Deculturalisation Trajectory of the South African Early Childhood Development Centres: Parents' voices.

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Abstract

Traditionally, family sociocultural values are core to childcaring and rearing, crucial and a necessity for children's cognitive development, growth, and learning; thus, this qualitative study sought views of parents on the sociocultural development of their 0-4-year-old children attending ECD centres/preschools/ECD Centres, in four ECD centres in the East London District, of the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa (SA). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory was used as a theoretical framework to guide this study. The study was located within the Interpretivist paradigm and used a Case study design to explore the topic. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, which was analyzed using a thematic approach. Purposive sampling was used to sample fourteen parent participants comprising nine females and one male aged between 25 and 50 years and four grandmothers aged between 55 and 80 years. The research question was, do parents perceive any alignment between home and ECD centres in terms of sociocultural values. The parent participants in this study echoed the importance of family sociocultural values which are ignored and rejected by ECD centres as irrelevant. The study therefor concludes that the ECD centres are perpetuating deculturisation of mainly Black children. The study, therefore, recommends the compulsory use of South African indigenous languages in ECD centres to embed and transmit sociocultural values.

Keywords: *Context, Culture, Family, Sociocultural values*

INTRODUCTION

Smith-Greenaway, (2020) highlighted that only 27% of African young children live with their biological parents countrywide. Wu et al., (2022) also confirmed parents moving away from their homes for job opportunities in cities and other provinces, resulting in a decreased EC rural population by 3% from 1996 to 2011, while the urban population has a growth of 20%. It also confirmed that the migration from rural areas resulted in instability in family structures, with negative effects on the sociocultural development of children (Pribesh et al., 2020). Due to distortion of families, the National Development Plan (NDP), suggested *'kinship network'*, for the provision of family care for all children in the ECD centres as a standing ground for young children in places of safety, some of whom are there from day

one until age eighteen with no sociocultural development guide (Agrawal et al., 2021) . Other factors such as violence against women and children, abuse, teenage motherhood, increasing single parenthood and divorce, working and single mothers; necessitated the formalization of EDD Centres to protect the interest of the vulnerable children (Paulus et al., 2021)

The South African (SA) government's key interventions to these multiple challenges facing families and vulnerable children to counteract poverty through open access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes and services (Ally et al., 2022). This strategy was perceived to be of triple benefit to young children of SA who would be fed while ensuring that they get quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) and health services (Verguet et al., 2020). The SA government, therefore, took the responsibility of indirectly caring and rearing for children through funding ECD programmes and services. Three government departments viz; Education (DoE), Health (DoH) and Social Development (DoSD) were identified as key partners to driving the process (Ally et al., 2022). This, open access of ECD services and programs to children of all sociocultural backgrounds, from birth to six (6) years of age, while taking into consideration 0-9-year-old children's development (Uchitel et al., 2022).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. According to this theory, human development does not exist in isolation; but connected to the environments around them and influenced by those environments. He continues that, no matter how deep the connections between the home and the surrounding environments, the home remains the first place where everything about the young growing child starts (Crawford, 2020). According to this theory, parents and their families have a core responsibility to transfer and transmit family sociocultural values to the newborn until adulthood. This implies that the home, it is where the parents and the infant interact to create a bond, building interpersonal relations, teaching the child family sociocultural values, which later motivate the child to continue learning to adulthood and beyond (Li et al., 2023). Echoed by Davis et al., (2021) these sentiments by declaring that globally, human beings survive and thrive in varied ecological and cultural circumstances in organizing the context for the children to develop and learn.

The traditional families' primary goal for their young children is to individualise, socialize and acculturate them into family norms and values before formal education institutions like schools can influence their formative years (Wang et al., 2022). This implies that there exist competing influences of the dominant culture and marginalized subcultures (Knox, 2022). In this case, competition between the home and the school in influencing the learner is ever present often resulting in conflicts. (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2021) argue that in elementary school, there exist cultural mismatch of values between home and school values resulting in home-school value conflict. In terms of this conflict, the school places emotional competence and academic performance as a priority compared to spending time with family and assisting family as part of the collectivistic values promoted by families (Smith et al., 2020). This assertion underscores the notion that the family comes first in the order of experiences and the first psychological agency of society and other agencies like school follow after (Lahire, 2022).

Socialization is how children internalize a culture's norms, values and ideologies in a dual way in that the external socio-cultural values influence the inner psychological make-up of the learner (Hepburn, 2020). The concept of socialization is the personality development of human beings through interaction with their social, physical and psychological contexts (Antonoplis, 2024). Key for socio-cultural values influence, is the multipronged process through which individuals assimilate and internalize cultural norms, codes, and values of a particular family or group to gain acceptance (Fuad et al., 2022). Socialization can be planned and spontaneous in both formally or informally contexts with predetermined objectives of development and reproduction of status hierarchies (Alward et al., 2020).

The first school for any child is the home and the first teachers are parents, particularly mothers (Douglas, 2023). Parents provide their children with the most powerful learning arrangements (Lehtme,

2024). Therefore, infants, toddlers and young children need a stable and consistent environment to grow and develop as they are totally dependent on their parental care (Xu et al., 2020). The transmission of family sociocultural values is facilitated through communication in a language mostly spoken by a particular sociocultural group to explain all that must be learnt by the growing child (Crawford, 2020). (Dzhambulova et al., 2024), concur that language is important because it has words that carry meaning to explain what must be understood and the hidden expressions and deeply rooted phrases some of which are known and understood by that cultural group.

Furthermore, language expressions and phrases in all cultures are used to give meaning, explain, unpack, and clarify things using words deeply rooted in language (Vapnarsky et al., 2022). (Ambert, 2020), affirmed that both the child and the parents' context are embedded within the family social and cultural context. In other words, what makes up the children's and parents' world is what made their great-grandparents context before them through socialization. They contended that people of the world raise their children in accordance with their cultures. Research studies have highlighted that young children learn different subjects during socialization and some aspects of their sociocultural values include moral values, respect, appreciation, kindness and affectionately living with others (Shih, 2022).

METHOD

The research paradigm used in this study was interpretivism. According to Emery & Anderman, (2020), interpretive theorists, believe that individual develop meanings of their experiences and express them according to their understanding in relation to things they know. It is appropriate for putting people at the centre and allowing them to express themselves according to what they know. Through interactions and discussions, the parents of 0-4-year-old children were able to construct the meaning of what they know and understanding of what sociocultural development of young children, whether there are areas of alignment between home and ECD centres of their choice. Qualitative research approach was used in this study in investigating issues in natural settings (Priya, 2021). In this study, investigations were focusing on parents' views of their children's sociocultural development in ECD centres. Case Study involving fourteen parents (nine mothers, one father and four grandmothers was used, and the participants were purposefully selected to provide rich detailed information about inquiry (Black & Mendoza, 2021). Semi-structured open-ended questions were used collect data from the participants. Data analysis was done using thematic approach which focused on identifying frequently used words and phrases to create themes that addressed the research questions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that home as the first socialization transmitted much more effectively sociocultural values as compared to the ECD Centres. Among the findings were that the home was a fun place for interpersonal relationships. The home promoted moral values, kindness, and humanity.

Home: A Fun Place for Interpersonal Relationships

The interviewed parent's views on interpersonal relationships between them, at 0-4 years of age, living with their parents/families in their homes reflected intimate interactions which involved a lot of fun. They remembered without struggle the best times they experienced in their homes, laughing, playing with siblings, feeling loved, cared for and appreciated for doing very little, most of the time. They recalled their families: parents, siblings, grandparents and relatives always around them, loving and caring for them; and emphatically put it that having their family members around gave them a sense of

security: *I just liked being home with my parents, I felt happy and safe. I loved and trusted my parents dearly and would cry whenever they left me until I was six years old (P3).*

Individually, they remembered their parents communicating with them in the most affectionate and respectful ways, showing them love and teaching them to love. Their families interacted and engaged them as young children. Their narratives of interpersonal relationship building processes involved a lot of fun, which they perceived as borne from the presence of their parents and family members in their homes (Don et al., 2024). The picture they portrayed of their homes is that of overwhelming fun, love, excitement and joyful moments. This joyous wholesome life they experienced, shared with their families includes: their parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, relatives and close family friends from early age who gave these testimonies individually (Chiang et al., 2023).

The participants in this study painted their world as anchored in their parents' context, which was made up of love for them to: "*just like being at home with parents*" (P5) having a lot of trust in their parents, feeling loved and safe and even referred to their parents "*as best friends" (P3)*. They gave a good, healthy and exciting picture of their homes, affection, respect and harmony. These narratives are supported in literature by words of Fernandes et al., (2021) who contended, *"affectionate parents resemble the central figure in the hearts of the children's universe",* meaning all *those infant children need is their parents and unconditional love, responding to their immediate needs.*

Secondly, the participants regarded their parents, as their primary caregivers who encouraged them by praising them just for attempting to do things no matter how small their efforts, "...*praised in their clan names*" (P4). These narratives explained that one-on-one attentive with their parents instilled confidence and built trust between the child and the parents. The confidence and time spent with family member created a bond, a connection, with their mothers particularly, as they were the ones mostly available. According to Carton et al., (2020), infant-caregiver bond is based on consistent warmth and responsiveness. Such attachment has profound implications for the child's feelings of security and capacity to form trusting relationships. The participants felt a sense of belonging with their parents, appreciation, and encouragement, they said; *I got used to being told that I was a beautiful girl, the princess of my clan. That built my confidence and motivated me to keep on doing good things (P2).*

The love and appreciation shown to Participant 6 by her parents developed into trust with her parents; m*y parents and grandparents loved and appreciated me; I trusted them. We bonded so well, it was as if we were peers. It felt good and the bond is still there (P6).* Krijnen et al., (2021), found that parents' love of their children provides a foundation for development of a child to be a loving person as well even in adulthood. These explanations reiterate that children who are cared for, given love as well as material needs such as healthy homes and food, are likely to trust themselves and people around them. Krauss et al., (2020) confirmed that the warm and caring, pressure-free family environment with parents, relatives, and siblings made the children identify with people around them.

Moral values

All fourteen parent-participants reflected that as young children they were taught to learn and exercise moral values from an early age. They spoke in-depth about respect, good behaviour, positive attitudes, good mannerisms, caring and loving self and others, including neighbours and local people (Malti et al., 2020). Almost all of them said that it was emphasized that they never call people older than them by their first names, not even their older siblings; ...w*henever you spoke with people older than you, it was expected that you use a suffix or a name, for example: Mama, Tata (dad), Enkosi (thank you) Tata, Makhulu (Granny) etc.* (P15). This study found that learners form the ECD Centres tended to respect their teachers more as opposed to their parents. Parent indicated ...*these children respect their teachers more than their parents.* Furthermore, sociocultural theorists concur with parents on children respecting and listening more attentively to their teachers than their parents. That kind of respect is

rooted from fear of their ECD teachers than respecting them affectionately and contend that it is because in pre/school culture there is pressure put on young children (Nilfyr et al., 2022).

Kindness and humanity

The participants explained that key to building interpersonal relationships was learning to do everything with the greatest respect and learn to be kind to all people. Kindness, as they explained it, seemed to have been at the centre of their parents' ways of living, grounded in the Africanist philosophical way of life of Ubuntu that it takes a village to raise a child (Mokhutso, 2021). Kindness as Ubuntu value was rooted in the ability to learn to share almost everything, unconditionally beyond home and sociocultural groups and even strangers –"*ngabantu nabo – they are people as well* (P1). Kindness was perceived as key moral value for maintain human relations and they declared.

We were taught to learn to share everything: food, sweets, sleeping laces/matrasses, clothes and sometimes eating from the same dish (P1). Our parents those days, taught us that it was not acceptable to eat in the presence of others without inviting them, but to share your food, no matter how little (P4).

Based on their own experiences, the participants lamented the content of knowledge being taught at the ECD Centres and expressed misalignment between home and ECD Centres. Parent 3 was not sure of the activities in carried out in the ECD Centres and stated that *-I do not know exactly what the children are doing nor learning there, but I think they play, eat and sleep.* Parent 6 reduced activities performed in ECD Centres as a reinforcement of routines; ...*in preschool, children are taught to understand routines to doing things irrespective of their individual needs e.g. going to wee, eating, sleeping whether the child is ready or not.* The limited parental knowledge of the role played by the ECD Centres in the lives of their children was concerning and indicated that there is no relationship between the school and the home. Furthermore, this implied that the ECD Centres in the study do not communicate with the parents with regards to curriculum matters (Jeong et al., 2021)*.

Parent-participants also pointed out such differences in knowledge transfer practices between home as preschools/ECD Centres do not teach or promote sociocultural development of children, making them understand and appreciate other children from other cultures - not even the centres that use isiXhosa as a medium of instruction who should understand the importance and effects of calling a child by his/her clan's name, they said:

*Family values, culture, traditions, such things are not taught nor encouraged in what children learn in preschools, no! Such things are never spoken about even when children are asked to do that family tree thing (*P7).

These sentiments are echoed by Khalfaoui et al., (2021), who argue that preschools are not interested in children learning their cultures, but to inculcate preschool culture to eliminate conflicts of diverse cultures. They do not communicate with children or ask them if they know their indigenous languages, different social settings or ceremonies. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services instill shame in most children of the world for not being Western and make it seem as if there is something sinister about not being White European or Western (Cortázar et al., 2020). ECD Centres coerce children to master learning in English at a very young age (Busch et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The participants of this study lamented that the ECD Centres completely overlook the home sociocultural values underpinned by Ubuntu principles. Furthermore, the participants echoed the views that children who are appreciated at home develop self-confidence. Whilst the ECD Centres, were perceived by the participants in providing critical foundations, however, they fall short of transmitting cultural values to the learners. By nature, ECD Centres are formal structures and based on the participants' views; they restrict freedom, spontaneity, creativity, acquisition, and retention of socio-cultural values.

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