and burnout if not managed well:

> *"Ultimately there is the need for principals to hold a certain emotional intelligence, which is above average because they need to be assume different roles to different people and that on its own, is quite complex."*

ECD managers mentioned other aspects of personal development such as "emotional intelligence" [ECD Manager 6; ECD Manager 12], stress management to prevent "fatigue and burnout" [ECD Manager 15] and self-regulation [ECD Manager 16]. This presents the need for personal development and ongoing self-development to be a task for any ECD principal who wants to lead and manage a team effectively. Crook, Alakavuklar, and Bathurst (2020) endorse the idea that self-development can lead to an openness to new ideas and ultimately innovation in the workplace.

In addition, a noteworthy coping strategy which was mentioned by participants was that of effective time management (T6.2).

> *"As a [p]rincipal of an ECD centre there are many things you have to juggle; the administration, the practitioners and you might also have your own class because there's not enough money to just be the [p]rincipal. You have to juggle your time."* [ECD Manager 5]

Leaders often feel in a hurry (Heikka *et al.*, 2016) and practitioners tend to spend large quantities of time keeping administration up to date (Ball, 2000). Learning to use one's time productively is a self-management technique which can reduce stress and promote productively (Pretorius, 2019). It can be noted that this task is closely linked to planning and control, both personally and professionally, for principals;

> *"What I have realised is that it is a mindset shift. When it comes to finances, a principal needs to be taking control of her life and her business."* [ECD Manager 10]

The ability to self-manage, and to be able to decipher one's emotions, and reactions to stressful or emotive situations is a valuable management competency in the social service sector.

6.3.3.7 Sub-theme T7: Operational tasks

Managerial competencies would assist a principal to ensure excellence and quality at the centre, while continuing daily operations and administration tasks. Centre operations are the cogs that maintain the momentum and progress of an ECD centre, just as it would be vital for any business. Most **operational tasks** (T7) are the responsibility of the principal or delegated to practitioners and support staff. Facility management and classroom resources (T7.1) are required to maintain daily activities.

Managing the centre includes maintaining the building, ensuring safety measures are in place, and that the facility meets the DSD's centre regulations. ECD Principal 3 mentioned,

> *"Cleaning the yard sounds simple but even that task requires guidance."*

And:

> *"Checking that the centre is functional and addressing compliance issues",*

particularly with regards to infrastructure, is part of the principal's role, according to ECD Manager 10.

Poor infrastructure and limited access to resources often prevent many ECD facilities from becoming registered and accessing the DSD subsidy, and a lack of funding for infrastructure and start-up costs hamper the establishment of ECD programmes, particularly if they are in poor communities (Viviers, Biersteker & Moruane, 2013).

Participants made note of the task of purchasing learning materials for the planned lessons. Purchasing curriculum supplies and classroom resources (T7.1) is a task that is fairly dependent on the financial capacity of the centre and the proactive nature of the practitioners and principal.

Enrolment and administration (T7.3) were also added as an operational task but can also be closely linked with communication and marketing tasks, also requiring

administrative skills from the ECD principal. Engaging prospective parents and the demands that come with enrolments, was explored by ECD Principal F:

> *"Particularly when my school gets bigger, the daily administration will become a bigger function too. Just staying on top of admin at the moment keeps me busy, often not with existing parents, but potential parents for future years and admissions.*"

Sometimes principals are required to fulfil teaching and child assessment (T7.4) responsibilities. These classroom-bound tasks may be intermittent, and at other times they are a regular role fulfilled by the principal.

> *"In the classrooms if there's the need, I will step in. There are times whereby the practitioner may ask, can I please quickly go to the clinic for a certain reason. I won't reply, 'I'm the [p]rincipal, I'm not supposed to attend that class'…if there is a need[,] I will."* [ECD Principal G]

Some principals take this task on daily:

> "*…during the day I end up doing a lot of hands-on teaching tasks. It is hard for me to separate what the principal should be doing to what the teachers do."* [ECD Principal F]

These differences in experience show the role flexibility expected from principals.

This complex role expands to often include purchasing and managing the nutritional and food purchases (T7.2)**:**

> *"The[…] principal has to be the cook, to be the cleaner, and the teacher. In most facilities, the principal multi-tasks."* [ECD Manager 4]

Another manager mentioned,

> *"It's her task to see that there's enough food. Must we buy food? Is the milk and the bread, and the whatever, there, so that the cook can do her job properly*?" [ECD Manager 14].

A principal should, furthermore, be able to educate and support parents to encourage healthy food choices and options for their children:

> *"[By] purchasing food[,] a principal makes sure that there's adequate nutrition in the school. They can't just buy random stuff and not know what the children are eating. There needs to be a variety of food groups given to the children. They need to make sure that there's some fruit. Some parents may send snacks, sweets and [C]oke."* [ECD Manager 13]

Nutritional status remains a concern in the ECD sector (Makanjana & Naicker, 2021, Ronaasen, Wilson, Elkonin, Steenkamp & Venter, 2017) and the South African food-based dietary guidelines are recommended for encouraging caregivers to provide children with a well-balanced diet (Vorster, Badham & Venter, 2013).

6.4 SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

While the aim of this study required an in-depth investigation into management competencies, which included the skills, tasks, and functions of ECD principals, there were additional themes that emerged. However, due to the extensiveness of these additional themes, they were deemed inappropriate to be discussed in this dissertation, to ensure that the focus remained on the goals of this specific study. Through further research and papers, these themes may be disseminated at a later stage. Additional themes that have far-reaching implications relevant to the sector included:

Motivation for the competencies:

- Quality assurance of ECD services and excellence of service delivery;
- Accountability of staff;
- Training that assists with essential skills, functions, and tasks;
- Professionalism of workforce; and
- Creation of a sustainable business for business success or failure.

There are a number of specific **challenges faced by ECD principals** in South Africa, which were shared during the interviews**.** Drawing on different authors, such as Viviers, Biersteker, and Moruane (2013), Biersteker, (2007) and Atmore *et al*. (2012), the ECD sector faces various challenges, including difficulties in registration of ECD centres to access state subsidies, limited funding, poor staff retention, lack of community and government support, and lack of adequate infrastructure. These challenges facing the ECD sector as a whole will not be discussed in detail, since they are outside the scope of the study. They are, however, relevant to the wider ECD context, particularly in South Africa. Challenges experienced by the principal in order to fulfil management competencies include **principal-related challenges (C1)**:

- Short-staffed ECD centres;
- High staff turnover rates;
- Lack of adequate management skills;
- Lack of mastery over complexity of principal role; and
- Low self-esteem of the principal.

Centre-related challenges (C2) are linked closely to the facility or ECD centre, which could present with the following problems:

- Limited facility space and resource scarcity;
- NPO/Centre Committee that does not support the principal;
- Financial issues;
- Untrained and unqualified staff;
- Interpersonal challenges; and
- Issues with parents.

The sector as a whole comes with historical and systemic **sector-related challenges (C3)** which, in summary, include:

- Poverty and impact of servicing underprivileged communities;
- Issues with government regulations for registration;
- Funding issues; and

- Other sector-specific challenges such as training inequalities.

Lastly, findings revealed the **following lessons learnt (L1)** by participants, both ECD principals and ECD managers, which they would share with ECD principals:

- A clear need for understanding the ECD sector;
- Maintaining a passion for children;
- Valuing quality education and services;
- Ensuring sustainable business practices;
- The importance of networking; and
- Seeking support and mentoring from others.

These additional themes are areas that require further exploration and research. They also signal to the ECD sector and to academia the importance of implementing practical recommendations and interventions, stemming from research, that are relevant and relatable to the workforce in the field. Greater investment into M&E would mean that ECD research can endorse and encourage further support to ECD centres in the form of funding to improve the fidelity and upscaling of interventions.

6.5 CONCLUSION

ECD principals and managers endeavoured to share their lived experiences and personal perceptions of the essential management competencies of ECD principals during the interviews. Throughout this chapter, these were quoted, described, and detailed with support from the literature.

The empirical findings revealed the views of these role-players to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals, specifically in a South African context. These findings are based on reflections, which are both practical and sometimes theoretical, dependent on the participant. These narratives often share an idealised expectation; however, many real-life examples were also given by the participants in this study to give a realistic perspective on the

sector. The contrast in these responses paints a good picture of the tension so often seen between experiences in practice and theoretical ideals.

The integrated nature of management competencies was clearly illustrated by the interrelated themes and concepts that emerged in this chapter. It was concluded that the ability to manage effectively can be attributed to a principal/manager's ability to acquire and hone their own skills and translate such skills into performing key managerial functions through the execution of relevant tasks.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa effectively. This was achieved through exploration of the following research questions and sub-questions:

What are the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa?

(a) What *skills* are required from an ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?
(b) What *functions* are required from an ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?
(c) What *tasks* are required from ECD principal to effectively manage an ECD centre?

The study followed the following objectives to meet the research aim, and Chapter 2 contextualised the management of an ECD centre in South Africa by:

- Presenting the current framework of South African ECD policy and the monitoring processes of the DSD for the registration of ECD centres in South Africa;
- Examining the ECD sector's challenges of partial care registration and management processes of an ECD centre;
- Synthesising possible learning processes within an ECD centre; and
- Analysing trends of the ECD sector.

In Chapter 3 and 4, a contextual framework was given through a review of relevant literature of the essential management competencies, including a learning organisation approach toward:

- Management skills;
- Management functions; and
- Management tasks.

The research methodology was reflected upon and described in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the empirical investigation was presented, and findings critically analysed. The empirical findings provided insight into the management competencies of ECD principals in South Africa. Finally, Chapter 7 presents conclusions and recommendations regarding essential management competencies needed to manage ECD centres for key role players in the ECD sector, such as the DSD and the DoBE, as well as for NGOs and ECD principals. The main research question and sub-questions are answered. The objectives of the study were reached through this dissertation as it presented the management competencies of ECD principals in the context of South Africa, synthesised by a learning organisation approach (LOA).

7.2 SYNTHESISED CONCLUSIONS

In the sections below, a series of conclusions will be presented under the three overarching themes of the empirical study, which together form the essential management competencies of an ECD principal. The integration of these themes provides contextually relevant findings to better understand the management competencies of an ECD principal in South Africa. These themes and conclusions are further supported by the theoretical framework of the study and literature chapters. The conclusions are presented in a synthesised format according to the major themes and by integrating the sub-themes and categories to indicate what the essential competencies of ECD principals are and how they should be applied in practice.

7.2.1 Essential management skills

It was found that there are a vast range of managerial skills essential to ECD principals that cover a number of fields of expertise, from ECD-specific knowledge, to interpersonal skills, to administrative and business expertise. The comprehensive role of an ECD principal negates that an isolated skill may be adequate for tackling the complexity of managerial tasks and calls for multiple skills to be executed, depending on the circumstances and needs of the centre. ECD knowledge and qualifications continued to be raised throughout the study as necessary for a competent ECD principal, yet it cannot be denied that principals also should be business oriented in their approach to managing their centres.

In a developing context, ECD principals should not only be encouraged to improve their pedological knowledge and knowledge of child development theory but also their ability to govern and should follow good business principles. What this means in a South African context, is a dual position of centre operations: Firstly, to comply with the DSD requirements, principals need to see themselves and operate as an NPO entity offering services for the benefit of their community, and secondly, in reality, they are independent business owners responsible for salaries, staff, and resource allocation, regardless of government financial aid or support. Guidance and mentoring have to be on the table if we hope to see these centres and principals navigate the stringent regulation requirements and meet the skill set demands expected of them, while being present in the competitive market of childcare and educational services. Relying on fees alone to fund an ECD is risky; there is a need for responsive, contextual, and strong business skills in ECD centres and this reverberated through the interviews and should not be ignored.

Throughout the interviews, some frustration was noted by ECD managers regarding the attitude of some ECD principals who, because they struggle with it, reject the learning process. In terms of skills, many principals rely on training and SSO support for their learning needs. Motivation to function as a manager and leader comes into question: Is being a principal something these women (and men) want to do or is it just to earn an income? A resistant attitude toward learning would hinder skill attainment, block open dialogue, and prevent active participation in the learning

journey. Self-reflection and a passion for the sector are skills that are easily overlooked but can add significant value to an ECD centre as a learning organisation. The fundamental nature of managerial skills is that they are acquired, developed, and mastered through experiential learning. ECD principals need to be given the platforms, tools, and the mentoring required to gain the competencies needed to manage an ECD centre as a sustainable business with a social impact.

It can be concluded that an active principal is engaged with their community, parents, and staff. These interpersonal skills are useful for marketing and promoting the centre and ensuring that operations run smoothly. Shared learning and opportunities for growth should be a priority for ECD principals and their staff, and constructive conversations about skills and the need for improvement should therefore become common practice for ECD settings. Communication is an essential skill that was challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic and presented principals with the need to hone their skills to communicate remotely with their teams and clients. Technology is increasingly becoming a vital tool for NGO marketing and networking, and the sector in South Africa is alive and using social media platforms for communication. Facebook and WhatsApp have consequently become a necessary resource for ECD principals and managers to stay connected, on a global as well as local level.

7.2.2 Essential management functions

Although passion for children may propel an ECD principal, certain essential management functions will thrust an ECD centre forward towards successful operations and long-term sustainability. Managerial functions include planning, organising, leading, and controlling. These four functions are theoretically constructed but can be applied practically in even small social enterprises such as ECD centres.

“Management theory” seemed to be a foreign concept to both the ECD managers and principals interviewed in this study. However, when probed and prompted for practical examples of the functions, there was a wealth of perspectives and examples from experience that came to the fore during the conversations. This concludes that

there is a need to motivate ECD principals to improve their knowledge base on management theory, which would increase their confidence in executing the essential managerial functions expected of them.

Planning was seen as a necessity for both principals and their staff, not only for classroom activities but also for finances and resources. Succession planning was rarely noted, and this is again a potential area for growth and further research in the ECD sector. Because of the focus of the study, the ECD managers tended to share more about the ECD principals' planning at the centre than their own planning of case work and community intervention. In terms of **organising**, most participants acknowledged the importance of organisation within a centre as administration, staff, and events are all reliant on a principal's ability to effectively organise and coordinate. While not every ECD principal may be naturally organised, this is a function that should be pursued to ensure that the centre maintains a high standard of service delivery and sound governance measures.

The principal is the driver of their centre, and this role cannot be underestimated in terms of their capacity to **lead**, influence, and create change in a community. The question that comes to mind, is why social service professionals are not partnering more with ECD principals. As social workers are those leading the sector, they need to encourage ECD principals to remain open to learning (as adults) and actively seek personal growth opportunities in order to fulfil all essential management functions. The philosophical approach to management in ECD centres should be of great significance in a developmental context, and even more so a social development context. This can be achieved through mentorship and training opportunities to promote leadership skills within the NGO and ECD sector alike.

The power of leadership emerged as not only a key competency but a pivotal element of organisational growth on all levels: the owner, among the staff, the children, and the stakeholders. Leadership is less about a title and more about relationships and valuing one's followers. As a leader, an ECD principal encompasses the vision and mission of their centre and should lead their staff and parents by example. Various titles can be used interchangeably for the principal of an ECD centre, but ultimately *leader* is their main function. This function should endorse their title and encourage

confidence in the services delivered and decisions made by the principal. ECD principals could claim their leadership authority and share it to create an effectively managed and loyal team of staff members. A sound ECD principal exhibiting leadership is willing to see, hear, and value the staff within their organisation and encourage their personal growth for the benefit of them as individuals and for the organisation as a whole. Unfortunately, it seems that when it comes to leadership in the ECD sector, the ECD managers have more questions about ECD principals' ability to manage than solutions to address the gaps in their knowledge on best practices and leadership skills. If viewed from a long-term perspective, opportunities should be created to support and mentor ECD principals in their role as leaders, to improve their execution of managerial functions and to have a positive impact on the success of the ECD centre as a whole.

Throughout the interviews, the theme of **control** mostly had negative connotations to it, despite the fact that participants acknowledged that they understood it as the *quality assurance* role they play in the governance of an ECD centre. Policies and regulations should support ECD centres' control measures and not hinder or weigh down the principals to the point of non-compliance due to the lack of skills or understanding. During the interviews, it was also mentioned that ECD principals exercise control by managing their staff members' employment and workforce needs. In terms of budgeting, control was deemed critical and often neglected in practice by ECD principals.

Ultimately, ECDs with strict quality control measures in place and ECD principals who follow due diligence in the governance of their centres, can be deemed high-quality centres that are well managed. In South Africa, due to the taboo nature of talking about finances and poor understanding of basic financial literacy, ECD principals, like many managers of non-profit organisations, fall into the trap of inadequate financial management and budget control for operations and long-term sustainability. Without a trusting and developmental partnership between government, SSOs, and ECD principals, the DSD regulations and control measures for M&E will continue to be a point of disconnect and tension.

SSOs and ECD managers in South Africa must focus on offering training and mentoring to principals of unregistered centres on how to improve their control capacity. To start this process, one needs to present the following question: What will it take to get the most vulnerable and underprivileged centre registered? This would involve widening the DSD registration database of ECD centres to embrace non-compliant centres, from a developmental perspective, and support the principals through a tiered registration programme whereby centres can work towards full registration and subsidy support for centres in every province.

7.2.3 Essential management tasks

Communication, financial management and planning, teamwork, strategic action, global awareness, emotional intelligence and self-management, as well as operations, were explored as essential management tasks. The array of activities presented by the participants reflects the theoretical managerial tasks outlined in literature.

Human skills are required to fulfil activities such as communication tasks, teamwork, and emotional intelligence tasks. Conceptual and technical skills such as business and administrative skills would be advantageous for ECD principals in the execution of financial management planning, strategic action, and operations. It can be concluded that a learning organisation approach becomes an empowering method that should be applied to ECD centres as it positions shared learning and dialogue at the centre of the organisations' management processes and tasks. The participants shared openly about the challenges and disconnect between the best practice ideal and the reality occurring in many centres, where principals lack the necessary skills to step into their function as principal effectively.

What should be noted, is that on the ground, SSO support to endorse the fulfilment of tasks and application of learnt skills is occurring and participants shared the positive impact of mentorship and training opportunities. SSOs in the ECD sector are working actively to upskill and promote quality services but are still bound by financial and resource constraints, which limit their reach. Principals interviewed in the study

were generally welcoming of mentoring and support and reflected on the benefits of SSO training for themselves and their staff. A sobering reality in the NGO sector is that if the funding for this type of support ends, the SSO intervention must also end due to limited capacity, despite the essential need for these supportive social services.

Mentoring and supervision of ECD principals can take a number of forms, including individual in-person site visits, group meetings, forum gatherings, and online engagement, to name a few. From the managers' perspective, it was clear that regardless of the platform or format of mentoring, the support being offered must be relational. ECD principals and managers need personal and self-development opportunities, because they are functioning in a socially-driven service sector that is demanding for even the most experienced manager.

The essential management tasks are seemingly simple in isolation, however, executing these tasks simultaneously and responsively can be overwhelming and require a competent and confident ECD principal. The successful output of an ECD principal who can adequately fulfil tasks has the potential to improve the quality of service delivery, team satisfaction, and professionalism.

7.2.4 Integration of skills, functions, and tasks

In accordance with the research goal, this study investigated the lived experiences of ECD principals and ECD managers. What occurred, was a layered discussion that involved participants (either consciously or subconsciously) linking and describing the integration required by principals when implementing their skills, functions, and tasks. It can be concluded that for the most part, ECD principals are struggling to integrate these skills, functions, and tasks and thus rely on instructions from their supervising social workers or ECD managers. The goal of competency-oriented management hinges on the ability of an individual to independently practice and improve their skills to increase efficiency of their functions through the completion of management tasks. Findings from the ECD managers' responses maintain that it may be too great of an expectation of an ECD principal to be able to instinctively harness their skill set to

implement needed tasks. In order to achieve a wide array of managerial functions competently, managers need to continually improve and develop their own skill sets. Without competency of the essential management skills, the managerial functions become challenging or will not occur. That being said, effective administration is a good example of an attribute that was identified as a business skill in its own right, a function of organising, as well as a defined managerial task of ECD principals.

It is difficult to view skills separately from functions, because skills enable a principal to implement and operationalise their core functions. It can be concluded from the interviews that the management competencies of ECD principals are teachable and require experiential learning to improve over time. In reality, it however seems to be a matter of survival for ECD principals. While they are trying to get ahead of an ever-changing curve, from the viewpoint of SSOs, many ECD principals are failing. A discouraged ECD manager supports this conclusion: "…*no principal [that I work with] is a good example…I try to be empathetic and put myself in their shoes*."

The ECD sector, largely influenced by the NPO market and regulations, requires transformational managers to steer the ships towards a sustainable future. Yet, little mentorship and support are offered to ECD principals, i.e., the owners of these centres. They are expected to survive independently, yet meet government regulations, with limited resources and guidance. However, the findings of this study revealed that if principals are acknowledged as business owners and given the same support and investment as small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs), then perhaps the industry would be able to have a sustainable future and become an empowering platform for learning and child development.

As a result, a call needs to be made to social workers, community development workers, educators, and SSOs in the ECD sector to advocate for management support, particularly with a focus on financial literacy training and mentorship. The implementation of supportive learning processes should become the norm for those working in a developmental manner with ECD centres.

Bureaucratic hurdles and inaccessible criteria for operations, however, continue to hinder the ability for small businesses to grow but also for entrepreneurs to navigate

and overcome start-up risks. So, while developing skills is a step towards empowerment, the economic market also needs to empower and promote entrepreneurship in order for ECD centres to thrive. These centres are very vulnerable to short life spans without financial security and compliance support.

What is, in other words, a challenge, is the sustainability of the ECD centres in South Africa without immediate support and guidance to plan their businesses and to manage and understand risk without adequate planning for a financially sound future. Until there is mutual trust between stakeholders and until clearly defined outcomes are established, there is a stalemate between government stakeholders, SSOs, and ECD principals. It would be optimal for the ECD workforce to be upscaled on a national level to increase the number of staff across the country, supported by an equitable HR workforce plan and upskilled locally, regardless of registration status or geographic location.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are aimed towards the key role players in the ECD sector, namely the DSD and the DoBE, SSOs and NGOS, and ECD principals as managers of ECD centres.

7.3.1 Department of Social Development and Department of Basic Education

- A collaborative vision between Government, SSOs, the ECD workforce and civil society must be emphasised if the ECD sector hopes to realise long-term impact in South Africa. We need to respect the multidisciplinary nature of the workforce required by centres caring for children aged 0-6 and this should be reflected in the government structures and by government stakeholders. Stakeholders are the supportive learning structures for ECD principals, regardless of educational background or demographics. The support of skills, functions, and tasks associated with registration, stakeholder management, and communication should be a priority for the DSD and the DoBE.

- For the purposes of engaging meaningfully with ECD principals, one must acknowledge the journey of NGOs in a modern economy and the widespread interests of civil society, but also the unique history of South Africa and its past inequalities in the education sector. Moving forward, the DSD and the DoBE are required to be pillars of support to ensure sustained equality in the sector. The challenges and issues experienced by ECD principals not only impact individuals, but also organisations operating in the country as well as families that benefit from their services. The funding model of ECD centres has to be a point of continued discussion, from the nice-to-have macro-policy perspective to the micro-level practicalities of these social enterprises. While the non-profits and the journey of the ECD agenda are significant to understand and acknowledge, we should not be bound to repeat past mistakes.

- Lessons have been learnt and show that the ECD managers of today and the future should be the change agents. This means changing the way we see NGOs – both community based and locally run. This can be achieved by equipping both social workers and ECD principals with the necessary competencies to understand businesses within a social development paradigm.

- Start-ups and entrepreneurial ideas should be supported to be both social and economically viable through funding models, both government and private.

- Service providers are recommended to aim for improving delivery methods. If they fail to do this, as a sector they have failed to learn from the past. As anchors in the sector, founders should be strategic and thoughtful about their involvement and allow for developmental opportunities to be born from their funding key performance indicators.

- A stronger emphasis should be placed on ECD principal and practitioner mentorship and a culture of learning should be fostered between social workers and ECD principals, whereby growth is encouraged and sharing of

information is praised. Mentoring can allow principals to learn from their mistakes, benefit from peer input, and to learn on the job. This mentorship and support should come from government departments, NGOs, and the private sector to strengthen and encourage ECD principals in their complex role. The DSD, DoBe, and DoH should be involved in this conversation as inactivity by any department could cause a negative ripple effect. Stakeholder involvement is recommended as a valuable skill set and priority when working with ECD principals.

- Regardless of when or if the governmental migration from the DSD to the DoBe takes place, social workers should continue to be active stakeholders and advocates for ECD in South Africa. The shift does not mean that there is no work for social development; on the contrary, social workers need to rise to the occasion and continue to contribute from their unique skill set, particularly in the areas of advocacy for children rights, child protection, developmental community interventions, and social research.

- It can be recommended that training, support and mentoring, covering the essential management competencies as well as the DSD registration standards and processes, should be services that are delivered regularly by government departments. Practically oriented, accredited training programmes must be facilitated by social workers working with ECD centres and delivered regularly for principals and staff.

- It is highly recommended for ECD principals to be trained in the skills for completing the DSD registration processes. Registration should continue to be a priority for quality and sustainability. It can further be recommended that Government outsources support for the registration of ECD centres in all provinces. This can be achieved by collaborating with the DoBE and the DoH instead of working in silos, which results in duplication and confusion around services. Services delivered by the government for the support of ECD registration and centre management should be easily accessible and

managers should function as an enabling resource for principals. Technology should be used to enable increased registration.

- It can be recommended that procurement processes should be established for supporting the development of ECD sites, facilities, and structures to promote compliance. Government structures should play a linking role between ECD centres and resources.

- Policy should be utilised by social workers as a driving force for the improvement of service delivery, the creation of accountable channels for accessible funding, and for harnessing the political will of those able to allocate funding towards ECD services in South Africa. It should further make the essential management competencies easy to exhibit and develop.

- A relevant issue when it comes to South African businesses, is that government should create an environment conducive to business development. This could be achieved through policies, trade agreements, incentives, and financial support. ECD centres, like other non-profits and social enterprises, rely on the investment from stakeholders but also continued community support.

- Governmental departments are recommended to continue active involvement in ECD research and policy formation by leveraging their status and legislative power towards advocacy. Social workers could be prominent leaders in furthering the ECD agenda in South Africa and across the world through their rights-based approach towards education and child protection.

7.3.2 Social service organisation and NGOs

- The SSO and NGO contribution towards the ECD sector continues to be the driving force behind development and training of the ECD workforce in South Africa. It is recommended that SSOs continue to play an active role in the

support and development of ECD centres and programmes through interventions that are context specific and accessible.

- What is noteworthy, is the unacknowledged wealth of knowledge of SSOs, who are largely employing young professionals (such as social workers) to manage and supervise ECD programmes. These individuals are in a unique position to share and preserve lessons learned from the sector, which could endorse and inform funding support, government investment, and interventions. It can be recommended that SSOs be utilised by the government to support training of the ECD workforce and to assist centres with the completion of the ECD registration process. SSOs could therefore be utilised as vehicles to disseminate information and resources from the South African government.

- A significant recommendation to NGOs in South Africa is that directors and managers should challenge the standard non-profit model of charity and embrace a social enterprise mentality with principles of economic stimulus and sustainability at the forefront of strategic ECD centre discussions. This shift might enable entrepreneurship as a fundamental function of an ECD principal and an intended outcome of ECD programme development and training.

- SSOs are encouraged to mentor and build relationships with various stakeholders in a collaborative fashion. It is suggested that managers utilise their leadership capacity to improve and expand the ECD network of support in their sphere of influence.

- Training opportunities and support for ECD managers to improve their ability to use technology to deliver services should be part of an SSO's learning process. This can translate into support toward the familiarisation of ECD principals with technology as a tool that forms part of management practices at their centres. Management practices and skills should be integrated into training material and workshops delivered by SSOs and funding for such

training should be made available by government-mandated policies and private doners.

- The essential management competencies of ECD principals should be related to both the work processes and tasks of these principals. And ECD managers should feel comfortable and confident to train, mentor, and support them. Additional training of SSO staff is recommended to ensure that management skills, such as financial literacy, is known and assimilated into the organisational culture. This training could be provided by both public departments and private organisations.

- It is strongly recommended that SSOs continue to advocate for the ECD workforce. The challenges and hurdles experienced by ECD principals in their management role should be seen as opportunities for development in the form of programme creation and intervention. Functions of ECD principals should be commonly known by SSO staff in order to support and create opportunities for learning in both a formal and informal manner.

- Continued research outputs and involvement are important for growth in the sector. That being said, SSOs are encouraged to remain present to research opportunities and utilise the data gained through their M&E processes to create and deliver valuable lessons and reflections.

7.3.3 ECD principals as managers of ECD centres

- The multifaceted role of principals should be understood and explored by ECD principals because, while these individuals are educators who often teach in a class, they are also principals who own a small business. It does, however, seem like many principals do not understand their professional role as business people. A focus on personal development, improved emotional intelligence, and the acquisition and of management competencies, can improve the management skills of these individuals. Principals are juggling many tasks that are required of them and, as a result, it is recommended that

not only professional, but also personal development is a priority to ensure that they learn how to manage to the best of their ability. It is recommended that all ECD centres create a document that defines and supports the role of a principal. This document should be amended over time as the needs of the centre evolve.

- From a business perspective, there is a high-end market for ECD services, whereby school fees are at a premium, and thus service delivery and outcomes are expected to be optimal. However, this means that centres offering quality education for early learning would only be accessible to those with large financial budgets and financial power, thereby excluding large portions of the South African society. Wages, resources, and centre stability are determined largely by the financial control of a centre and principals can learn to manage these with accountability and discernment.

- Since control measures are often required by doners, ECD programmes, regardless of delivery method, would need to upscale or ensure high-beneficiary statistics in order to be profitable investments for external doners, so that they can gain profit-seeking supporters. However, impact investors may also see quality management as an indicator of quality assurance, prompting financial investment. It is recommended that ECD principals seek funding opportunities and cultivate partnerships with doners who understand the nature of the ECD sector. This is because they may not necessarily be seeking financial gain but be motivated to meet the social development needs of a community, enhance education, and promote job creation in South Africa. While social franchises may be a useful control mechanism for promoting quality assurance and encouraging best practices in ECD centres, it should be noted that individualisation of services should remain a priority within an inclusive education system in an African context. Funding for learning and centre support may seem to fall behind in the wave of well-written policy ideals. It is recommended that ECD principals take it upon themselves to fundraise and seek strategic partnerships for the sustainability of their centres in the months to come.

- ECD principals should encourage and ensure sound business management practices and innovation within their centres through the use of technology and creative problem solving. A learning organisation approach towards increasing competency of skills, functions, and tasks is recommended. Principals themselves should attend forum meetings and training opportunities to improve their own management competencies.

- Lastly, it is recommended that ECD principals align themselves and their centres with M&E and external research studies to improve the quality of services delivered, and contribute towards learning in the ECD sector. Although research outputs and impacts may seem a slow burn for principals, with little immediate reward, the invaluable lessons and reflections of the ECD workforce should be preserved.

7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher believes that this study created a number of avenues for further research, namely:

- Further investigation into the acquisition and execution of skills, functions, and tasks of ECD principals;
- Exploration of the mentorship and supervisory role of SSOs and governmental social workers in the ECD sector;
- Research on ECD principals and practitioners as a target population, specifically pertaining to early education, social protection, and health of young children. The management of these topics is also an area for further research;
- Research on leadership within the South African ECD context, as this was a topic that emerged in the study as a critical management function. Limited research in a South African context has been conducted exploring the leadership of ECD services in South Africa;
- Further exploration of the outcomes and evaluations of ECD principal management training and mentorship; and

- Investigation of principal-related challenges, centre-related challenges, and sector-related challenges, which were also topics that emerged in the study and present a wealth of unchartered research opportunities for future studies.

7.5 FINAL REFLECTIVE CONCLUSION

Since 1994, there has been an idealised agenda of transformation in South Africa that has not always translated into reality. This agenda maintained the goals of economic and social development, reconciliation and, in principle, a focus on education. Has this goal been achieved to benefit the youngest citizens of South Africa? One could argue that ECD has only recently become a political and societal priority, and often only in words, but not always in action. In order to achieve the sectoral goals, we need to move away from the fixation on expanding policy and move towards collaborative actions and quality-assured upscaling of intervention and service delivery. Essential management competencies should be seen as fundamental for ECD principals to gain, develop, and share, if they hope to achieve sustainability for their centres.

Upon reflection, I did not envisage that this study would be a story that was politically influenced and economically driven, *and* impact not only the management of centres but also the education of children and adults. The ECD sector and social service workforce are alive with possibilities and potential to be a dynamic, reciprocal system of learning and child protection. Management competencies have never been more vital as we head into unchartered territory post the Covid-19 pandemic. The women (and sometimes men) managing, owning, and running these ECD programmes in centres, both formal and informal, are not only investing in the future, but are also supporting the communities around them today. By adopting a learning organisation approach, one can view the large-scale hurdles and challenges with the strength that ECD principals face every day. This is in an attempt to not only educate, but also to protect and care. Management skills should be a priority for training and efficient management functions should be the backbone of centre operations and executed with passion and creativity. The management tasks of a principal should be evident in every ECD centre in South Africa. We are not expecting too much to want the very

best for the most vulnerable citizens of our country. In fact, in the wave of 2020-2021 and the unknown that lies ahead, the children of South Africa deserve to have the odds be put in their favour.

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ANNEXURE A: THEMES FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL WORK MANAGERS IN THE ECD SECTOR

Biographical information:

- Age and gender
- Position/designation, number of years as manager in ECD sector
- Qualifications and training
- Geographic area

Reflections of supervising social workers in the ECD sector:

1. What are the management skills an ECD principal should possess to manage an ECD centre, such as technical skills, conceptual skills, and administrative skills?
   1.1. *Why should they possess these skills?*
   1.2. *How do ECD principals gain these skills?*

2. What management functions, should an ECD principal employ such as planning, organising, leading, and controlling of ECD centre operations? (Examples: budget controlling, asset management, staff planning, or committee organisation)
   2.1. *How should ECD principals fulfil these functions?*
   2.2. *Why should ECD principals fulfil these functions?*

3. What are the specific management tasks of an ECD manager to manage an ECD centre, such as registration of an ECD centre/programme, health and safety checks, accounting and budgeting, lesson planning, monitoring operations, nutrition and child feeding, reporting, hosting parent meetings, networking, applying for funds, and marketing?
   3.1. *How should ECD principals fulfil these tasks?*
   3.2. *Why should they fulfil these tasks?*

4. What significant lessons and reflections would you share with other managers as a social work manager working with ECD principals?

ANNEXURE B: THEMES FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH ECD PRINCIPALS

- **Biographical information:**
  - Age and gender
  - Position/title at centre
  - Number of years as principal, qualification/training
  - Geographic area: Urban/underprivileged area

- **ECD centre information:**
  - ECD centre registration status with DSD
  - Size of centre
  - Number of staff (paid/unpaid)

Reflections of ECD principals:

1. What are the management skills an ECD principal should possess to manage an ECD centre such as technical skills, conceptual skills, and administrative skills?
   1.1. *Why should they possess these skills?*
   1.2. *How do ECD principals gain these skills?*

2. What management functions should an ECD principal employ such as planning, organising, leading, and controlling of ECD centre operations? (Examples: budget controlling, asset management, staff planning, or committee organisation)
   2.1. *How should ECD principals fulfil these functions?*
   2.2. *Why should ECD principals fulfil these functions?*

3. What are the specific management tasks of an ECD manager to manage an ECD centre, such as registration of ECD centre/programme, health and safety checks, accounting and budgeting, lesson planning, monitoring operations, nutrition and child feeding, reporting, hosting parent meetings, networking, applying for funds, and marketing?
   3.1. *How should ECD principals fulfil these tasks?*
   3.2. *Why should they fulfil these tasks?*

4. What significant lessons and reflections would you share with other ECD principals?

ANNEXURE C: CONSENT FORM (ECD SOCIAL WORK MANAGERS

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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Essential management competencies of ECD principals:
A learning organisation approach

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by J. Ronaasen, a doctoral student from the Social Work Department at the University of Stellenbosch. The results of this study will become part of a research report. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are Social Worker in the ECD Sector and supervise or mentor ECD Principals.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals and the social work managers supervising Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in South Africa.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:
A semi-structured interview will be utilized to gather information confidentially. You need not indicate your name or any particulars on the interview schedule. The schedule will be completed during an interview conducted by the researcher.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Any uncertainties on any of the aspects of the schedule you may experience during the interview can be discussed and clarified at any time. No risk or harm to the participant is foreseen as the will not be emotional of nature Only the time used to conduct the interview may be a possible inconvenience.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The results of this study will inform welfare organisations of the essential management competencies of ECD principals and social workers through the reflection from ECD Principals and social workers in the ECD Sector. This information could be used by welfare organisations for further planning in service delivery.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment in any form will be received for participating in this study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding where each questionnaire is numbered. All

questionnaires will be managed, analysed and processed by the researcher and will be kept in a safe place.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so, eg should you influence other participants in the completion of their questionnaires.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: LK Engelbrecht (Supervisor), Department of Social Work, University of Stellenbosch, Tel. 021-808 2070, E-Mail: lk@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me the participant by _____ in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to him / her. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his / her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study._____

Name of Participant_____ _____

Signature of Participant:

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____[name of subject/participant]. [He / She] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

ANNEXURE D: CONSENT FORM (ECD PRINCIPALS)

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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Essential management competencies of ECD principals:
A learning organisation approach

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by J. Ronaasen, a doctoral student from the Social Work Department at the University of Stellenbosch. The results of this study will become part of a research report. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are ECD Principal managing an ECD centre in South Africa.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals and the social work managers supervising Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in South Africa.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:
A semi-structured interview will be utilized to gather information confidentially. You need not indicate your name or any particulars on the interview schedule. The schedule will be completed during an interview conducted by the researcher.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Any uncertainties on any of the aspects of the schedule you may experience during the interview can be discussed and clarified at any time. No risk or harm to the participant is foreseen as the will not be emotional of nature Only the time used to conduct the interview may be a possible inconvenience.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The results of this study will inform welfare organisations of the essential management competencies of ECD principals through the reflection from ECD Principals and social workers in the ECD Sector. This information could be used by welfare organisations for further planning in service delivery.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment in any form will be received for participating in this study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding where each questionnaire is numbered. All questionnaires will be managed, analysed and processed by the researcher and will be kept in a safe place.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so, e.g. should you influence other participants in the completion of their questionnaires.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: LK Engelbrecht (Supervisor), Department of Social Work, University of Stellenbosch, Tel. 021-808 2070, E-Mail: lk@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me the participant by _____ in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to him / her. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his / her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study._____

Name of Participant: _____. _____

Signature of Participant:

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____[name of subject/participant]. [He / She] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator

ANNEXURE E: ECD MANAGER ALLOCATION OF UNIQUE QUESTIONS

Participant #	Skills (A-C)	Functions (D-G)	Task
ECD Manager 1	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills	(F1) Planning	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
ECD Manager 2	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills	(F2) Organising	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of registration and compliance		(T4) Strategic action tasks
ECD Manager 3	(S5) Technical skills: Monitoring and evaluation	(F3) Leading	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S6) Technical skills: Green environmental skills		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management Tasks
ECD Manager 4	(S7) Technical skills: Using technology	(F4) Controlling	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S8) Human skills: Communication		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
ECD Manager 5	(S9) Human skills: Group facilitation and team-building skills	(F1) Planning	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S10) Human skills: Mentoring and coaching		(T4) Strategic action tasks
ECD Manager 6	(S11) Conceptual skills: Policy development skills	(F2) Organising	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S12) Conceptual skills: Decision making		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
ECD Manager 7	(S13) Conceptual skills: Designing a learning culture and process	(F3) Leading	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
ECD Manager 8	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills	(F4) Controlling	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks
ECD Manager 9	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of registration and compliance	(F1) Planning	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S5) Technical skills: Monitoring and evaluation		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
ECD Manager 10	(S6) Technical skills: Green Environmental skills	(F2) Organising	(T1) Communication tasks
	(S7) Technical skills: Using technology		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
ECD Manager 11	(S8) Human skills: Communication	(F3) Leading	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S9) Human skills: Group facilitation and team-building skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks
ECD Manager 12	(S10) Human skills: Mentoring and coaching	(F4) Controlling	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S11) Conceptual skills: Policy development skills		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
	(S12) Conceptual skills: Decision making	(F1) Planning	(T1) Communication tasks

ECD Manager 13	(S13) Conceptual skills: Designing a learning culture and process		(T2) Planning and financial management tasks
ECD Manager 14	(S1) Technical skills: Entrepreneurial skills	(F2) Organising	(T3) Teamwork tasks
	(S2) Technical skills: Business management skills		(T4) Strategic action tasks
ECD Manager 15	(S3) Technical skills: Financial management skills	(F3) Leading	(T5) Global awareness tasks
	(S4) Technical skills: Understanding of registration and compliance		(T6) Emotional intelligence and self-management tasks
ECD Manager 16	(S5) Technical skills: Financial management skills	(F3) Planning	(T5) Global awareness tasks

ANNEXURE F: ETHICAL CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: SBER - Amendment Form

15 May 2020

Project number: 13061

Project Title: Essential Management Competencies of Principals at Early Childhood Development Centres

Dear Ms Jessica Ronaasen

Co-investigators:

Your REC: SBER - Amendment Form submitted on 29 April 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
11 February 2020	10 February 2023

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. SUSPENSION OF PHYSICAL CONTACT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT SU

There is a **postponement of all physical contact research activities at Stellenbosch University,** apart from research that can be conducted remotely/online and requires no human contact, and research in those areas specifically acknowledged as essential services by the South African government under the presidential regulations related to COVID-19 (e.g. clinical studies).

Remote (desktop-based/online) research activities, online analyses of existing data, and the writing up of research results are strongly encouraged in all SU research environments.

Please read the REC notice for suspension of physical contact research during the COVID-19 pandemic: http://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/sbecovid-19

If you are required to amend your research methods due to this suspension, please submit an amendment to the REC: SBE as soon as possible. The instructions on how to submit an amendment to the REC can be found on this webpage: [instructions], or you can contact the REC Helpdesk for instructions on how to submit an amendment: applyethics@sun.ac.za.

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (13061) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

ANNEXURE G: REFLECTIVE REPORT

Personal journal reflection guided by six questions (Ruokonen-Engler & Siouti, 2016) for understanding reflexivity in research, written in the first person:

1. What personal experience do I have with my research topic?

The field of early childhood development (ECD) is not new or unfamiliar to me. After completing my master's in 2013, I was given the opportunity to manage ECD parent programmes and train ECD principals and practitioners in both urban and rural contexts. This allowed me to engage with people from many different cultures and communities. I believe that social workers should be leaders in their communities and my own exposure to leadership and management grew as I began to realise the success of initiatives lies within the team and the leader. This symbiotic exchange means that the leader influences their team and vice versa. ECD is an emerging field in South Africa that is necessary for development and education in our country and to see improvement from our historical inequality. While working in development came naturally to me, the idea that management and entrepreneurship were also critical for success came with witnessing the harsh reality of the economic toll that poverty is taking on our country. As a social worker, I have spent most of my career navigating how to contribute meaningfully to the sector.

2. How did I come to study the specific topic in the field?

To explain the WHY behind my research journey, I would have to take you back to the beginning when I fell in love with the idea that helping children meant hope for the future. I saw the most incredible woman starting preschools and, within these women, their desire to shape our country's future leaders, despite so many challenges. I found by bridging the gap between child protection, parent education, and education, I was able relate to so many different people, disciplines, and ultimately, at this point, researchers that are all exploring how improve the lives of small people.

This topic emerged from my professional career in the ECD sector, but also carried a personal agenda as I have come to see the value of personal growth, leadership, and mentorship in my own life. ECD is therefore at the heart of my PhD study. Although management, leadership, and learning started to mould themselves into the rationale and motivation, it has always been the small people of our country who will one day shape the future, that were the true inspiration and the main reason for my passion for this topic.

Choosing to serve the women in the ECD sector, is a privilege. I have seen so many moments of development, and raw authentic progress as they strive for the better: better for the community, better for the children, and better for themselves. Seeing

the value of the economy on development is significant to the construction of my research topic. By taking a step back from the NGO sector to pursue this study, I feel the topic became something I thought about continually and processed deeply without the pressures of being aligned to any one NGO.

3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?

There is a lot to say about early education and its benefits, both locally and globally. Sadly, a lot of the talk is just that: words without action. The sad reality is that part of the way I approached this study was by believing that as an advocate for ECD, that I too can contribute and preserve the experiences of ECD principals – the women who I so greatly admire for their perseverance and growth. There is much uncertainty in South Africa regarding which government department should "lead" ECD, and yet, the sector is miles ahead; it is progressing and fighting for its own voice. COVID-19 was devasting for the ECD centres in South Africa. I felt helpless watching these small businesses crippled by regulations and criteria for reopening, all which required finances. I believe that this study showcases the flight and heart of the ECD principals in the face of tremendous adversity.

4. How did I gain access to the field?

I have learnt that networking and building relationships are vital. I was fortunate to build a longstanding relationship with a number of NGOs across the country and through my connections with social workers and ECD managers, I was able to recruit participants and engage with the field. It was wonderful to see how eager they were to participate and share their opinions, thoughts, and experiences with me. Covid-19 was a challenge for engaging in person, however, with some minor changes and the use of virtual platforms (telephonic interviews), I was able to still complete my interviews and remain securely connected to the research field. I had to cancel my data collection trip, which was intended to be my entry and engagement with the field and was disappointed not to be able to do any in-person, face-to-face interviews.

5. How does my own position (age, gender, class, ethnicity, economic status, etc.) influence interaction in the field and the data collection process?

I have to acknowledge my own privilege in this context as a researcher: a white female and a social worker. There is a dynamic when relating to woman of colour, particularly those who do not have the same educational background or economic status as I do. I was grateful for the women who were brave enough to share their story with me, even though the interviews were not conducted in academic language. I was left inspired and humbled. As a professional and researcher, I was reminded again of how incredibly resilient and creative the ECD sector is and that it's largely being led by such strong and motivated woman living under less-than-ideal circumstances. Even over the telephone, these women spoke with such strength of

the hurdles they have overcome. May powerful stories such as theirs be the reason powers at be will see the value of investing in this essential sector delivering education and protection.

I realise more and more the importance of education and learning, both personally and professionally. We should be learning through reflection, because learning is more than facts. Pursuing my passion is part of my journey and is not separate from the research process. People told me that pursuing academics may hinder my family life and disrupt my career, but that was not true. In fact, my personal development, my family life, and my career will forever be changed for the better because of this study and the growth that occurred in me throughout my research.

6. What is my interpretation perspective?

To be honest, the terrible circumstances of Covid-19 challenged me to want to strongly narrate the injustice within the ECD sector. I found myself feeling extremely passionate, sometimes frustrated, and other times inspired, when engaging with the narratives and transcribed data. The hardest part of the analysis process was discovering the challenges, heartache, and discrepancies that plague the everyday lives and business practices of the ECD. I have had so many moments of clarity while researching, collecting data, and engaging with this topic to realise that these principals are using what they have to do the best they can in the face of so many challenges. NGOs in South Africa are vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of South Africa's governance, leadership, and economic tides. Establishing management competencies for ECD principals is part of the growth potential and strength for ECD principals in the future.

There were so many insightful conversations and meaningful quotes in the data that, at one point, I actually struggled to complete the data reduction phase of the analysis. I loved seeing the depth and richness of the data that resulted from the interviews, and it was wonderful to have been part of research that impacted communities. I am challenged and stirred by the following words from one of the participants: "*Leadership is a process, not a position. There is no organisational learning without individual learning*".